Steps in Field Research

Begin with a topic of interest.

Step 1: Select a Field Site
- Search for a site that will allow you to study your topic
- Identify potential collaborating organizations or key informants
- Visit several sites and choose carefully

Step 2: Enter the Field and Establish Connections with Members
- Spend time with your organization or community
- Get to know people, learn about your organization or community
- Look for other organizations as secondary sources

Step 3: Establish a Role, Observe, Make Friends
- Find an identifiable identity in the community
- Participate! Talk to people, tell people what you are doing

Step 4: Watch, Listen, Collect Data
- Observe activities, events, ordinary interactions
- Keep detailed notes of everything you observe
- Review your notes and think about what you observe – what is this a case of?

Step 5: Analyze Data and Generate Working Hypotheses
- Establish patterns in your data
- Generate working hypotheses that tie your case to a theoretical perspective

Step 6: Focus on Aspects of Interest, Connect with Theory
- Focus your activities on specific events that address your hypotheses
- Think in terms of grouping or organizing information into theoretical categories

Step 7: Conduct Interviews, Focus Groups, or other Targeted Data Collection Techniques
- Develop a series of open-ended questions that will help you understand your subjects and subject matter
- Administer the questions to selected subjects or focus groups; choose subjects purposefully, using "snowball" sampling or advice of key informants
- Record your interviews (with permission)

Step 8: Disengage and Leave the Setting
- Prepare your collaborating organization and key subjects for your departure
- Dedicate time to your departure; allow subjects to "see you off"

Step 9: Complete your Analysis and Write your Report
- Finalize your typology or theory
- Prepare your results; Write inductively
- Verify your results with your subjects
- Present your results to colleagues

(adapted from W. Lawrence Neuman, Social Research Methods, Fifth Edition, 2003)