

Guide for Conducting Community Leader Interviews

Introduction

Community leader interviews are a very effective technique for learning about an underserved or non-user community. The technique is personal and informative and begins the process of building trust that is essential for reaching the target community.

Community Leader Interview Process

The major steps in conducting community leaders interviews are:

- Identify community leaders (see Guidelines below and Community Resources list)
- Set up interviews (see Sample Process for Community Leader Interview)
- Conduct interviews (see Sample Community Leader Interview)
- Analyze/summarize information (see Guidelines below)
- Set up follow-up interviews (see Guidelines below)

Guidelines for conducting each step of the process are attached.

Goals of the Community Leader Interviews

1. To gather information about the needs of the target community.
2. To begin building relationships with leaders within the target community.
3. To identify potential community partners and collaborators to help you improve services to the target community.

Guidelines for Conducting Community Leader Interviews

Identifying Community Leaders

1. Use the Community Resources list to help you begin identifying potential community agencies and groups to contact. Your goal is to identify community leaders that have knowledge of or experience working with your target community.
2. The leaders you interview do not necessarily have to be members of the target community themselves. They must, however, be knowledgeable about the needs and issues of the community. They might have gained their expertise by working for an agency that serves the community or they may be community activists with a broad knowledge of community problems and issues.
3. Not all types of organizations on the Community Resource list may be represented in your community. You may already be familiar with some community leaders through the newspaper or other media coverage. Start with what and whom you know. Talk to other people in the library, your church, friends, neighbors, etc. who may have a personal connection with a potential interviewee. It helps to be able to say that someone they know referred you to them.
4. Make a list of a minimum of 5 community leaders to interview. These are busy people and your schedules and deadlines may not coincide.

Setting Up the Interview

1. The sample process provided is intended to be a checklist for you rather than a script. You are starting a personal relationship so be sure you are as comfortable and informal as possible. Practice what you want to say before you make the first call.
2. At the end of the interview be sure to ask them for additional names of people you should contact. By now the community leader knows you and what you are trying to accomplish. They can be invaluable in expanding your list of contacts. Be sure to always mention their name if you follow-up on their referral.

Conducting the Interview

1. Even though the community leader may offer to come to the library or your office, make it a point to conduct your interviews out in the community. You want to see them in their milieu and you want others in the community to start seeing you out in the community. Face-to-face interviews are preferable to phone interviews.
2. The interview questions are intended as a guide. Be flexible and alert. The interview doesn't usually follow the simple 1-7 pattern of questions. Often the leader will answer several of your questions at once. If so, when you get to a question that the leader has already addressed simply summarize what they said and ask if they have additional thoughts on the question.

3. Practice saying the questions out loud ahead of time. Rephrase them so that you feel comfortable asking them.
4. Start by building rapport on a personal basis. The session should be informal and relaxing. Find out about the person, the organization and the background about key services and projects they provide before you start the interview questions.
5. If someone they know has referred you to them be sure to mention this. Strive to make a personal connection immediately.
6. The focus of the interview questions is to identify community needs and issues. The purpose of the interviews is to get to know the community from an insider's perspective. The focus is not to get the community leader's perspective on what the library should be doing to serve the community. That will come later. At the interview your role is to acknowledge and tap into the expertise of the community leader.
7. Take notes but do not use a tape recorder. Feel free to take the time to write good notes. Ask the interviewee to repeat if you missed something or rephrase what you thought you heard. The interviewee wants to help you get it right.
8. If at all possible, end the interview by letting them know when you will be back in touch. Let them know that you will send them a copy of your findings, results, etc.

Summarizing the Interview

1. Review your notes immediately after the interview. Sit in your car or outside their office and be sure you can read what you wrote.
2. Transcribe and summarize your notes as soon as possible. Make a list of the needs and issues identified; highlight those that are repeated or mentioned more than once.

Set Up Follow up Interview (within first three months following initial interview)

1. The community leader interview process is the start of a relationship. As a minimum, plan to meet with the leader at least three times:
 - The first meeting should be to conduct the interview and begin the relationship.
 - The second meeting should be a personal follow-up with the results/findings of your interviews and to get their input on your preliminary action plan.
 - The third meeting should be to get their help in marketing your activities, services to begin implementation of your action plan

Community Resources

Note: This list is not all inclusive; selected examples are in ().

You DO NOT need to contact every category on the list.

You DO need to tailor your list to your community.

