

## KEY STAKEHOLDER/INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

*Key stakeholders* are those who are knowledgeable about substance misuse and abuse and/or have an interest or stake in efforts to address the problem. These individuals can help you better understand substance misuse and abuse and identify options for addressing the problem. Key stakeholders may include the following:

- People who are misusing and/or abusing substances
- Parents
- School nurses and school counselors
- Social services agency personnel
- Substance abuse prevention and treatment providers
- Medical staff from local and regional hospitals, community health centers, health care systems, insurers, dental offices, and pharmacies
- Law enforcement and first responder personnel
- Municipal government officials (e.g., mayors, city council members, department heads)
- Local business owners (liquor retailers, bars, restaurants, etc.)
- Representatives from the faith community
- Youth

**Note:** Engaging key stakeholders in all aspects of the assessment process promotes sustainability by securing their buy-in and laying the foundation for ongoing participation and support. It is likewise important to share the findings from the assessment process with key stakeholders and other community members. The better they understand the baseline issues, the more they will appreciate—and want to sustain—your substance misuse and abuse prevention and reduction efforts.

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### Pre-Interview Planning Process

Key informant interviews involve identifying different members of your community who are especially knowledgeable about a topic (whom we call *key informants*) and asking them questions about their experiences working or living within a community. It is typical to do 8–10 key informant interviews and

to seek out people with more than average knowledge to interview. These interviews are usually conducted face to face with your informants, using either an outside interviewer specifically hired to conduct the interviews, or a member (or members) of your organization. Group members with the needed skill set can be recruited to conduct the key informant interviews (and can train other members, which will help sustain this skill among your group). The length of these interviews can vary and will depend on the number of questions you decide to ask.

There are several factors to consider when deciding who will conduct the interviews, for example:

- **Time:** Interviews will need to be scheduled, conducted, written up, and analyzed. Preparation and follow-up activities can easily take up to twice the time of the interview itself.
- **Skills:** The interviewer must possess specific skills, such as the capacity to listen well, the ability to write and take accurate notes, a good memory, comfort with meeting new people, attention to detail, and strong communication skills.
- **Consistency:** It is best to have one or two people conduct interviews so that knowledge and experience about how best to frame questions is built up. Also, a limited number of interviewers greatly facilitates identification of themes, since only one or two people have heard all the information.
- **Cultural competency:** Interviewers should be individuals whom key informants can relate to. This could mean the interviewer shares attributes with the key informant (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, age) or that the interviewer is particularly familiar with the culture of the key informant.

The pre-interview planning process comprises three steps:

1. **Send a letter of introduction.** Once you have identified the key stakeholders in your community, send an official letter of introduction. The letter should include information about your coalition, provide background information on the substance misuse and abuse prevention initiative, briefly describe the needs and assets assessment that is being conducted, describe how key stakeholders were identified, briefly highlight what sort of information you will request during the interview and how the information will be used, and inform them that they will be contacted by phone in the near future to set up the interview.
2. **Call to set up the interview.** After a reasonable amount of time has passed, call each key stakeholder to set up the interview. Introduce yourself and briefly review the information in your letter of introduction. Make an appointment to interview the stakeholder at a time and place that is convenient for him or her.
3. **Send the questions ahead of time.** Once the interview has been scheduled, send each key stakeholder a copy of the questions you plan to ask. This allows respondents adequate time to prepare their thoughts and to identify any relevant materials ahead of time.

## Conducting the Interview

**Begin by introducing your project and purpose.** Remind the respondent about your purpose and the ultimate use of the information. 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.

**Don't let the interview go much over an hour.** The people you choose as key stakeholders are likely to be busy, and the quality of the conversation can deteriorate if they feel rushed. Many of your respondents may be people whom you will want to collaborate with in the future, so do not antagonize them by letting the interview go on too long.

**Don't move to a new topic prematurely.** Do not 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.

**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.

**Use two interviewers.** While not always feasible, it can be useful to have two people at the interview—one to conduct the interview and one to take detailed notes. Primary interviewers will still need to take their own notes to help with summarizing the information at the end of the interview, but knowing that their partner is taking more detailed notes allows them to pay more attention to the interview process itself.

**Use active listening techniques.** Pay close attention to what the key stakeholder is telling you. Follow up on anything that is unclear or that you don't understand.

**Take notes.** As described above, whether a single interviewer or a team of two conducts the interviews, it is essential to take detailed notes. Do not rely on your memory of the conversation after the fact.

**Record the interview.** If possible, do this in addition to taking formal notes. Recording allows you the opportunity to go back and clarify any points of confusion from your notes. If you choose to record the interviews, you need to obtain permission from the key stakeholder at the beginning of the interview. It is also traditional when taping an interview to inform respondents that they have the option of going "off the record" at any time they wish—at which point the recorder should be turned off.

