

mVAM Guidance:

Collecting and Storing Telephone Numbers for Mobile Data Collection

Introduction

The mVAM project requires WFP staff to compile mobile phone numbers for potential respondents who are willing to participate in monthly phone surveys with a live telephone operator, via interactive voice response (IVR), or through text messages. Face-to-face and IVR calls typically last between 5–10 minutes depending on the number of questions asked and time respondents take to answer each question.

The following guidance sets out best practices for managing phone number collection and storage:

Collecting Phone Numbers

When collecting phone numbers from potential mobile data collection participants, WFP staff should do the following:

- Explain the purpose of the survey: it is important to explain clearly who you are and what the objective(s) of the project are to potential respondents. Be clear and take the time to answer any questions he/she might have.
- Demonstrate a sample call: Where appropriate, demonstrate to respondents how their numbers will be used by modelling a sample call.
- Ask permission: Before collecting each phone number, obtain consent from the respondent. Note that respondents should also be asked to opt in to each phone survey before it begins.
- Do not push respondents: If respondents are hesitant to provide their phone numbers, thank them for their time and move on. Do not try to convince people to participate.¹

Managing Phone Numbers within a Database

- Confidentiality: Phone numbers should be treated with the same confidentiality as beneficiaries' names and other personal information.
- Storing numbers: Each phone number should be logged in a password-protected database that is only accessible to VAM and/or M&E staff (and telephone operators when live calls are used).
- Unique identifiers: When logged in the database, fields such as name(s), phone number, etc. should be encrypted using symmetric encryption.
- Exporting data: When exporting data for data sharing, do not include encrypted columns to ensure that data confidentiality is maintained.
- Sharing phone numbers: Do not share phone numbers or databases containing phone numbers with any external party or with other members of the team outside of those working on the project. Should someone request the dataset, ensure that phone numbers are removed and only unique identifiers are visible.
- Removing personal identifiers in open-ended questions: If an open-ended question is asked, responses should be reviewed for personal identifiers (i.e. names or phone numbers). Personal identifiers must be deleted before the data is shared.

NOTE: The mVAM HQ team will provide a Technical Guidance Note describing which fields need encryption so that the database is completely anonymized.

¹ To ensure high response rates, we want participants who are willing and able to participate. If a person is hesitant, take the time to clearly explain the project but do not push him/her to participate.