



Water for a Healthy Country

Rural Towns-Liquid Assets: Methodology for Preliminary Social Analysis

Catherine Johnston, Melissa Green and Blair Nancarrow

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Social Methodology for the Rural Towns – Liquid Assets Project

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this paper is to provide a ‘user-friendly’ methodology for social analysis as part of the Rural Towns – Liquid Assets project. It documents the methodology that was adopted for social analysis in the towns of Merredin, Moora, Tambellup and Wagin. This same methodology can then be applied for other rural towns participating in the research. The social research process is described in detail from inception to report writing and providing feedback. It is deliberately written in an easily understandable and simple form to allow for all levels of expertise to be able to follow and utilise the methodology. This forms one of the principal research objectives of the Australian Research Centre for Water in Society (ARCWIS) for the Rural Towns – Liquid Assets project.

1.0 Introduction

The Rural Towns - Liquid Assets project is a multi-disciplinary, collaborative project that aims to provide an integrated water management solution for salinity in sixteen priority Western Australian Wheatbelt towns. Specifically, it intends to do this in a way that can provide multiple benefits for a town.

The principal research objective is:

To design, install and demonstrate integrated town water management schemes which process locally sourced water with which to supply existing rural water supply demands...and to expand agricultural industries and exploit new commercial opportunities.

A key aim of the research is to ensure that water management options are tailored to the specific social, economic and environmental conditions of these towns. Hence, a social research component comprised an integral part of the project. This was to ensure that social considerations informed the technical, economic and policy aspects of the study. This is vital for helping to ensure that the project outcomes are relevant for and endorsed by local communities.

The Australian Research Centre for Water in Society (ARCWIS), within CSIRO Land and Water, conducted the social context research and analysis for the towns of Merredin, Moora, Tambellup and Wagin¹. This research entailed:

- providing an understanding of community aspirations and concerns for the future of their town;
- involving local communities in options and preferences for water and salinity management in their town; and,
- helping to establish a link between the community and the technological science being developed.

This paper outlines the methodology adopted by ARCWIS for the conduct of its social research. It is written in a detailed, 'user friendly' format that is easily understandable. This allows other researchers to apply the methodology for the other priority towns involved in the Rural Towns - Liquid Assets project. It sets out guiding principles for the social research process from the earliest, preparatory stage to the finalisation of the report detailing the research findings and subsequent feedback as required.

2.0 Stage 1 – Preliminary work

As with any research project, a good deal of preliminary work needs to be conducted before proceeding with the research itself. For social research, this can assume greater importance as you are dealing with people. Hence, rigorous planning and organisation are called for. The following discussion outlines the steps required for the planning aspect of the research methodology prior to embarking upon the community engagement process.

2.1 Project timetable

The first task is to devise a project timetable for your work. This schedule needs to outline tasks to be done, when, by whom, and a column for "ticking off" each task as it is completed. This may seem like a somewhat basic principle, but it is vital for social research. Proper scheduling is not only important for ensuring that things will be workable for you and for your colleagues, but is essential when dealing with the community. Their time is important and their participation in research is highly valued. Engagement therefore needs to be professional and organised, and demonstrate respect and consideration for people who have agreed to be part of a study. This has an important role to play in building positive relations for future research, whether or not you are a part. Unfortunately, community trust of scientists and 'experts' can be tenuous, so it is vital that people come away with a positive perception of their interactions with researchers.

¹ See, "Johnston, C., Green, M., Helmert, E. (2005). *Rural Towns – Liquid Assets: Social Analysis of the Towns of Merredin, Moora, Tambellup and Wagin*.

For these reasons, when devising a timetable make it as specific and detailed as possible. Keep in mind, however, that your timetable may not necessarily fit in with that of a community. So check about possible events or factors that may influence the feasibility of your schedule. For example, will your planned visit to a town coincide with a local agricultural show? If so, people will not be available or will not be inclined to meet with you. Consideration of holidays is also essential. As you are aware, people typically go away during school vacations and public holidays.

2.2 Interview questions

Before proceeding any further it is necessary to define the interview questions. This will frame your research from the outset and avoids later confusion. The project proposal will already have defined the research question. From this, specific interview topics can be identified to elicit the specific knowledge you are seeking from the community. The topics identified for the Rural Towns – Liquid Assets project are:

- personal demographics;
- perceptions of the town;
- future vision of the town (realistic and ideal);
- challenges facing the town;
- salinity as a possible issue for the town;
- overall water situation of the town;
- innovative water management options and preferences;
- means for achieving aspirations for the town.

