

Tips for Conducting Key Informant Interviews

Although key informant interviews are more informal than other forms of data collection, they still require a structure to be effective. Your respondent is more likely to take you seriously (and provide better information) if you are prepared and the conversation has direction.

Tips for conducting key informant interviews include the following:

- **Begin by introducing your project and purpose.** Remind the respondent about your purpose and the ultimate use of the information. Also, explain who will have access to your interview notes and whether the respondents will be identified in any reports or public discussions of your investigation.
- **Start with an easy question.** For example, ask how long your respondents have been in their jobs. This will set them at ease and provide a context for analysis (as someone who has been on the job for six months will not have the same perspective as someone who has been on the job for 10 years).
- **Ask your most important questions first.** You might run out of time. This is especially important when interviewing people whose job might require them to end the interview early (such as emergency medical service or law enforcement personnel).
- **Ask the same (or parallel) questions of several respondents.** For example, you might want to ask all respondents connected with a particular prevention program (or system) to list the three things they would like to see improved. Answers from a number of different people in a system can reveal programming obstacles or places in which the system needs to be improved.
- **Don't move to a new topic prematurely.** Don't leave important issues hanging—you might run out of time before you can return to them. Also, you will get more useful information by discussing one subject at a time.
- **Be prepared to ask the same question in another way.** Prepare several questions that try to elicit the same information. Turn to the alternate questions when your first question just doesn't do the job.
- **Don't get stuck on a question.** Sometimes you just won't get the information you want from a particular respondent. Know when to move on so you don't frustrate yourself or antagonize your respondent by trying to elicit information that he or she does not have, cannot articulate, or isn't willing to share.
- **Don't let the interview go much over an hour.** The people you chose as key informants are likely to be busy. The quality of the conversation can deteriorate if they feel rushed. Many of your respondents may be people with whom you might want to collaborate with in the future, so don't antagonize them by letting an interview go on too long.
- **Record the interview if possible.** And take notes. As with focus groups, transcribe the recording and type up your notes as soon as possible after the interview is completed. Don't forget to get the respondent's permission to make an audio recording.

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