

## **DEEP DISH: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS ACROSS DIVERSE POPULATIONS**

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In-depth interviewing is a research technique that is frequently used in program evaluation to collect information to answer key research questions. For most topics, in-depth interviewing does not require a great deal of specialized training or equipment, and can elicit insightful information when carried out by an effective interviewer. A key challenge with this research technique, and a substantial factor in its cost, is gaining the cooperation of targeted interviewees.

This poster presents an analysis of the effort required to reach in-depth interview completion goals with interviewee populations of importance to energy-efficiency program evaluation, such as program staff, market actors, and policy makers. The analysis is based on over two hundred in-depth interviews conducted between January 2010 and December 2016 for a variety of energy-efficiency program evaluations. At the time of the interview, the in-depth interviewees were located in a dozen states and provinces and fell into one of the following populations:

- Program administrators
- Program implementers
- Residential real estate developers
- Home builders
- Municipal code officials
- City councilors
- Corporate retailers
- Store managers
- Chain restaurant managers
- Architects
- Window contractors
- Insulation contractors
- Energy audit contractors
- HVAC contractors
- HERS Raters
- Lighting manufacturers
- Program participants

We rank these interviewee populations by the relative difficulty of getting a completed in-depth interview with them. The metric used to rank the populations is total interview requests divided by total completed interviews, or average interview requests per completed interview. Interview requests take the form of conversations, emails, and voicemails. The ranking of interviewee populations is presented in a bar chart that displays the proportion of average interview requests that were conversations, emails, and voicemails. Populations such as program administrators, program implementers, program participants, and lighting manufacturers are among the easiest to complete an in-depth interview with. They required less than five interview requests per completed interview. Building trades populations such as builders, building contractors (window, insulation, energy audit, HVAC installers, and HERS raters), and municipal code officials required around ten interview requests per completed interview. Populations that were the most difficult to complete an in-depth interview with include city councilors, residential real estate developers, and chain restaurant managers. Each of these populations required more than 35 interview requests per completed interview.

In a series of additional tables and graphics, we present factors associated with these populations that may have affected the average interview requests per completed interview. These factors include interview length, the presence of interviewee incentives, the quality of the sample, and other factors specific to certain populations. We also present the refusal rate and an estimate of the scheduling cost per complete. While we are not able to draw broad conclusions about the populations given the limitations of our sample, we are able to share lessons learned and practical tips based on our experience completing these in-depth interviews.



# Deep Dish: In-Depth Interviews Across Diverse Populations

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## Average Requests per Completed Interview

Health Experts (n=4)	3.3
Program Administrators (n=26)	3.7
Lighting Manufacturers (n=4)	3.8
Program Implementers (n=6)	3.8
Social Service Providers (n=3)	4.0
Program Participants (n=10)	4.3
Architects (n=3)	5.0
Corporate Retailers (n=10)	6.0
Store Managers (n=25)	6.1
Building Contractors (n=35)	9.4
Builders (n=7)	10.9
Code Officials (n=13)	12.8
City Councilors (n=3)	35.3
Residential Developers (n=6)	39.5
Restaurant Managers (n=2)	85.5



## Fewer than 5 Average Requests per Complete

Population	Estimated Length	Average Length	Incentive	Refusals	Scheduling Cost per Complete
Health Experts	--	44	--	--	\$33
Program Administrators	45	42	--	--	\$37
Lighting Manufacturers	30	27	--	--	\$38
Program Implementers	60	63	--	--	\$39
Social Service Providers	--	62	--	13%	\$41
Program Participants	30	18	--	--	\$44

**accustomed** **vested interest**  
*indebted institution* **mandatory** **research** **office** **expert** **uninterested**  
*busy* **professional** **professional**  
 Average Individuals Contacted per Complete

## 5 to 20 Average Requests per Complete

Population	Estimated Length	Average Length	Incentive	Refusals	Scheduling Cost per Complete
Architects	45	19	\$100	25%	\$51
Corporate Retailers	15	24	--	5%	\$61
Store Managers	15	9	--	5%	\$62
Building Contractors	45	26	\$50	1%	\$96
Builders	45	23	\$100	11%	\$110
Code Officials	45	26	\$100	8%	\$130

**mobile** **customer service**  
**professional** **civil servant**  
**busy** **trades**  
 Average Individuals Contacted per Complete

