

[Staple business card here]

Bay State Cities Project  
Department of Political Science  
Tufts University

LOCAL ACTIVIST INTERVIEW FORM

Date:

Interview Subject:

Name of Organization

Phone #:

Email address from business card:

Interviewer: Robin\_\_ Jessie\_\_

Comments on quality of interview. (If typical, you need not put anything here. But if subject is uncooperative, evasive, especially helpful, note here *briefly*.)

Names of organizations/individuals he mentioned (or suggested) that we might want to talk to. When he/she mentions the name of an organization, make sure you get the name of an individual to talk with. If a phone number is offered, include it here. If your write-up does not indicate what kind of organization each is, note that here:

### **INITIAL PHONE CALL SCRIPT:**

My name is [Robin Liss/Jessie Simoncelli] and I'm calling you from the Tufts University Department of Political Science. I'm part of a research team that is currently in the field doing a project on urban government in eight Massachusetts cities. One of those cities is [name of city]. I've been doing some interviews with people in government and your name came up as someone it would be useful for me to talk to.

So what I'd like to do is to set up a time to talk. I'm very flexible in my schedule and I'll do this whenever it's convenient. I can either do it over the phone or I could come out to [city] and we could have coffee at a Starbucks or some such near your home or office. We could even do it now if you have a half hour. So what would be best for you?

**NOTE: You need to be pleasant but insistent at this point. If they try to put you off, "I'm busy now but maybe next month," you respond. "Fine, what would be a good day next month. Why don't we pencil something in and I'll leave you my phone number if you have to reschedule."**

**NOTE: If they say either a phone interview or in-person, your response will depend on where you are in your interviewing. If time seems abundant, or if the interviewee is close by (Arlington, Somerville), then opt for in-person. If you have reason to believe that the subject may be someone marginal in that city's politics, if it's far away (Worcester), or if you have more interviews than you can handle, then opt for a phone interview. You may want to wait on these interviews until you have a number of city councilors or city administrators under your belt and opt for an in-person interview for those interest group activists whose name has come up more than once.**

**NOTE: If the respondent asks you, "who mentioned my name?" or "who recommended me?", say something like, "I'm a little constrained here. When we interview someone, we promise them that the interviews are confidential. But that would go for any interview I conduct with as well: everything is confidential and you'll never be mentioned by name.**

**If not clear from conversation already, confirm group's existence here:** Before I get off, let me just make sure I have you properly identified. You were mentioned as being active in [name of group]. That is correct?

**If they say something like, "well, it's not much of a group" or "we're not really active now" you should respond,** That's ok. As long as you were active at one time and you were working on behalf a group, no matter how informal, that's fine. **If it becomes clear that the person really is a sole activist, acting only on his/her own behalf, then say something like,** "I guess we were misinformed. We're restricted in our interviewing to organizational representatives. So we won't need to talk to you after all. I apologize for taking up your time. But thanks! **If not clear even after some probing, err on the side of scheduling the interview.**

Interview scheduled for DATE:  
LOCATION  
TIME  
NOTES:

**OR Proceed directly to interview over phone**

**FOR SUBSEQUENT INTERVIEW RATHER THAN THOSE DONE  
IMMEDIATELY OVER THE PHONE**

**Subsequent Phone Interview:**

**NOTE: When you reconnect with the respondent over the phone, your opening spiel should be relatively short. Don't ask if this is still a good time to talk; assume it is. You don't want to give them an opportunity to postpone. They'll voluntarily tell you if they can't do it right then. Your over the phone reconnection should go something like this: "Hi, this is Robin Liss/Jessie Simoncelli, calling for our appointment to talk about city government in [city]. I just want to remind you that this is a scholarly study conducted by a team of political scientists at Tufts University. The interview is strictly confidential; nothing we write will contain your name or the name of any organization you're affiliated with. So let me get started [proceed to Q1]."**

**Subsequent In-Person Interview**

**NOTE: If your reconnection is for an in-person interview, you can proceed more casually and don't need to worry about "phone fatigue". You can use the above patter and add to it as you see fit. Remember to hand out your business card at the beginning. Also remember to say, "I just want to remind you that this is a scholarly study conducted by a team of political scientists at Tufts University. The interview is strictly confidential; nothing we write will contain your name or the name of any organization you're affiliated with.**

**Q1** I wonder if I could ask you a little about yourself. Tell me how you got involved in the community and how you came to be active in [name of organization].

