

Key Informant Approach

Gathering together key informants or experts to provide input for a situation analysis is one method for identifying issues. Key informant data can be used alone or in conjunction with another approach. This approach requires the careful identification of a select group of formal and informal leaders, influential leaders or experts. It provides for structured contact with these informants, usually through direct interviews or a focus group format.

Description of the Process

1. Begin by identifying the key informants to be interviewed. These are individuals expected to have particular or “expert” knowledge about the county, its people, environment and issues. Use the Diversity Matrix in Appendix 1 as a basis for identifying key informants. It might be desirable to ensure that you have key informants representing each demographic characteristic and each value orientation as well as any other key groups in the county.

Who might the key informants be?

- Human Services administrators and/or staff
- Public Health staff
- School administrators
- CESA representatives
- 4-H leaders association
- Youth group leaders
- Clergy
- W2 administrators
- Agriculture students
- Equipment dealers
- USDA FmHA County Supervisor
- USDA CS District Conservationist
- Agricultural loan officers
- Veterinarians
- AMPI/Morning Glory Farms field manager
- Chamber of Commerce representatives
- Zoning administrator
- Bankers
- Law enforcement officers
- Head Start staff

- Hospital administrators
- Towns' association chairperson
- Village presidents
- Solid waste department managers

2. Determine how many key informants you will interview. This depends upon the size and diversity of the county and the number of areas/communities/stakeholder interests that are present. The time and energy available for conducting the interviews also determine it.

3. Decide when and how you will interact with the key informants. The core planning committee may decide to conduct a series of individual interviews with 10-15 selected key informants. It is often convenient to meet with key informants at their work or meeting place (as indicated in the example invitation letter). Or, you may choose to bring together several groups of key informants for focus group interviews.

4. Determine the questions that will structure the interviews. [See examples under Focus Group Interviews in Appendix xxxx]

Possible questions might include:

- What are the key needs and concerns facing youth in _____ County?
- What are the key needs and concerns of our families?
- What do you see as the number one priority issue affecting agriculture in _____ County during the next four years?
- What issues are facing our communities and towns? Our business? Our environment?
- What are some of our strengths in this county that we can use as we build our future?

5. Summarize the narrative responses. Record the results and list those who participated in the interviews in the report.

Involvement of Oversight Committee

The oversight committee helps identify the individuals to interview. Perhaps there are key informants or experts in their district or members of other committees they come in contact with who could provide useful information.

Areas of Consideration

This approach takes time, but gives staff the opportunity to ask probing follow-up questions to clarify the concerns and needs that are identified. It also gives county staff access to individuals who may be influential in the county and who can be involved in later program development and implementation. This approach has another pay-off for Extension: those who are interviewed perceive UW-Extension as recognizing their exper-

Sample Letter of Invitation

tise and as being concerned about addressing important issues.

Date

Dear _____;

Every four years, UW-Extension staff from across the State engages in a comprehensive program planning process. The results help guide our program efforts and direct University resources to meet the needs of Wisconsin citizens.

It is that time again when we seek input from people around the county in order to identify concerns and needs so that we can set our programming priorities. This time we have added a “Key Informant Approach” to the process. Key Informants are folks like you who come in contact with the issues and needs of _____ County residents on a daily basis. We want to access your expertise. Your ideas will be shared with the citizen committee as they identify the top priorities for _____ County.

We will be joining you at your _____ meeting on _____ at _____. We will be asking you to identify the major concerns and needs of the county, what you would like the county to look like in five years and what assets we have in _____ County that can help us with building a bright future.

We look forward to meeting with you on _____.

Sincerely,

County Office Department Head, Chairperson of Oversight Committee