

Transportation Outreach Planner

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Public Outreach Strategies

Key Informant Interviews

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Recommended Target Groups

Education

College Education
High School Diploma
No High School Diploma

Language

Creole
Other
Spanish

Disability

Hearing Impaired
Other
Physically Challenged
Sight Impaired

Income

Low Income
Middle to Affluent

Vehicle Ownership

Non-vehicle Owner
Vehicle Owner

Race and Ethnicity

Race and Ethnicity

Age

Seniors

Working Age Adults

Youth

Strategy Class

- General

Strategy Types

- Civic Engagement

Description

Key informant interviews are conducted with community leaders, business people, project stakeholders, or others who may offer a unique perspective or understanding of a specific topic or issue. The main purpose of the interview is to obtain information regarding the person's views, perceptions, and priorities. Such interviews help to provide insight on community concerns, and provide a format for discussing matters that may be difficult to discuss in public meetings. ¹

Special Uses

Key informant interviews can be used to obtain the following information: ²

- Advice on the development and implementation of an effective public involvement program
- Concerns and recommendations regarding a proposed project or policy
- Community perception regarding a proposed project or policy
- Historical knowledge of a community or issue
- Identification of community leaders and stakeholders

When to Use

Key informant interviews are particularly useful during the early stages of a public involvement effort for a proposed project. Through the interviews, an agency may be able to obtain valuable information from community stakeholders regarding concerns, priority needs, and recommendations for outreach strategies. This information can be used to establish the groundwork for a project, and to avoid mistakes of the past. Key informant interviews also serve as a good tool to address controversial issues, since the interviews provide a mechanism to foster dialogue and obtain perspectives from different points of view. Finally, key informant interviews can be used to periodically assess the effectiveness of public involvement efforts. ³

Cost

* Low (up to \$999)

Interviews can be relatively inexpensive if the work is local, and if performed by in-house staff. The greatest expense will be staff time and travel expenses, if any. If long-distance calls are required, expenses may increase. However, it is possible to avoid long distance expenses if cell phones are used. ⁸

Low (up to \$999)

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Moderate (\$1,000 to \$9,999)

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High (\$10,000 to \$50,000)

Very High (Above \$50,000)

Disclaimer: The cost estimates provided are intended to be a guide. Project costs will vary depending on the size and nature of the project.

Time

* 1 to 3 months

Key informant interviews can be organized within a short period of time. The most time consuming aspect of organizing the interviews is identifying the key stakeholders and arranging the meetings.

1 to 3 months
6 months to a year
Multiyear

*
**

Disclaimer: The time estimates are approximations. The duration of a project may vary depending on various factors, including size and budget.

Implementation Guidelines and Suggestions

The following serve as recommended guidelines and suggestions for conducting key informant interviews: ⁴

- **Assess existing data and determine the type of information to be gathered in the interviews.** A review of existing research and reports will help identify gaps in information and the types of questions that should be asked during the interviews.
- **Identify community leaders and stakeholders to be interviewed.** Once the type of information needed has been determined, it will be easier to identify the best interview prospects. A preliminary list of community stakeholders and local experts can be developed by a review of the following documents:
 - Newspaper clippings on related issues or the community
 - Meeting notes of similar projects or issues
 - Sign-in sheets from community meetings
 - Project-related reports and testimony
 - Mailing Lists
- **Use the “linked-chain” research method to develop a comprehensive list of key leaders and stakeholders.** When conducting key informant interviews for data collection, it is important to ensure that all key individuals have been included in the process. This is particularly important in minority and ethnic communities, where informal community leaders may not be part of any formal organization. The “linked-chain” approach is a process where known key stakeholders are asked to provide the names of other community leaders. If a name is repeated several times, the name is added to the list of interview prospects. By this method, an agency can be reasonably confident it will identify most key stakeholders and community activists. For the linked-chain approach, consider asking for the following information:
 - Local officials
 - Neighborhood groups, advocacy organizations and churches
 - Professional associations and agencies
 - Colleagues and consultants with experience in the area
- **Ensure that the interviewer has the appropriate skills, experience and knowledge to conduct this type of interview.** The interviewer should be comfortable with one-on-one contact, have good listening skills, and be able to probe for details. The interviewer must be well-briefed on issues important to the community and on the person being interviewed.
- **Determine if the interview should be face-to-face or by telephone.** A face-to-face meeting encourages more personal in-depth discussion and helps to break barriers. Telephone interviews are easier to schedule, less costly or time consuming, but may be less formal and less personal.
- **Decide if the interview will have structured questions or if the questions will be open-ended.** Interviews with structured questions ensure that the discussion stays on point, and allows for comparison among responses. However, such interviews may not allow for candid discussion. Open-ended interviews are flexible and informal, and offer less consistency in data collection. A combination of both can be used to ensure specific information is gathered, but that the interviewer can pursue more in-depth discussion on topics that may arise.
- **Develop an interview tool to facilitate discussion and ensure questions are answered.** The tool should provide a basic script for the interviewer, as well as a checklist of the key questions or topics that need to be discussed. The script should include information on the purpose of the interview, what will be done with the information, and how the interview findings will help the community. Documented permission from participants should be obtained if the information is going to be quoted or made available to the public. However, anonymity is more likely to encourage candid responses.
- **Determine how the data will be documented. All interviews should be documented, either in writing or**

through a recording, and participants should be made aware of what will be done with the information.