Once the topics have been identified, specific questions covering the topics need to be devised. The questions need to follow a logical format and be succinct and easily understandable. For the Rural Towns – Liquid Assets project, the following questions were developed:

- ♦ **Firstly, can you tell me how long have you lived in (insert town name)?** If not born in the town, **How did you come to live in? Do you have any family living here?**

This question gains background information, including whether youth have stayed in town. It is also as an important ‘ice-breaker’ to begin the interview.

- ♦ **How would you describe (insert town name) to me as it is now?**
Prompt if necessary: infrastructure and services; community; health and education; economic wellbeing; , social issues; cultural outlets; environmental conditions; youth; recreation and leisure; community groups....

This provides a broad understanding of the town from the local viewpoint.

- ♦ **Where do you think the town will be in 20 years time?** *Clarify that this is how they see the town in the future in all likelihood, as opposed to their ideal vision.*

Information about how the town is realistically perceived in the future is gained through this question.

- ♦ **Ideally, where do you hope the town will be in 20 years?** *Reaffirm that this is their ideal vision for the town in the future.*

This is an important contrast for the preceding question and is also linked to the final question.

- ♦ **What are the major challenges facing (insert town name) at present?**

This helps to gauge priority issues facing the town.

- ♦ If salinity is not mentioned. **Do you think that salinity is a possible issue for the town?**

Although salinity may not have been mentioned as an issue unprompted, it may still be considered a problem. For this reason interviewees need to be specifically asked about salinity.

- ♦ **What is the overall water situation of (insert town name)?** *Prompt supply, quality, access, uses, types, efficiency...*

This question helps determine local attitudes towards and knowledge of water in general in the town.

- ♦ **Do you have any ideas for innovative water management for (insert town name)?** *If necessary, prompt about possible uses or preferences for excess water.*

Local options and preferences for water and salinity management for a town, an important part of the research project, can be determined through this question.

- ♦ **What do you think the community needs to help meet its aspirations for the future of (insert town name)?**

This question encourages positive consideration of challenges, as well as identifies what is needed for the future of the town from the *local* perspective.

2.3 Background research

Following the development of the interview questions, background information on each town can be compiled. It is vital before speaking with people in a community that you have a good background understanding of a town. This is not only important for your own research, but knowing about a town and a community helps establish a good rapport with people when you are interviewing. Moreover, people will speak about issues, places and people during the course of an interview and it is helpful to understand what they are referring to.

As each town is different and there will be a wealth of information. It is impossible to cover and remember everything. However, a sound basic grounding can be gained. Conducting background research comprises the following.

- Review of available *statistical information* about the town (particularly demographics, industry, (un)employment, population trends and distribution) – this can be obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, regional development organisations and the like;
- Search of *state government agency websites* (for example, the Water Corporation, Department of Agriculture WA) for relevant town/region information and reports;
- Perusing *local government Shire websites* and following up links or important events/topics that are of interest. This covers information relating to water, the environment, local community, business and historical aspects (local community directory links may be found through this means too);
- Reviewing *local media resources*, particularly regional or town newspapers and newsletters. These are often available online and are a good means of gaining information about regional issues and events, as well as a local perspective of a town.
- General *internet search*, for example through the Google search engine. This can reveal a wide variety of interesting information that may not be found through the above research options.
- For the Rural Towns – Liquid Assets project, the *FTP site* will also have helpful background information for a town.

Compile all information you have in a specific and clearly marked project folder in your computer. This allows others to easily access information if needed. Print off any hard copies you need and can take with you for reference if visiting a town.

2.4 Creating a database

2.4.1 Database format

The next step after obtaining background information about a town is identifying potential participants for a town. You will need to create a database for inputting information about regional contacts. It is best to create this database through a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet as this allows for data sorting once all the information has been inputted (see Appendix A for an example spreadsheet²). The stakeholder groups that need to be included are: aged; community groups; education; environment; health; indigenous; landholders; local business; local government; state government; town residents, and; youth.

² Names and contact details are fictional.

