



Understanding Resident Perspectives A Guide for One-on-One Conversations

Overview

During the community assessment phase of a campaign, one of the most essential activities is getting to know the community, those who live there, the issues that are important to them, what their real lived experiences are and have been, and how those experiences relate to the issues on which we are focused. The only way to understand this is to get out into the community and talk to *real people*. Sure, we often talk to those who work with and serve local residents, but it's essential that we spend time engaging the individuals themselves who are *directly impacted* by the issues we are addressing.

One-on-one conversations with residents is a powerful way to begin to build trust and may lay the foundation for longer-term engagement. Effective community action requires regular input from residents describing their own lived experiences and their thoughts on possible remedies, interventions and solutions. We should definitely give the same level of preparation and professionalism to them as we would to any other key informant interview, while keeping the tone conversational, curious, and respectful.

Our goals in resident conversations are as follows:

1. Establish rapport and begin to build trust with those who live in the community and are directly impacted by the issues on which we are focused so that we can do *with* rather than *to* the community;
2. Learn about the true lived experiences of the residents of the community so we can avoid making assumptions or taking action based on implicit biases and lack of exposure/proximity; and,
3. To better understand how the issue we are working on intersects with the resident's experience with that issue to inform approaches to policy change, implementation, and accountability.

How to conduct resident interview/conversation

1. Identify individuals to learn from and WHY you think they can inform your work. For example:
 - Who are the resident "leaders", i.e. individuals who run tenant organizations or parent groups in the community?
 - Who are individuals who live in the neighborhoods most impacted by the problems you are addressing, such as substance use, unhealthy eating, cardiovascular disease, etc.?
 - Who are the faith leaders in the community?
 - Who can provide you with first-hand knowledge of their real lived experience of racism and health disparities?
 - Who from the community might be critical of your proposed goals?
 - Who are the well-respected elders in the community?
 - Who is disenfranchised or often overlooked in the community?

- Who do you hope to engage as grassroots leaders in your campaign?
2. Request time to meet with them, describing the purpose/goal/what you hope to achieve. [Note that if you know someone in common, ask that individual to make an introduction for you.] Ask them to help identify a location that would be convenient and comfortable for them.
 3. Prepare for the conversation:
 - Google information about the individual and their neighborhood;
 - Develop a set of questions.
 4. Conduct the conversation:
 5. After the meeting, send a thank you note – preferably hand-written!

Conversation Dos & Don'ts

Do ...	Don't ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Set the stage for this to feel like a conversation. Meet somewhere the individual is comfortable. This could be over coffee, in a home, or at an office. ✓ Treat the individual as a community expert. ✓ Be fully present. ✓ Reference your list of questions occasionally. ✓ Be transparent. Reiterate your reason for wanting to meet with them before diving in. ✓ Take time to answer their questions. ✓ Ask if they would like to stay informed as your campaign progresses and then keep them informed! ✓ Ask if they can recommend anyone else you should talk with. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊗ Create positions of power. (e.g., an office setting with one of you behind a desk.) ⊗ Make assumptions about the individuals experience, knowledge, or beliefs. ⊗ Get distracted. Turn off your phone and don't have a notebook and pen in hand! ⊗ Read your questions like a script.

Sample questions

(‘Community’ = Name of city/town/neighborhood/housing complex.)

- I’d love to hear how you came to live and work here and what your involvement in [community] has been. Can you tell me about your background and your roots in [community]?
- What’s the best part about [community]? Points of pride?
- How would you describe [policy issue such as resident access to affordable, healthy food, etc.] in [community]?
- Has that changed over time? If so, how?
- Do you recall who led that effort and if there were any opponents?
- If you were in charge of the world and could make [community] even better, what would you do?
- I’m wondering if you could give me any advice about working in this community when I don’t live here, myself?
- Are there other folks you might suggest I speak with?

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