

## HOW TO CONDUCT A KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW

The key informant interview is a standard anthropological method that is widely used in health related and other social development inquiry. This is one method used in rapid assessment for gathering information from the affected community. The term “key informant” refers to anyone who can provide detailed information and opinion based on his or her knowledge of a particular issue. Key informant interviews seek qualitative information that can be narrated and cross checked with quantitative data, a method called “triangulation”.

### Step 1: Choose the interviewer

The interviewer has to remain neutral and must refrain from asking biased or leading questions during the interview. An effective interviewer understands the topic and does not impose judgments.

Choose an interviewer who:<sup>1</sup>

- Listens carefully.
- Is friendly and can easily establish rapport.
- Knows and understands the local customs, behaviours and beliefs.
- Can inspire confidence and trust.

## Step 2: Identify suitable key informants

Choose suitable key informants according to the purpose of the interview. A key informant can be any person who has a good understanding of the issue you want to explore. The informant can be a community member, teacher, religious or secular leader, indigenous healer, traditional birth attendant, local service provider, children and young people or others from the affected community. Interviews can take place formally or informally – preferably in a setting familiar to the informant.

## Step 3: Conduct the interview<sup>2</sup>

- Based on what you already know about the issue, develop an interview guide beforehand to ensure that all areas of interest are covered. Use open-ended questions as much as possible.
- Hold the interview in a place that can put the respondent at ease.
- Establish contact first by introducing yourself.
- Thank the participant for making his or her time available.
- Describe the objectives of the interview.
- Go through the interview guide questions, (recording the proceedings with a tape recorder only if this exercise is conducted during the emergency preparedness or recovery phases of your communication initiative), together with your notes.
- If time allows tape recorder use, be sure to ask permission to use the interview.
- After each interview, transcribe the results of your discussion, using the guide questions in recording the responses. Remember to write as legibly as possible to facilitate this step.
- For each interviewee, note down your own observations about the process and content of the interview.

### Do not forget to:

- Assure the respondent of confidentiality.
- Avoid judgmental tones so as not to influence responses.
- Show empathy with the respondent and interest in understanding his/her views.
- Let the respondent do most of the talking.
- Be an active, attentive listener.
- Pace yourself according to the time you have allotted for the interview.

## Step 4: Crosscheck information<sup>3</sup>

In the initial response of an emergency each informant may give you new information. But later on, informants usually confirm or clarify the data that you already have. Be sure to confirm that your notes reflect more than one background or viewpoint. If not, your conclusions may end up one-sided or biased.

## Step 5: Use the data

Information from key informant interviews helps you to further probe the needs, wants and priorities of an affected community during a rapid communication assessment exercise. You can use this qualitative information to complement the findings from the initial assessments undertaken in an emergency situation. It can also guide you in developing and adjusting your communication initiative.

## Footnotes

- 1 Whitman, C., et al., *Rapid Assessment and Action Planning Process*, Health and Human Development Programs, a Division of Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), The World Health Organization Coordinating Center to Promote Health through Schools and Communities, p. 7.
- 2 Whitman, C., et al., op.cit., p.7.
- 3 Adapted from *Needs Assessment Techniques Using Key Informant Interviews*, University of Illinois, Extension Service-Office of Program Planning and Assessment, Chicago, p. 3.