In your database you will need to have a category for name, address and telephone contact details for each of the stakeholder groups described above. It is helpful to get email addresses where possible as it may be difficult to contact people during working hours. Columns for interview details and comments are also required. This will show you whether a person has been contacted and if they were interested in participating in the study, and if so, when the interview has been booked for. If you are conducting telephone interviews you can record when the interview has been completed. This detail assists with maintaining good relationships with people. For example, the same person won't be contacted twice for the same reason or people don't have to repeat themselves into relation to some special point they've provided.

2.4.2 Identifying stakeholder information

When the database has been completed you can go about gathering contact details for potential interviewees in the research. There are a number of means for finding the information you need for each stakeholder group. Telephone and local community directories are an obvious means to get contact details. Telephone directories for both white and yellow pages can be found online at:

- ♦ <http://www.whitepages.com.au/wp/busSearch.jhtml>
- ♦ <http://www.yellowpages.com.au/siteEntry.do;jsessionid=2upha5otgk14.y200122121>

Community directories are particularly useful and can typically be obtained from the local government Shire in each town. It is also helpful to call known contacts in each town, for example a local catchment representative, who can recommend people to talk to. Project team members will typically be able to advise recommended contacts for a town. You will also likely find contact details for people or groups when conducting your background research for a town.

2.4.3 Range of contact details

It is important to ensure that you have a good range of contacts for each stakeholder group. Contact details can sometimes be obsolete. Those targeted may not be able to participate in the study, or might lack the interest to do so. For this reason you need to have a number of contacts to fall back on. However, it is important to check that you have not duplicated any contacts – for example, business representatives may also be included as a town resident. Your Excel sorting process can check duplication of names and telephone contact details.

2.5 Arranging interviews

2.5.1 Selecting potential research participants

The process for arranging interviews, either personal or telephone interviews, is very similar. Before calling people, go through your database and target and highlight stakeholders that you believe need to be included in the study. Ensure that you have *at least* one representative from each stakeholder group. You may need to have more than one representative in some instances – for example, local government and business contacts. Recommended people need to be highlighted for contact.

If more than one researcher will be contacting potential participants, decide upon the break up of the people you will contact. This will ensure that there will be no double-ups, which not only make you appear unprofessional but are annoying to those you are contacting.

2.5.2 Contacting potential research participants

When you have identified possible participants for the study, you are ready to begin arranging interviews. For the Rural Towns – Liquid Assets project, the communications protocol is to firstly advise other project team members, particularly the communications manager, of your intention to begin interviewing and the timeframe for this process. You then need to contact the local government CEO to advise the same. During this phone call you can arrange an interview time with the CEO. Ideally, this will be your first interview for a town, but will naturally take place at his/her convenience. If you are visiting a town and are not able to make the interview with the CEO your first, then check if it is possible to personally introduce yourself before commencing your interviews. The CEO may also be able to recommend people to talk with, so also check for this information during the phone call.

Once you have contacted the local government CEO and have gained agreement to proceed, start calling people to arrange interviews. When calling people you need a “telephone introduction” as a guide. This needs to be as simple and succinct as possible. You don’t have to follow every word as you will come across as stilted and unnatural, but it is helpful to have a framework for what you need to say. An example is:

Good morning/ afternoon Mr/Mrs/Ms My name is and I am with the I am part of a team researching possible future water management options in your town for the Rural Towns – Liquid Assets research project. It is vital for us to speak with the community to gain local input to this research and to get a good understanding of..... (insert town name) from a local perspective.

We are speaking with a range of different people in (name of town) and hope to have your input to our research. We would like to speak with you and it would take about 30 minutes of your time, depending upon how much information you wish to volunteer.

Are you interested in helping us with this research?

Naturally you will need to be polite and professional when speaking with people, but be friendly too. Keep in mind that it is important to frame the conversation in such a way that the person you are calling will want to participate. Therefore, answer any questions that come up and make all attempts to clarify the purpose of your call if someone requires more information. You may find that you need to stress that it is their local knowledge that is important to you. People can believe that they are not “qualified” to participate in the study because they are not an expert or do not know much about water management. Be prepared to answer such questions as “How did you pick me?” or “What good will this do?” Make your responses as reassuring and positive as possible.

