Knocking on doors and getting cooperation from people you've never met is one of the most important skills for a NSDUH Field Interviewer. You will too … if you have what it takes. Keep reading to find out.

Do You Have What It Takes to Be a NSDUH Field Interviewer?

NSDUH Field Interviewers take great pride in the work they do on this important research project.

What is the NSDUH?
The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) has been conducted annually by RTI International since 1988 under a contract with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

NSDUH data are continually used for a variety of important purposes. For instance, the Federal Government and State public health agencies use the data to estimate the need for drug treatment facilities all across the country. Other Federal, State and local agencies use the information in support of drug-use prevention programs and to monitor ongoing drug control strategies.

Is working on the NSDUH rewarding?
You may have never heard of the NSDUH until now, but you’ve definitely seen the data before. We’ve been collecting that data in your area for many years. This is your chance to become a part of the process.

Working on the NSDUH can be very rewarding for you, but that doesn't happen without fully committing to your assignment and doing the best job you can each day. Like many jobs you may have had, you will get out of this job what you put into it.

Is this position right for you?
Receiving this brochure means you’ve discussed being a Field Interviewer with a NSDUH representative, so you probably know a little something about the requirements of this position already. In addition, you may have questions. This brochure will give you the information you need to help determine if this position is right for you, so please read carefully.

While we have pointed out some of the less enjoyable aspects of this job, these are by no means exaggerated. We just want you to have as much information as possible when you make your decision, because, like any other job, this Field Interviewer position is not for everyone. Too often we have people accept a position, come to training, start work and then decide this is not for them. We don't want to waste your time or ours.

There are, of course, many great aspects to this work. That is why many of the 600+ Field Interviewers currently working on the NSDUH have been with us for multiple years. They greatly enjoy all the positive features of this job—meeting new people, working independently, operating on a fluid work schedule and conducting valuable research. These Field Interviewers take great pride in the work they do and the impact this study has on their community and the entire nation.

So after reading this brochure, ask yourself, “Do I have what it takes to be a NSDUH Field Interviewer?” If you think you do, then we look forward to welcoming you to our NSDUH team and working with you on this important research study.

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It’s decision time. Do you have what it takes?
This brochure was designed to provide you with a realistic picture of what it takes to be a NSDUH Field Interviewer, not to convince you that this is the job for you. That is a decision you must make on your own. We invite you to discuss the contents of this brochure, as well as all the other information about this job you’ve picked up, with your friends and family members. Ask them to read this brochure and see what they think. Do they think you have what it takes?

Knocking on doors and getting cooperation from people you’ve never met is one of the most important skills for a NSDUH Field Interviewer.
What does “part-time” work as an interviewer really mean?

Some “part-time” jobs involve a regular number of hours on a set schedule, maybe 3 or 4 hours a day for a couple of days each week. As a NSDUH Field Interviewer, even though it is considered a part-time job, you will be expected to work many different days of the week, rarely on a fixed schedule, and work at least 4-hour blocks of time.

You will need to work on days and at times that allow you to contact respondents and complete your interviewing assignment. This means working an average of 20–25 hours per week, often at night and on weekends—both Saturday and Sunday. There will be times when you are able to work more than 20 hours in 1 week, and there could be some weeks when there won’t be much work at all, if any.

Where will I be working?

All NSDUH data are collected within the privacy of the homes of our survey respondents. You will personally visit each household selected to participate in this study to administer the NSDUH questionnaire using a laptop computer. You will be required to contact specific addresses, selected months in advance through scientific random sampling procedures. You will not be knocking on random doors throughout an entire city, town or neighborhood—only specific addresses.

Most often, the specific addresses assigned to you will be just a short distance from your home. In some cases, additional travel of a greater distance might be required to complete your assignment. Also, you may be asked to complete your assignment in an area or neighborhood very different from your own.

Depending on the location of your assignment, whether it’s in an urban, suburban or rural area, the challenges you will face in contacting respondents could vary a great deal. Rest assured that other NSDUH Field Interviewers have already faced these challenges in previous years. As such, we have lots of experience dealing with these challenges and will give you advice and assistance to overcome them on your own, so you are able to successfully complete your assignment.

What type of training will I receive?

All new NSDUH Field Interviewers attend a New-to-assignment training session upon being hired, before you ever set foot in the field to begin completing your assignment. This session lasts a week and allows you to become familiar with all aspects of your assignment, including specific interviewing techniques. Prior to this training, you will receive a NSDUH project manual filled with our procedures and specifications for you to carefully review.

