

HRBF IE Network

Computer Assisted Field Entry (CAFE) vs. centralized data entry

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Computer Assisted Field Entry (CAFE) can literally make the difference between the success and the failure of a survey, as some recent experiences have shown. There are very few complex surveys that have succeeded without CAFE, and few complex surveys that have failed with CAFE. Notice the word 'complex' in the last statement. Many successful surveys were implemented before CAFE, but they were not as complex as the surveys we are trying to implement in the HRBF and similar programs.

Notice also that CAFE is not just a technological notion. Implementing CAFE requires hardware and software, of course. But it also requires an effective organizational structure and a realistic planning of survey fieldwork. More specifically, it requires:

1. a committed and dedicated core staff team, and
2. implementation of the team approach to fieldwork.

QUESTION 1

What resources are necessary for CAFE?

- You need one data entry operator (DEO) with one laptop per field team.
- It doesn't need to be an expensive laptop. Typically, you can find laptops for \$400-\$500, however due to high customs tax you may need to budget up to \$1000 per laptop. You will need to consider local procurement of laptops during budget and timeline negotiations.
- You may also consider not using a DEO and train the interviewers to enter the data themselves. Then you will need one laptop per interviewer, but you should also subtract the salary and per diem of the DEO, and consider that the interviewers will need to spend about an hour per day making CAFE.
- Team supervisors will also be responsible for entering the data, analyzing the error reports and deciding on corrective revisits. Training the team supervisors on CAFE responsibilities is difficult at first, and therefore central supervision of CAFE teams needs to be far more active, technical, capable and committed than usual central supervision of field teams. Central supervisors must know better than anybody else how to deal with the reports.

QUESTION 2

What is the recommended training schedule for CAFE?

- A good data entry program should be intuitive and it should not require a lot of training. You should budget 3-5 days given the local capacity.
- Again, training team supervisors on entering the data, analyzing the error reports and deciding on corrective revisits is fundamental for CAFE to work.

QUESTION 3

What info can you provide on the differences in data quality between CAFE vs. centralized data entry?

- The essential benefit of CAFE is that outliers and inconsistencies are dealt with in the field, by direct confrontation with the household's reality, rather than through

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office guesswork, as in centralized data entry followed by cleaning. In other words, with CAFE you are buying a different product.

QUESTION 4

Can you quantify the time saved by using CAFE vs. centralized data entry?

- With centralized data entry you will typically need to spend at least 3 months cleaning the datasets.
- With CAFE, the delivery of finalized databases is immediate -- all the data is available at the same moment the last cluster is visited and its file delivered. Of course, this requires strong management in collecting the data files from the field and bringing them to the central location, as is the case with centralized data entry.