If a person is unwilling to participate in the study, thank them for their time. If someone indicates that they are interested, the process will vary depending upon whether you are conducting personal or telephone interviews. If you conducting a *telephone interview*, ask if it is convenient to conduct the interview immediately. If this is not possible, arrange a time and date that is convenient for both parties (if necessary, explain interviews are being conducted during working hours).

If you are conducting *field trips*, interview times will of course be arranged for when you are visiting the town, at a time and place that is convenient to the interviewee (usually in their own home or office). Be prepared to work beyond normal office hours to fit in with people. Note that in a field trip situation you need to start contacting people about two weeks in advance to give them adequate notice. However, they may want you to call again the week before your visit, or even when in town, if this is more convenient for them.

Irrespective of whether you are conducting telephone interviews or arranging personal interviews, you need to explain during the telephone call with the participant that their views are anonymous and will be kept confidential. Let them know that their input will form part of a report that will inform the water management plan being developed but it will not be possible for the reader to identify comments made by a particular person. Pass on your contact number before ending the call so that they can call you if need be. If you have prearranged a date, time and place during the call, ask if they would like you to confirm the appointment closer to the time.

2.5.3 Difficulty in making contact with a potential participant

Sometimes it is very difficult to contact a person who you would like to include in the research. If this is the case, leave a telephone message explaining who you are and why you are calling, and leave your contact telephone number. Let them know that you will call them back when they contact you so that they do not attract STD telephone charges. Be persistent as people may be too busy to get back to you, but be aware that there is a fine line between persistence and harassment. Two telephone messages are usually enough. If there is someone you believe is essential to make contact with and you are not able to contact them via telephone, check if they have an email address. If so, send an email outlining the project and why you are contacting them.

Note that for cultural reasons indigenous representatives may be particularly difficult to contact. Persevere. Be aware that you may have to go door knocking when in a town if you are conducting personal interviews.

2.5.4 Recording interview details

You will need to fill in details in your stakeholder database as you go. As mentioned previously, you will have columns for interview date and time, and for general comments. However, you will also need to keep track of those who you have contacted or tried contacting. You will input comments as you go. For example, *interview booked, telephone disconnected, too busy*. As noted in the example database in Appendix A of this paper, it is helpful to highlight each of these types of categories in a different colour so you can get a good understanding of how you are proceeding at a glance. The categories used are: targeted (but not yet contacted); interview booked; and, not interested.

Although you have details in your stakeholder database it is helpful to have a separate interview schedule to fill in as you go. This will allow you to see at a glance your timetable when arranging interviews, which is particularly important for a field trip situation. It is also necessary for easy reference when interviewing in a town. The schedule will include information about the *date, time, place of interview*, and the *stakeholder category and name, address and contact telephone number* for the interviewee. Also include a column for *personal reminders or notes* you may need to make. For example, if a person has a young baby or is very elderly, to keep the interview relatively brief.

When arranging personal interviews be aware of planning for time. You need to leave enough time for longer talks as you don't want to cut people off. You also need to allow for time to travel between interviews. Being late is not an option when engaging with the community. People have other demands on their time and it is therefore important to respect their agreement to participate in the research by

arriving at the agreed time. Include a lunch break in your day. This is an important break when interviewing and will allow you to resume your interviews more refreshed in body and mind.

3.0 Stage 2 –Field trips

3.1 *Preparing for a field trip*

If you are conducting a field trip, when you have arranged your interviews you are ready to arrange a visit to the town. The key to a successful field trip is good planning and organisation. This is where you will find your project timetable particularly useful. You need to ensure that all arrangements are made and you have all you need to make your trip as smooth and efficient as possible. Once again, this is not only for your benefit but is essential for reasons of professionalism and building positive relations with a community.

Firstly, you will need accommodation in a town. Some towns are very small and accommodation is limited so you need to tend to this detail in advance. You will find most accommodation listed on the internet and in community directories. However, it may be helpful to contact the local government and ask their recommendation for places to stay in town. Naturally, you will also need to arrange transport to a town. If you are not taking your own car then you need to book a company car in advance.

As basic as it would seem, you will need to have a list of “things to take” for getting yourself organised for your field trip. It is amazingly easy to forget something essential and you need to be prepared to deal with unplanned disruption during your visit. Things to put on the list include:

- your research project file;
- stationery;
- maps;
- the interview schedule and questions;
- laptop computer to transcribe interviews;
- mobile phone, preferably a CDMA model for the best reception in country areas.