**End the interview by summarizing the key points.** Summarizing what was said is a good way to end the interview. This step is important because it gives you an opportunity to put what the stakeholder said into your own words. This also allows the stakeholder to correct any mistakes or to emphasize key points that you may have overlooked.

## Post-Interview

**Review your notes immediately after the interview.** This is the best time to clarify your notes and to add any additional information that was not possible to note during the interview, including information about the tenor of the interview, such as the degree to which the respondent was cooperative, how strongly he or she felt about issues discussed, and whether and why the interview may have been cut short. It's also the best time to create a formal summary of the discussion based on your notes. As discussed above, analysis of the qualitative interview data should involve at least one other person who will rely on your notes.

**Follow up with a thank you.** Send a thank-you call or letter after each interview. This provides an additional opportunity to thank key stakeholders for their time and participation, and allows you a chance to follow up on any themes or pieces of information that were missed during the interview, or items that you found to be confusing when preparing your summary.

## KEY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWER GUIDE

This guide is intended for the individual(s) conducting the key stakeholder interview and should not be distributed to the key stakeholders.

- Instructions to interviewers appear in brackets.
- All questions and probes should be answered (even if only by a “don’t know”). It is not necessary to continue with a probe if the respondent has already provided a response in his or her answer to the general question or to another probe.
- When selecting interview questions, keep in mind that open-ended questions are likely to elicit more thought and explanation, and therefore richer data, than closed-ended (“yes or no”) questions.
- Ask the questions/probes in the order shown.
- You may add questions, but do so only after Part VI. Be sure to ask the final question (“Do you have any other comments or observations you would like to make?”) before concluding the interview.
- Begin with introductions as needed.
- Explain that you will take notes and audio-record the interview. Discuss the respondent’s option of “going off the record.”
- Ask, “Do you have any questions about how the interview is going to work?” Answer all questions the respondent may have before proceeding to the questions below.

### Part I: Assessment of the Issue

**Question:** How would you describe the substance misuse and abuse situation in the community?

**Probes:** What is the severity of the issue? How has the issue changed over time? Who is misusing alcohol? [Get specific information about age, gender, and race] What are the consequences? When do the use and consequences occur (i.e., during what specific days of the week or times)? Where do the use and consequences occur? What are the factors that drive the problem?

**Note:** One thing you’ll want to determine from your interviews is whether specific groups of people or other factors stand out. As defined by HealthyPeople 2020, “Health disparities adversely affect groups of people who have systematically experienced greater obstacles to health based on their racial or ethnic group; religion; socioeconomic status; gender; age; mental health; cognitive, sensory, or physical disability; sexual orientation or gender identity; geographic location; or other characteristics historically linked to discrimination or exclusion” (¶ 5).<sup>28</sup> Is there a particular impact on a group or subpopulation who may be vulnerable to health disparities?

### Part II: Steps to Address the Issue

**Questions:** What has your organization done, if anything, to address substance misuse and abuse in the community? What do you think should be done to address substance misuse and abuse in the community?

**Probes:** How well have these efforts worked? Did you work with any other agencies or organizations in the community on this? [If so] Which organization(s), and how and how well did you work together?

### Part III: Readiness to Address the Issue

**Question:** What is your assessment of the level of readiness within your agency or organization to address substance misuse and abuse in the community?

**Probes:** What is the level of interest in the issue? What is the level of willingness to address the issue? What factors would facilitate this work (e.g., what resources are available)? What factors might undermine or complicate this work?

**Question:** What is your assessment of the level of readiness in the community at large to address substance misuse and abuse?

**Probes:** Who are the leaders or champions of this issue? What is the level of interest in the issue? What is the level of willingness to address the issue? What factors would facilitate this work (e.g., what resources are available)? What factors might undermine or complicate this work?

**Question:** What impact, if any, has the misuse and abuse of substances in the community had on the functioning of your agency or organization?

**Probes:** How much of a burden has this placed on your agency or organization? How has it made your job harder? [Note that this information may be useful in recruiting the respondent's support for your initiative]

#### **Part IV: Data on the Issue**

**Question:** What data are collected by your agency or organization, if any, that might help inform our assessment of substance misuse and abuse in the community or related factors?

**Probes:** How are the data collected? How often are the data collected? How recent are the data? Where are the current data gaps? Are there any problems with the data? How would we go about getting permission to access the data?

#### **Part V: Resources to Address the Issue**

**Questions:** What role, if any, would your agency or organization be willing to play in our efforts to reduce substance misuse and abuse in the community? What other individuals do you think we should talk to in order to obtain more information about substance misuse and abuse in the community?

