

Key Informant Interview

For our purposes, a key informant is a community resident who is in a position to know the community as a whole or know a particular demographic in the community. Interviewing a diverse array of key informants will help you understand what people in your community think are the health assets and health concerns of the community. Conducting key informant interviews is one way to collect community opinion relatively quickly.

How to Conduct a Key Informant Interview

1. Decide who will be involved in conducting the interviews including the lead contact for this work.
2. Identify the topic(s) you will focus on in your interviews, e.g. nutrition and physical activity, breastfeeding, physical activity among the elderly, food security, school environment, etc.
3. Make a list of the key informants you will interview. See the “Key Informant Interview, Possible Key Informants” handout on page 3 for guidance on developing a list of diverse key informants. Throughout the process of interviewing people you will be referred to other key informants in the community, so your list will likely expand.
4. Decide if you will use a formal or informal approach. Informal: Talk with key informants in an unstructured way to get a sense of the community opinion on an issue. Formal: Develop a questionnaire and mail it to informants, or use the questionnaire in a telephone interview, personal interview, group interview, or in a community forum.
5. Develop a questionnaire. Even if you choose an informal approach, writing down what you’d like to learn will be helpful. See the “Key Informant Interview, Sample Interview Process” handout on page 4 for guidance.
6. Record the interview summary. As soon as possible after the interview review your notes and prepare a summary of the interview.
7. Summarize results. Group similar answers to questions or similar ideas and themes from your interviews.

Tips

- Number of interviews to conduct. A good rule of thumb is to keep interviewing until you start hearing the same ideas repeated. But, make sure you have interviewed a mix of people that reflects the diversity in your community.
- Confidentiality. Before starting your interviews, think about how you will use the results of your key informant interviews. This, in turn, affects the confidentiality you offer to those you are interviewing. One strategy is to plan on reporting results only in the aggregate, and then ask permission if you want to quote an individual.
- When to use key informant interviews.
 - Use key informant interviews as a one-time event to collect community opinions. Or, do key informant interviews on a regular basis to stay current with community developments.
 - Use key informant interviews in combination with other community opinion results.
- Good interviewees. Find key informants who understand the community and who think strategically about issues.
- Multiple interviewers. If you plan on having more than one person conduct the interviews make sure everyone is trained by the same person and that they all use the same interview questions.
- Active listening. Your job is to get as much information from the person as you can on the topic you are interested in. Paraphrase people's responses to make sure you understand the person and periodically summarize their ideas. Do not judge the person's responses or argue with the person you are interviewing.
- Common sense. Much of the process to conducting key informant interviews is common sense.
- Additional benefit. Key informant interviews build awareness of your program, community assessment, and/or agency.

Key Informant Interview

Possible Key Informants

The focus or interest of your community assessment will guide the selection of key informants. If you are assessing community opinion on health concerns in general you should interview a mix of people that reflects your community. Or, if you are assessing community opinion on eating and physical activity habits of preschool age children you could be more targeted in who you interview.

Below is a list of criteria to consider when making your list of people to interview.

Age

- young child adolescent young adult adult elderly

Note: have your team define these age categories by including age ranges.

Note: When surveying children and adolescents you need to pay special attention to issues such as privacy and parent/guardian permission. Your organization may have guidelines when working with this population, and/or there are federal guidelines such as the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act that you may need to adhere to.

Religion

- Protestant Catholic Judaism Islam Buddhism
 Other:

Ethnicity

- Asian Black Caucasian Hispanic Native American
 Other:

Elected Officials

- Local State National

Human Service Agencies

- Education Health Social

Business Sector

- Agriculture Construction Finance Industry Retail

Education level

- No high school High school graduate Some college
 College graduate

Community

- City/neighborhood: _____
 City/neighborhood: _____
 City/neighborhood: _____

Key Informant Interview

Sample Interview Process

Setting up an Interview

- Introduce yourself
- Identify the agency and/or project you are with
- Describe the purpose of your interview with them
- Schedule an interview at a time and place that is convenient for them and that is quiet and private.

Conducting an Interview

Start of an Interview

- Reintroduce yourself
- Remind them of the agency and/or project you are with
- Review the purpose of your interview with them
- Talk about confidentiality and use of the interview results

Ice Breaker Question

- Tell me about your agency and who you serve
- Tell me about your neighborhood and who lives there

Content Questions

- See the “Community Opinion Survey, Sample Questions” for a list of possible questions

Summarize Interview

- At the end of the interview review your notes and give the key informant a 2-3 minute summary of what you heard them say

Close Interview

- Thank them
- Verify the contact information you have for them
- Offer to send community assessment results and/or summary of key informant interviews
- Leave your contact information

These handouts are based on materials developed by the University of Illinois Extension Service – Office of Program Planning and Assessment. See <http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/~PPA/KeyInform.htm> for more information on key informant interviews.