It is recommended to take copies of an outline of the project brief to give people if they ask. Save all important information for a town, including the stakeholder database, on a floppy disk to take with you. You will also need to have your credit cards handy, although remember that smaller towns only accept certain types of credit cards or only accept cash. People often ask for your business card, so to take these with you too. You will also need some form of official identification in case it is required.

3.2 Conducting a field trip

Conducting a field trip entails far more than simply visiting a town and asking people questions. As social research takes place among real human beings there are a number of special and/or ethical considerations to be aware of. Some of these include clearly communicating the purpose of the research, gaining informed consent for participation, and assurance of anonymity and confidentiality. These will already have been taken care of when arranging your interviews. However, there are other factors to consider when visiting a town. These relate to ensuring the physical, social and psychological welfare of people with whom you interact, and respecting the dignity and privacy of those participating. There is also a responsibility to one's organisation and other colleagues and researchers.

The following section describes some good principles to follow in a field trip situation. Much of this relates to interviewing, as this is your primary purpose when in a town. However, other important guidelines that are fundamental to research involving community are also discussed.

3.2.1 Community engagement

When you visit a town you are not just talking with selected individuals but you will be engaging with the community throughout your stay. During your field trip, be aware that you are an "ambassador" for the project, and for researchers in general. For this reason it is important to be pleasant and friendly to all you encounter. As you are aware, word travels fast in country towns and many will be aware of whom you are.

It is important to show respect and consideration for the local community. Take the time to explain the project to people who are interested and ask you about the research. They may want to know how it impacts them and their future. Show that you are committed to what you are doing and its significance and meaning for a town. You may find an overall perception that researchers and/ or scientists don't care about local communities or the future of a town. Showing that you care and that you know that these are real people in a real town, rather than just an abstract scientific or theoretical matter of interest, can make a world of difference in people's attitudes towards you. Having said this, be extremely mindful of managing local expectations. Don't allow people to think that the project can solve all the problems of a local community and town.

3.2.2 Conducting interviews

PRINCIPLES FOR PERSONAL INTERVIEWING

- Conduct interviews in pairs.
- Know a town and the name of the person you are interviewing.
- Make the research meaningful for the participant.
- Affirm the importance of local knowledge and experience.
- Assure confidentiality.
- Ensure interviewees are comfortable and at ease.
- Establish an early rapport.
- Be aware of your body language – openness, eye contact, smiling and nodding.
- Be polite but friendly.
- Be encouraging without being intrusive.
- Provide helpful feedback.
- Probe for more in-depth information or clarity.
- Accommodate silence.
- Be sensitive and tactful.
- Do not make the interviewee feel awkward or embarrassed.
- Remain neutral.
- Keep to time.
- Finish the interview on a positive note.

3.2.2.1 Preparation for an interview

Before conducting your interviews in a town, refresh yourself on the background information you have compiled. This will help you to facilitate an interview smoothly. Demonstrating that you are familiar with a town will also help gain people's trust. Familiarise yourself with your interview schedule for the day to plan ahead. Think about your personal appearance. For example, if meeting local government representatives you need to look professional, but you also want general community residents to feel as comfortable with you as possible during an interview. They may already feel somewhat apprehensive about dealing with an 'official' or a scientist, so more casual clothes might be appropriate.

Note that it is advisable to conduct interviews in pairs. This will allow for the most comprehensive understanding of the information gained during the interview, and is also important for personal safety and support should something unplanned occur during the interview. It works best if one person conducts an interview and maintains eye contact while the other takes notes, although there will be teamwork in eliciting information when required. More than two people in an interview team is not advisable. It is not only unnecessary, but can be intimidating to the interviewee. Tape recorders are not required. You can capture all the information you need through note-taking during the interview. Tape recorders can make some people feel very uncomfortable and may be culturally inappropriate.

3.2.2.2 The interview process

Conducting an interview is far more complex than it appears. For the Rural Towns – Liquid Assets project, semi-structured interviews are appropriate. This type of interview is designed to elicit the interviewees' ideas and opinions about a particular subject or topic without leading them towards preconceived choices or allowing them to talk without any parameters. The two basic principles of a semi-structured interview are to *create relaxed, comfortable conversation* and to *avoid leading the interview or imposing meanings on information gained*.