Authorization for use of a recording device should be granted by participants either verbally on the recording, or on a signed release form. If the interviews are anonymous, the findings of the interviews should be summarized and combined with other interviews. The names of the people who were interviewed may be listed in reports, but the comments should not be attributed to individuals.

- **Prior to the interviews, send all the key informants a sample of the questions or topics to be discussed.** This will enable the interviewees to prepare and gather any information or materials that they may want to share.
- **During the interview, ask the key informants if they would like to stay involved and assist with public outreach efforts.** Agencies can use key informant interviews to identify volunteers who can help keep the public informed and involved.
- **Provide everyone who is interviewed an opportunity to review a summary of the interview discussion, so that they may make corrections, provide clarification or add information.** This should be done soon after the interview to avoid issues with recollection.
- **Maintain communication after the interviews.** After the interviews are completed, agency staff should foster and maintain a channel of communication with community leaders by providing updates on the interview findings.
- **If possible, organize at least one on-site tour with key community leaders so that they have the opportunity to point out specific concerns or recommendations.** On-site tours often serve to further supplement the information gathered during interviews. They can also be useful in showing that agencies have an interest in understanding a community's concerns.

RECOMMENDED TARGET DEMOGRAPHICS

Key informant interviews can be effective public involvement tools among all demographic groups. However, the interview questions and script need to be tailored to the target audience. For example, in a primarily Hispanic community, the interviewer needs to be prepared to conduct the interview in Spanish.

Lessons Learned/Challenges

Below are key points to keep in mind when conducting key informant interviews: ⁵

- **Ensure that the people interviewed provide a representative mix of the interests in the community.** Often, agencies that conduct key informant interviews focus only on public officials. However, it is important to obtain a broader representation of stakeholders and community leaders in order to fully understand the various perspectives and concerns of the community. If the interviews are limited to people of a particular background or sector, the findings may be one-sided or biased. Efforts should be made to contact interest groups, neighborhood organizations, opinion leaders, business managers and residents.
- **Key informant interviews should be a single component of a comprehensive public involvement effort. Community outreach and other activities that establish a dialogue with community groups should also be utilized.** The interviews can help agencies refine their public involvement efforts, but should not be the only means to engage stakeholders in direct talks.
- **Determine early on how data gathered from the interviews will be compiled and managed.** Because interviews can generate a great deal of data, it is important to have a system in place for collecting and processing the information. Notes should be transcribed as soon as possible, particularly if they were handwritten. Knowing in advance how the findings will be reported, will help determine how the data should be compiled.

Case Studies

Adams County, Colorado used key informant interviews as part of a comprehensive community needs assessment of the special transportation needs of seniors, homebound adults and persons with disabilities. Key informant interviews were used to obtain information on the effectiveness of available services, barriers to transportation, and recommendations for improvements.

<http://www.co.adams.co.us/documents/page/Special%20Transportation%20Report.pdf>).⁶

Ramsey County, Minnesota used key informant interviews to gather data on ways to encourage people to be more active. Participants provided recommendations for improvements to the physical environment and the transportation system. (http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/NR/rdonlyres/C2597178-4723-423F-BED1-1672D40FA995/3548/alrc_key_informant_report.pdf).⁷

For Further Information

UCLA Center for Policy Research: Key Informant Interviews: This guide provides information on how to conduct key informant interviews, and includes references for additional resources. (http://www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu/healthdata/ttt_prog24.pdf).⁹

University of Illinois Extension, Program Planning & Assessment: Key Informant Interviews: The website contains detailed information on how to develop key informant interviews, sample questions and interview scripts (<http://ppa.aces.uiuc.edu/KeyInform.htm>).¹⁰

Sources

¹ U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), "USDOT FHWA/FTA Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making: Key Person Interviews," August 2002, 29, FHWA, March 2011 <<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/contents.htm>>.

² UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, "Section 4: Key Informant Interviews," UCLA, 29 July 2011 <http://www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu/healthdata/ttt_prog24.pdf>.

³ FHWA, "Conferences, Key Person Interviews."

⁴ FHWA, "Conferences, Key Person Interviews."

⁵ UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, "Section 4: Key Informant Interviews."

⁶ Adams County, Colorado, "Special Transportation Assessment: Final Report," 3 December 2009, Adams County, 29 July 2011, <<http://www.co.adams.co.us/documents/page/Special%20Transportation%20Report.pdf>>.