In order to begin completing your assignment, you must attend this training session and demonstrate that you are able to perform all the basic skills necessary to become a NSDUH Field Interviewer. Making a good impression and giving your best effort at this training session is vital to your future success on the NSDUH.

Often these training sessions are held in a city away from your home, so you will be required to travel to this session (most likely by commercial airplane) and stay overnight in a hotel for several nights in a row.

Once training has concluded, you may feel overwhelmed by all the details discussed at the session. This New-to-Project training is very thorough and provides you with lots of important information that may seem difficult to remember. Your supervisor will be with you every step of the way to help you master all of the details of this important job. You never stop learning as a Field Interviewer, even after training has ended.

Will I have to meet specific deadlines?

Yes. Like many other research projects, the NSDUH follows a tight schedule. Each part of this study must be completed within a very rigid time period to ensure that we never fall behind. Data collections conducted by NSDUH Field Interviewers must be completed on time to ensure that the staff who process and analyze the NSDUH data have enough time to do their jobs.

No exceptions can be made for this schedule—not even one day—regardless of your personal plans, bad weather or other inconveniences you may encounter. When you are given an assignment, you will work hard to be sure you finish data collection by the deadline, which will be made clear to you before you ever start working. Such stringent deadlines are necessary due to the critical nature of the NSDUH data—getting the interviewing completed in a timely manner gives policy makers the most current information they need to combat our nation’s drug problem.

Do I have to work nights and weekends?

Yes. As previously noted, your assignment as a NSDUH Field Interviewer requires you to work at times when respondents are available. The success of this project depends on identifying and interviewing specific individuals, and there are no substitutions as to whom you can interview. Our decades of experience have taught us that nights and weekends are often the best times to find these NSDUH residents at home. As a NSDUH Field Interviewer, you should plan on working on nights and weekends as the rule, rather than the exception.

You will work closely with your supervisor to determine the best times to work your assignment that allow you to complete your work efficiently, and there will be a great deal of flexibility regarding the hours you work from day to day and week to week.

What other skills will I need to be a successful Field Interviewer?

To become a successful NSDUH Field Interviewer, you will need a wide range of skills, in addition to being able to administer the interview using a laptop computer. Chief among these is the ability to knock on the door of a house you’ve never been to before and quickly gain the cooperation of a person you’ve never met. Your ability to meet people and convince them to participate is critical to the success of the NSDUH.

Experience has taught us that if you are professional, knowledgeable, friendly and able to get a respondent, you have a greater chance of getting them to answer your questions. If you enjoy contacting and dealing with new people, you will discover that most people selected to participate in this study are extremely cooperative and few will refuse to be interviewed. However, there will be some you encounter who will not want to participate, and some of those people may even be rude to you. If you maintain a positive attitude, stay organized, meet your deadlines and work hard, communicate clearly with your supervisor and do your best each day you work until your assignment is completed, you will be well on your way to success.

Are there any physical requirements to do this work?

Yes. Your work as a NSDUH Field Interviewer means you will be outdoors in many different types of weather during the daytime and at night. As noted earlier, the firm deadlines for data collection mean we cannot wait to contact respondents only when the weather is nice. The actual interviews are generally conducted within a respondent’s home, often in the kitchen or living room, but getting to that person’s door may require you to navigate a variety of different situations: heat, cold, wind, rain, snow, muddy roads, uneven pavement, etc.

Also, sometimes your assignment might be in an apartment building or dense urban environment, which will require extensive walking and/or climbing stairs rather than driving in your car from house to house.

In addition, you must carry your computer equipment and other project materials with you at all times when contacting respondents. This can all be contained within a computer bag you will be provided with, and it can weigh as much as 15 pounds.

How much independence will I have when working?

You will have a lot of independence working your assignments. Except on the rare occasion when your supervisor comes to visit you, you will be working on your own when contacting respondents. Although you will always be able to get help from your supervisor or our technical support staff via telephone, you will have a great deal of independence in the field. That’s one of the big reasons we stress the importance of being organized, self-motivated and self-disciplined to all Field Interviewers.

How will I know if I’m doing a good job?

We have many tools in place to help measure both the quality and efficiency of your work. You will be expected to meet or exceed the time-tested NSDUH quality and production standards for your assignment. A small percentage of the people you interview will be recontacted by staff at RTI to verify the quality and accuracy of your performance, and those results will be made available to your supervisor.

You and your supervisor will meet via conference calls at least once each week to discuss your progress with your assignment and to determine any areas needing improvement. All of our NSDUH supervisors also take the time to recognize a job well done and praise you for your efforts.