As mentioned previously, the questions for the Rural Towns – Liquid Assets project have been designed to ensure that the interview goes as smoothly and efficiently as possible, as well as to elicit the required information. However, the interviewer has a vital role in ensuring the ultimate success of an interview. The following discussion outlines important suggestions for conducting a successful interview.

An indicator of a successful interview is, of course, eliciting the information that you require. This is not as easy as it would seem. Simply attending an interview and asking questions is by no means going to gain the information you need. The right environment needs to be created to encourage people to share their knowledge and thoughts with you. This starts with recognising that the people you will be interviewing are in effect the 'expert', and have important local knowledge to impart.

Moreover, it requires understanding that your research project will directly impact the people you are talking with, and should be of benefit to the local community and the town. If people can see that you are aware of this they are likely to be more responsive to your questions. They need to know that you value their input and experiences and recognise that what you are doing will affect them and the town they live in. People will not respond well to being treated as 'social guinea pigs'. On a more pragmatic level, ensuring that interviewees feel comfortable and at ease is equally vital for a successful interview.

With these points in mind, there are a number of simple principles to follow when interviewing. Before attending an interview, commit the person's name to memory. This way you can greet them as you introduce yourself when you meet. Before beginning the interview, make sure that all parties are comfortable. Thank the interviewee for agreeing to participate in the study. Reiterate the purpose of the research project, your part in it, and intended use of the information you receive. Explain clearly their part in the research, affirming the value of local input and experience for the project. Ensure that you make the project and the interview meaningful for them. Remind them that the interview is confidential before proceeding with the questions.

The design of the interview questions will help facilitate a smooth interview. Commencing with a question about the person you are talking with will help ease the participant into the interview. Knowing a little more about them, especially if they are long term residents, will help establish an early rapport. The following questions about the town will firmly establish them as "experts" and can help raise confidence if it is needed. Gain as much information from these questions as you can as it gives vital insight into a town and what issues are important for the local community. Be aware when asking questions about salinity and water management that interviewees may feel uncomfortable because they may not have scientific knowledge. Ensure that you affirm it is simply their personal views and preferences that you are seeking. If someone is not aware of salinity, simply move onto the following questions in a way that does not make them feel inadequate. Finishing with a question about what is needed for the future of the town re-establishes interviewees as experts and as having the local knowledge needed for the project.

The way you present yourself during the interview is crucial. As mentioned previously, it is essential that the interviewee feel as relaxed and at ease as possible. You therefore need to be aware of your body language – being open, making eye contact, nodding, smiling. Be as supportive as possible if you note that someone is feeling uncertain or awkward. Prompt them whenever you think is necessary. A simple "what else can you tell me about?" can be very effective. Sometimes people need encouragement to talk in the early stages of an interview. However, if they are disinclined to elaborate, do not harass them.

Speak clearly and politely, but be friendly. It is vital that you are attentive and listen carefully to what is being said. People will not talk if they sense that you are distracted or disinterested. Provide helpful feedback, for example, "Thanks, that's

important for us to know.” If you think it is necessary, probe to get more in-depth information or clarification. Don’t be afraid to ask them to elaborate on something if you are not clear. However, do not pre-empt an answer or be leading in your questioning. Also accommodate silence. Reflection on the part of the interviewee is a good sign.

It is important at all times to be sensitive towards what is being said. Be particularly careful not to place the interviewee in an uncomfortable or embarrassing situation. If they appear hesitant about expressing something ‘negative’ about the town, a group or a person, remind them of the confidentiality and anonymity. Affirm that the information will be used discretely and professionally, and no names will be used in any circumstance. However, if they are still reluctant to speak out, respect this and move on. Finally, you must remain neutral, even if the person is making comments you strongly disagree with. You are not there to take sides or to try and educate them or change their minds. Be prepared to hear negative opinions or experiences about scientific or academic research without taking offence. Remember, people are merely expressing an opinion. Listen to their views, but be sure to draw them back to the topic at hand by asking for either more information about a question, or leading them to the following question.

Be aware of keeping to time when conducting the interview. You may find that some people will want to keep talking, or may stray from the subject matter during the course of the interview. You will need to firmly, but *tactfully*, draw them back to the matter at hand or bring the discussion to a close. Be sure to finish the interview on a positive note. Thank the person again for their time and participation and once again affirm the importance of their input for the research.