**Q2** In this context I'd like to get you to talk about some recent work of the [organization]. Could you tell me about the issue you've been spending the most time on of late? Tell me the story.

*You'll ask either 3a or 3b*

**Q3a [IF THEY TOLD A STORY THAT INVOLVED AN ADMINISTRATIVE AGENCY, SEGUE INTO Q3 WITH SOME TIE, LIKE:]** Your story leads to the next area I wanted to explore. We're interested in your interaction with local agencies of government. Is the [name of agency from story] the agency you interact with most frequently? **[THEN]:** Tell me what your relationship is like with that agency **[the agency he/she said they spent the most time with, even if it is not the one initially mentioned in the story]**. What kinds of interactions do you have with it?

**OR**

**3b [THIS VERSION OF #3 IS FOR RESPONDENT'S WHOSE STORY DIDN'T DEAL DIRECTLY WITH AN ADMINISTRATIVE AGENCY]** I want to turn more directly to a discussion of the government here in [city]. First, the administrative side of government and then later the city council. What is the agency of the local government that you interact with most frequently? **[THEN]:** Tell me what your relationship is like with that agency. What kinds of interactions do you have with it?

**Q4** Let me continue you in this vein. Thinking about your relationship with this agency, I want to give you a choice of how to describe that relationship. And let me be a bit academic and ask you to think of a continuum with three points on it. At one end we would place relationships between local community groups and administrators as collaborative: partners who work cooperatively together. At the other end of the continuum we would place relationships that are conflictual. And in the middle of the continuum, are relationships where the agency is friendly and open to talking with outside groups, but remains independent and doesn't work in a collaborative or partner-like manner with groups like yours. I know that was a long question! But where would you place your organization's relationship on that continuum?

**PROBE IF THEIR ANSWER WAS BRIEF:** Was the relationship always this way, or has evolved one way or the other over the years.

**Q5** Do you sit or another member of your organization sit on any advisory committees for the city?

**Q6** Let's move on to the city council. Who are the city councilors you work the most closely with? Tell me what kind of relationship and interactions you have with them?

**Q7** Again, by way of summary, I'd like you to think of the same continuum I detailed just a little while ago: at one end is a collaborative relationship, at the other is a conflictual one. In the middle is an openness to talk with you but not a collaborative or partner-like relationship. Thinking of your relationship to the city councilors that you interact with most frequently, where would you locate yourself on this continuum.

**Q8** In the last election were you or your organization active on behalf of a candidate or candidates for city council or for mayor?

**PROBE TO MAKE SURE YOU GET A CLEAR IDEA OF WHAT THE ORGANIZATION GAVE TO THE CAMPAIGN(S).** How would you evaluate the assistance you gave to this/these campaigns? Do you think what you/your organization did made a significant difference?

**Q-Help NOTE: If there are other organizations the individual mentions that appear to be active in the policymaking process in the city, ask:** That just about wraps things up. If I could ask for your help on one thing, though. As we spoke you mentioned some organizations that you interacted with. We're going to follow up and try to do brief phone interviews with one representative of each group we hear about. **[Here distinguish between organizations where he/she mentioned a person, and those that he/she didn't.]** Could you give me the name of someone at the **[organizations where he/she didn't give you a name]**.

Let me make sure I have the names right for **[list names mentioned earlier; probe if its not clear how you get a hold of them; nonprofits might be run out of someone's home. Businesses, business associations, and unions should be easy to find.]**

**FOR IN-PERSON:** That's it. Thanks so much. [**Close your folder and put away your pen in a very obvious fashion, indicating that you really are done. Then:**] Maybe I should ask if there's something I should have been asking you?

**[Do not take notes, leave notebook closed even if they talk about something directly relevant]**

**FOR PHONE:** That's it. Thanks so much. Maybe I should ask if there's something I should have been asking you?

**FOR IN-PERSON:**

**[Linger at door if comfortable; small talk might be revealing at this point]**

**[When you finally do leave, *immediately* write up any comments they made after your notebook was closed; *immediately* write up all other comments using the notes you took as a guide.]**