You DO need to reach out to people not usually included.

- Youth Service Organizations (Big Brother/Sister, Boy Scouts, child abuse agencies, recreation programs, Girl Scouts, Jr. Achievement, Head Start, Even Start, child care associations, Association for the Education of Young Children, school age care and enrichment programs)
- Women's Centers/Service Organizations (battered women' shelters, YWCA, NOW)
- Refugee/Immigrant Centers/Services (Catholic Social Services, refugee rights association)
- Religious Organizations (church organizations, ministerial association)
- Senior Centers/Service Organizations (Area Agency on Aging, elder abuse/care agencies, RSVP)
- Organizations of/for People with Disabilities (center on deafness, council of the blind, health and human services agencies, Easter Seals, Goodwill, independent living centers, United Cerebral Palsy)
- Organizations serving the homeless (food closet, homeless assistance program, Salvation Army)
- Organizations serving ex-offenders (Department of Corrections, Friends Outside)
- Technology Experts (computer clubs, consultants, community colleges, Internet providers, universities)
- Organizations fighting discrimination (Anti-Defamation League, human rights group, NAACP)
- Miscellaneous Organizations (arts and cultural groups, athletic groups, censorship groups, historic preservation groups, local neighborhood groups, men's groups, veterans' groups, women's groups)
- Educational Organizations (community colleges, multilingual programs, PTA/PTO, school board, other libraries, private schools, home school organizations, higher education institutions/organizations)

Community Resources, page 2

- Government/Political Representatives (mayor, city council, county supervisors, city/county fiscal office, law enforcement, job training programs)
- Health Organizations (American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, hospitals, public health nurses, early intervention programs, public health clinics)
- Legal Organizations (ACLU, bar association, legal aid, NAACP Legal Defense Fund)
- Ethnic Organizations (Asian Resources Center, Hispanic centers, Inter-tribal Council, Urban League)
- Family Services Organizations (Social Services Department, Family Service Agency, Jewish Family Service)
- Media Representatives (newspaper, radio, TV, ethnic media, local magazines and newsletters)
- Financial Representatives (bankers, credit unions, financial planners, stockbrokers)
- Community Services Organizations/Associations/Clubs (AARP, AAUW, American Red Cross, B&PW, Kiwanis, Lions, Literacy Organizations, Rotary, Soroptimists, United Way)
- Economic Development Organizations (economic development councils, real estate brokers)
- Businesses/ Chambers of Commerce/Visitor's Bureaus (major employers, minority business owners, small business owners; city, county and ethnic chambers)

Sample Process for Community Leader Interview

1. Call to ask community leaders to participate in an interview.

Introduce yourself and explain why you are calling. Ask if this is a convenient time to talk.

Sample explanation:

I am Yolanda Cuesta and I am with the Fair Oaks Public. I am calling to ask your help in identifying the needs of the Spanish-speaking community. Our goal is to increase the number of Spanish-speaking community members that use public computers in the library.

We want to learn more about the needs and problems of the Spanish-speaking community in Fair Oaks and how they might be solved. We are conducting interviews with people like you who play an important role in helping the Spanish-speaking in Fair Oaks.

The interview will be kept confidential; the results of all our interviews will later be combined. No ideas or opinions will be attributed to you. If we feel it would be helpful to attribute something specifically to you, we will contact you and ask for your permission.

We estimate the interview will take no longer than 30 minutes.

If you are willing to participate in an interview, I will send you a copy of the questions prior to the interview. Thank you for your time.

2. Send them a copy of the interview questions.
3. Meet with them or call them back at the scheduled time.
4. Conduct the interview.
5. Thank the person for his/her time and explain how you will keep him/her informed about your progress.

Sample Community Leader Interview

Note: Start by building rapport on a personal level. The session should be informal and relaxing. Find out about the person, the organization and the background about key services and projects before you ask the following questions.

1. Tell me about the Spanish-speaking community in Fair Oaks.
2. What are the major needs, issues and problems facing the Spanish-speaking community in Fair Oaks?
3. What kind of help do Spanish-speaking community members need to have a better life in Fair Oaks?
4. What services are available to help the Spanish-speaking community? What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? What else needs to be done?
5. Who else should we contact to help us identify the needs of the Spanish-speaking community in Fair Oaks?
6. Is there anything else you would like to say about the Spanish-speaking community in Fair Oaks?
7. What questions would you like to ask me?