If a participant asks for a copy of the report or for more information about the project, make sure that this is noted and is delivered to them. Before you leave, check with the person if there is anyone else they think you should be speaking to. This is a good way to possibly identify people you may have missed who are important participants for the study. If time doesn’t permit an interview with further people that you would like to include in the research, make a note to arrange a telephone interview when you are back in your office.

3.2 After the interview

Immediately after the interview, write down your main impressions from the information gained. This is separate from the detailed interview information that you just received. Do this even if you are busy as to delay is to lose the immediate thoughts that come to mind. Write it in rough, dot-point form if need be. It can be fleshed out later. It is important to have a discussion with your colleague at the end of the day to compare overall thoughts and impressions. Keep an ongoing document of these main impressions and themes for a town based on your interview data. Whenever possible, transcribe interview notes onto your computer as you go. Doing

this whilst out in the field is most effective as the information is still fresh in your mind. When back in the office there is the tendency to forget the context and meaning of some of the responses you received.

3.3 *Post-field trip*

When back in the office finalise any transcripts if this has not already been done. Ensure that they are written in a way that is clear to anyone else who may need to read them. Something that makes perfect sense to you may be mystifying to someone else. Ensure that the information is easily accessible for others working with you, or who may later need to refer to your transcripts. Revisit your notes of main impressions and make sure they cover everything important.

Start analysing the key themes that emerged from the interview data. You need to identify and document themes for each question. This will start structuring your thoughts and will also make the report writing significantly easier later on. A wealth of information will be received from your interviews and it will be a major problem later if the information is not organised and analysed as you go.

It is important for the Rural Towns – Liquid Assets project that other team members are aware of the outcomes of a field trip. This project is collaborative and other team members need to know about what you have found to date. At this stage they do not need a comprehensive discussion but just a sound briefing. Send an email to all parties advising how the field trip went and detailing the main points and messages gained from the visit. Make sure that you cover all aspects that are of significance to the project, including communications and organisational issues. Develop this email in conjunction with your colleague before sending it off to make sure that all points have been covered. Invite any comments or feedback to your message as people may want to know more about something you have written.

Depending upon your schedule, you may then need to go back to the beginning and start organising yourself for social analysis in the next town.

4.0 Stage 3 - Report writing

Everyone has a different approach to report writing but given the amount of information to be analysed and documented for the Rural Towns – Liquid Assets project, following some basic principles will make this an easier task. As mentioned previously, transcribing interviews and writing down and analysing main impressions and themes as you go makes life much easier when it comes to writing the report.

A key task for the report writing for this project is ordering the wealth of data into patterns and categories. The purpose of the research study needs to be kept in mind

at all times during this process. There will be many trends and issues identified and you will need to discern which are important for reporting back to the project team and stakeholders. Decisions also need to be made about how much detail to include in the report. There needs to be sufficient information for the reader to understand what is being presented without it being trivial or mundane.

Before documenting your findings, discuss the report structure with your colleague. For social analysis of Merredin, Moora, Tambellup and Wagin, the most logical and “user friendly” format was a town-by-town discussion detailing main findings for each question. It is imperative that the implications of this data for the research project be elucidated at the end of the report.

Writing the report for the Rural Towns – Liquid Assets project entails a healthy degree of sensitivity and diplomacy. You are writing about people and their town. Therefore, as much as is possible, the report needs to be written in a manner that conveys the findings of the social research without causing offence or local controversy. Keep in mind that local government and community representatives will be reading the report. Therefore, while ensuring scientific integrity, be tactful and aware of how you relate information. This is particularly important when writing about challenges or negative perceptions of a town. Ultimately, the purpose of the report is to help provide opportunity for positive change, in line with the research project’s aims.

A huge amount of subjective and sometimes sensitive information will have been passed on during the interviewing process. As self-evident as it would appear, be extremely mindful about objectivity. When relating what has been said to you in an interview make it clear when *opinions* and *perceptions* are being expressed. What people feel or believe does not make it a ‘fact’ but is still a reality to them and cannot be dismissed without consideration or response. It is also important for the author to maintain objectivity. Naturally analysis will need to be made of the data obtained. However, there is a fine and highly significant line between providing interpretive insight and passing opinion. Maintaining the anonymity of participants and those referred to during interviews is also essential. This is important also in how you express content. Often someone can be easily identified by locals purely as a result of the particular content of the report.