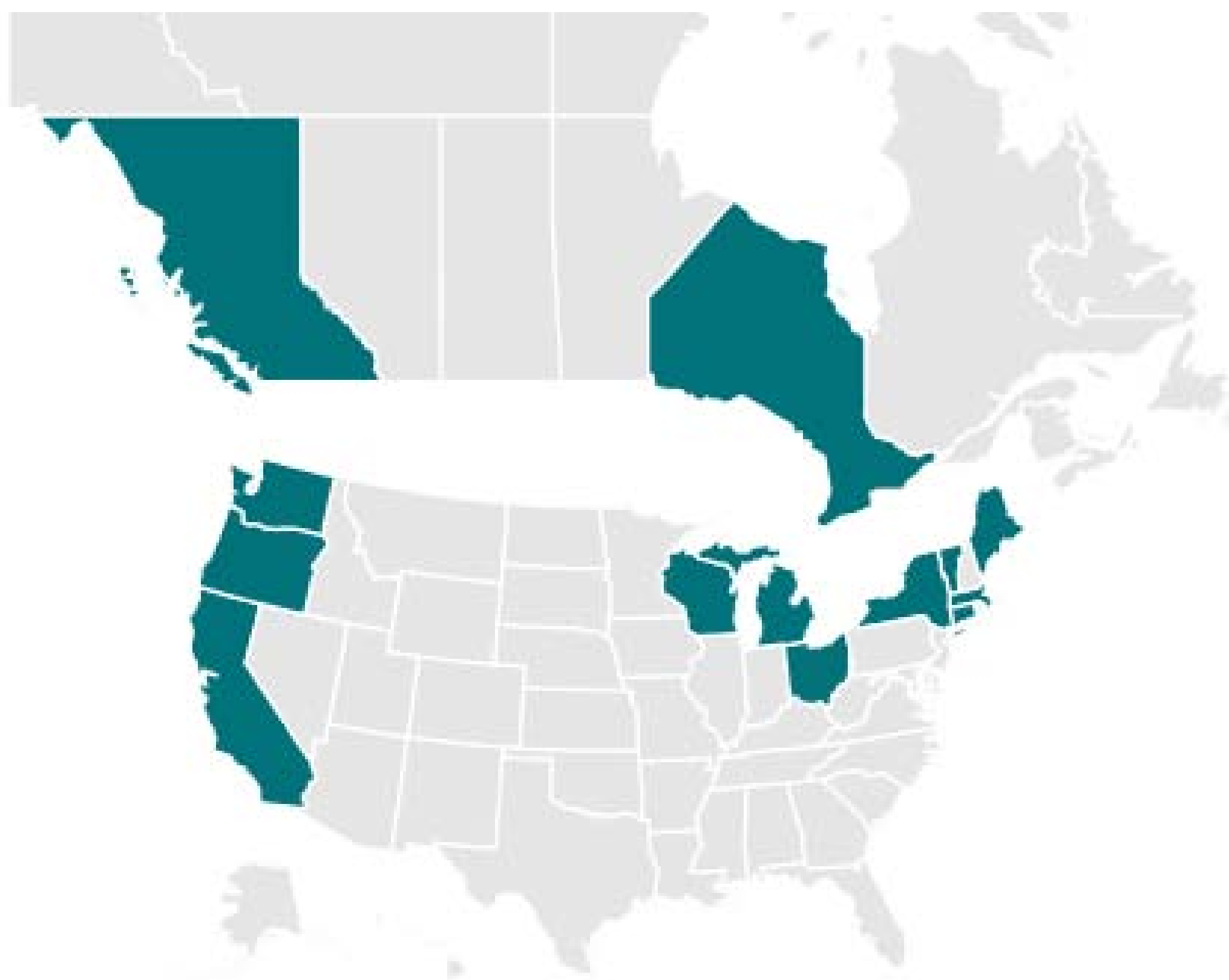
## More than 20 Average Requests per Complete

Population	Estimated Length	Average Length	Incentive	Refusals	Scheduling Cost per Complete
City Councilors	45	20	\$100	31%	\$360
Residential Developers	20	31	\$100	8%	\$403
Restaurant Managers	30	21	\$50	--	\$872

**civil servant** **wrong person**  
**office** **busy**  
**turnover** **professional** **uninterested** **skeptical**  
 Average Individuals Contacted per Complete



Over **200** in-depth interviews conducted between 2010 and 2016 with individuals located in a **dozen** states and provinces



**1500** Total Interview Requests

**650** Emails

**600** Live Requests

**250** Voicemails

## Lessons Learned

Populations with a **vested interest** in the evaluation or that are **accustomed** to being interviewed are more likely to agree to an interview.

**Busy** populations require more interview requests per complete, and are reluctant to agree to **lengthy** interviews.

**Inaccurate** or **small samples** relative to completion goals can substantially increase scheduling costs.

Financial incentives tend to be less effective with **higher income** populations.

**Civil servants** cannot accept financial incentives over a certain amount.

## Practical Tips

- ✓ Match communication method with population
- ✓ Try calling during various days and times of day
- ✓ Use mail merge to save time emailing interview requests for large samples, but make sure to control for bias
- ✓ Know how much \$ civil servants can accept
- ✓ Keep it brief for busy populations
- ✓ Budget more for populations with deficient or nonexistent sample data
- ✓ Budget more for small samples relative to completion goals
- ✓ Let them hear your smile ☺

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