

Key Informant Interview Guidance Document

What is a Key Informant Interview?

A key informant interview is conducted to obtain vital information about your community. It is used to gather information for a needs assessment and utilize the findings for effective prevention planning. It is also used to assess if the needs in your community have changed over time. The information is typically obtained from a community member (key informant) who is in a position to know the community, or the particular issue of interest.

You may have already conducted a key informant interview in the past without knowing. If you have had a meeting with a local community member, public official, minister, or school representative to discuss community needs, you have informally conducted a key informant interview. By conducting key informant interviews you are being good stewards of the valuable time and resources available in your community.

How to Conduct a Key Informant Interview

There are many ways to get the information you want from a key informant. The best method is to use a well prepared procedure, such as written questionnaires, telephone interviews, personal interviews, group interviews, or community forums and public hearings. You can also make this a one-time event, or something you do on a regular basis to stay current with community changes.

Methodology

Who should I select as a Key Informant?

- The informant can be a professional person who works with the group you want more information about, or a member of the target audience.

Administering the questions

- Depending on the audience, look at having two interviewers (1 to administer and 1 to document)
- Introduce yourself and explain reason for interview

How/who will collect information

How information will be gathered and analyzed

How information will be used for decision planning



Selecting the Key Informant

Selecting the right informant is very important. The informant should be someone who not only understands the issue, but also thinks about solving/preventing the issue. A good informant will be able to express thoughts, feelings, opinions, and their perspective on the topic. It is necessary that the informant knows what is going on in the community and is able to articulate that knowledge.

It is vital to include a representative range of informants for the interview. You want to select people of different ages, ethnic backgrounds, religious affiliations, educational level, and community responsibilities. You want the total group of informants to reflect the characteristics of the community or the group being assessed. If you do not take the time to thoughtfully select the right informant you run the risk of interviewing individuals with one perspective or background, and having your conclusions one-sided or biased.

Sometimes a good informant may be able to refer you to other key informants, who can then refer you to another potential informant. In the early stages each new informant may give you the new knowledge. In the later stages of informants usually confirm or clarify the information you have already obtained.

Advantages and Disadvantages to a Key Informant Interview

Advantages

- ✓ Get community/expert level perspective
- ✓ Opportunity to establish rapport/trust
- ✓ Provide in-depth information about topic of interest
- ✓ Allows clarity of ideas and information
- ✓ Easily combined with other techniques
- ✓ Obtain information from many individuals, including minority or silent majority viewpoints

Disadvantages

- ✓ Relationship with informant may influence the information you obtain
- ✓ Informants may give you their own impressions and biases
- ✓ Information may be difficult to quantify or organize
- ✓ Potential to overlook community members who are less visible
- ✓ Time consuming to select appropriate informants and build trust

Interviewing the Informant

Begin by telling the informant that you are grateful for their time and willingness to participate in the interview. Tell the informant they have been strategically selected because they offer valuable insight and knowledge about the issue/topic. Thank the informant and assure them that their responses will be kept confidential and will not be linked to their name and only used in aggregate form.

Questions should be free flowing and allow the informant to provide their knowledge and expertise on the topic. If the informant hesitates or does not feel comfortable answering a specific question, skip the question. Avoid yes, no, and not sure answers. Encourage (ask can you tell me more about your opinion) informant to provide detailed information on the issue or topic.

Potential Questions

Questions other than the informant's demographic information will vary by issue/topic. The questions provided below are for example purposes only. Alcohol-related questions can be easily interchanged to address other substance abuse topics (illicit drugs, non-medical prescription drug use).

- ❖ Informant's demographics (age, gender, race/ethnicity, education level, occupation, role in community)
- ❖ If the police caught a youth drinking/using drugs in your community what do you think would occur?
- ❖ What do you feel is the greatest substance abuse problem in your community (be specific)?
- ❖ Why do you think that substance is the greatest problem?
- ❖ How easy do you think it is for youth to... and why?
 - Purchase alcohol in stores, bars/restaurant, public social events?
 - Get alcohol by asking someone they know such as a friend/sibling/relative to buy it for them?
 - Get alcohol from their home or friend's home without permission?
- ❖ How likely is law enforcement in your community to find out about parties where youth are drinking and break up party?
- ❖ What are your feelings about you community having a law (social host) which would penalize adults who "host" or provide alcohol to youth?
- ❖ How do you feel about holding parents responsible for providing youth alcohol?

Suggested Readings

<http://www.accessproject.org/downloads/final%20document.pdf>

http://www.createforchildren.org/communication_emergencies/pdf/Tool5.pdf

http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNABS541.pdf

http://www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu/healthdata/ttt_prog24.pdf