When completing the first draft report, have it edited by an experienced social science researcher. From this point, follow the communications protocol for the Rural Towns – Liquid Assets project. You will need to clarify exactly what this is with the communications manager at the time.

5.0 Feedback

As your findings for your research are a result of community input, confidentiality, in the typical scientific sense, does not apply. Feedback to local communities is mandatory. For distribution of the report, copies can be emailed to the local government CEO and other interviewees who have email access. A copy of the report needs to be sent by mail to the other people. If the report includes discussion of more than one town, only include the town that is of interest to them in the body of the report. They don't need or likely want to read about other towns. In the covering letter advise that they can get a full copy of the report from their local government Shire if they desire.

Be prepared to present the results of your findings. As a collaborative, multi-disciplinary project it is critical that other project team members are aware of your findings, and of the significance of these for their research. You may also be called upon to present findings to the representatives of the towns you have visited. After all, the research project is for their benefit and they may want to know what you have found. If you are called upon to present to town representatives, again be mindful of diplomacy and tactfulness. For them, you are talking about themselves, their families, friends and neighbours and the future of the town. This is far from 'scientific' from a local point of view.

APPENDIX A

**STAKEHOLDER
DATABASE**

| Microsoft Excel - Stakeholder Database.xls | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Type a question for help | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| A22 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O |
| 1 | Targeted (but not yet contacted) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | Interview booked. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Not interested | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | S'holder Group | Title | 1st Name | Surname | Position | Organisation | Address | Suburb | Phone (08) | Fax (08) | mob | Email | Interview Date | Interview Time | Comments |
| 5 | Aged | Ms | A | Eagle | | Nursing Office | Brown Street | TOWNVILLE | 1234 5678 | 2345 6789 | | | | | |
| 6 | Aged | Mrs | B | Don | | Townville Senior's Group | | TOWNVILLE | 3456 7890 | | | | | | |
| 7 | Aged | Mrs | C | Blue | Secretary | Senior Citizens Committee | | TOWNVILLE | 9876 5432 | 2109 8765 | | | | | |
| 8 | Business | | D | Demon | | Agriculture in Townville | | TOWNVILLE | 4567 8901 | 1234 4567 | 1234 567 890 | | | | |
| 9 | Business | Mr | Eric | Power | | Local Motors | 31 Grey St | TOWNVILLE | 8765 4321 | 1098 7654 | | | 20th April | 9.00am | booked |
| 10 | Business | | F | Saint | | Townville Local Newspaper | White St | TOWNVILLE | 5678 9012 | 2345 5678 | | | | | |
| 11 | Business | | G | Kangaroo | | The Corner Deli | | TOWNVILLE | 7654 3210 | 0987 6543 | | | | | |
| 12 | Business | | H | Hawke | | Local Grains Inc | Great Green Hwy | TOWNVILLE | 6789 0123 | 3456 6789 | 2345 678 901 | | | | |
| 13 | Business | | I | Cat | | The Piggery | | TOWNVILLE | 6543 2109 | 9876 6543 | 3456 789 012 | | | | tel disc |
| 14 | Business | Mr | JK | Tiger | | Rural Business | North Blue Rd | TOWNVILLE | 7890 1234 | 4567 7890 | | | | | |
| 15 | Business | Mr | L | Magpie | Manager | Community Bank | 52 Grey St | TOWNVILLE | 5432 1098 | 8764 4321 | | | Thurs 21st | 10.00am | booked |
| 16 | Community | | M | Bulldog | | | 98 Red Street | TOWNVILLE | 8901 2345 | | | | | | |
| 17 | Community | | N | Docker | | | 12 Brown Street | TOWNVILLE | 4321 0987 | | | | | | too busy |
| 18 | Community | | Oliver | Swan | | | Low Orange Road | TOWNVILLE | 9012 3456 | | | | | | not interested |
| 19 | Community | | P | Crow | | | Pink Road | TOWNVILLE | 3210 9876 | | | | 19th April | 2:00pm | booked |
| 20 | Community | | Q | Lion | | | 19 Black Street | TOWNVILLE | 0123 4567 | | | | | | |