**Probe:** Are there any other individuals in your agency or organization whom we should talk to?

#### **Part VI: Questions for Specific Groups of Interviewees**

**Note:** The following questions were adapted from Rhode Island State Epidemiology and Outcomes Workgroup, Buka, and Rosenthal.<sup>42</sup>

##### ***Questions for Medical Providers and Youth-Serving Groups***

- Do you think that underage drinking is a serious problem in this community?  
**Probe:** [If yes] Why? [If no] Why not?
- Do you know youth in this community under the age of 21 who use alcohol?
- Are there certain subpopulations of kids under 21 who are more likely to drink alcohol in this community?
- Do you know of parents or adults in this community who permit youth under the age of 21 to consume alcohol in their homes?
- Where do you think minors under age 21 in this community obtain alcohol?

- Under what circumstances is it acceptable for an adult to provide alcohol to minors under age 21?
- What forms of media or advertising do you think influence alcohol use among minors under age 21 in this community?
- If you were aware of a minor under the age of 21 who was consuming alcohol, what would you do?
- What resources are available in this community to address alcohol use among minors under age 21?

### *Questions for Law Enforcement*

- Do you think that underage drinking is a serious problem in this community?  
**Probe:** [If yes] Why? [If no] Why not?
- What specific measures are being taken in this community to enforce laws against underage drinking?
- What specific measures are being taken in this community to enforce laws regarding sales of alcohol to minors? to enforce laws regarding adults supplying alcohol to minors? to conduct party patrols?  
**Probe:** Do you know of any other measures?
- How effective do you think those measures are at enforcing laws against underage drinking? What would help make them more effective?
- Are there certain subpopulations of kids who are more likely to drink alcohol in this community?
- Do you think the legal consequences for underage drinking offenses are sufficient?  
**Probe:** [If yes] Why? [If no] Why not?
- Do you think judges and the juvenile justice system are doing a good job with respect to underage drinking violations?  
**Probe:** [If yes] Why? [If no] Why not?
- Based on your view of this community, how acceptable is it for minors to drink alcohol?
- Where do you think people under the age of 21 in this community get alcohol (e.g., home, liquor store, grocery store, convenience store, bar/restaurant, friends)?
- Where do you think people under the age of 21 in this community drink alcohol?

### *Questions for School-Based Personnel/Educators*

- Do you think that underage drinking is a serious problem in this community?  
**Probe:** [If yes] Why? [If no] Why not?
- Do you know youth in this community under the age of 21 who use alcohol?
- Do you know of parents or adults in this community who permit youth under the age of 21 to consume alcohol in their homes?
- Are there certain subpopulations of kids who are more likely to drink alcohol in this community?
- Does your school have an alcohol policy? If yes, is it enforced?
- Is alcohol education part of the school's curriculum? If yes, is it effective?
- Does your school sponsor extracurricular activities to prevent underage drinking?

- Do you think parents understand the seriousness of the underage drinking problem?  
**Probe:** [If yes] Why? [If no] Why not?
- What role do you think that teachers and counselors can play in reducing underage drinking?
- What is the most effective way to keep underage youth from drinking alcohol?
- Does your school have a mechanism in place for identifying and assisting students who may have an alcohol problem?

### *Questions for Community Leaders and Public and Elected Officials*

- Do you think that underage drinking is a serious problem in this community?  
**Probe:** [If yes] Why? [If no] Why not?
- Do you know youth in this community under the age of 21 who use alcohol?
- Where do you think people under the age of 21 in this community get alcohol (e.g., home, liquor store, grocery store, convenience store, bar/restaurant, friends)?
- Do you think that there are sufficient laws to reduce underage drinking?  
**Probe:** [If yes] What are the most effective laws? [If no] What additional laws need to be passed to reduce underage drinking?
- Do you think the public is aware of current underage drinking laws and regulations?
- How would you improve underage drinking legislation in this state?
- What is the role of public and elected officials in reducing underage drinking?
- How would you improve local laws, policies, or procedures related to underage drinking?

### *Questions for Health and Prevention/Treatment Specialists*

- Do you think that underage drinking is a serious problem in this community?  
**Probe:** [If yes] Why? [If no] Why not?
- Do you know youth in this community under the age of 21 who use alcohol?
- Do you know of parents or adults in this community who permit youth under the age of 21 to consume alcohol in their homes?
- Where do you think people under the age of 21 in this community get alcohol (e.g., home, liquor store, grocery store, convenience store, bar/restaurant, friends)?
- What are the barriers, if any, to reducing underage drinking in this community?
- Are there certain subpopulations of kids who are more likely to drink alcohol in this community?
- What is the role of health professionals, prevention specialists, and treatment personnel in reducing underage drinking in this community?
- Do you think the general public understands the underage drinking problem in this community?
- What can be done to solve the problem of underage drinking in this community?

### *Questions for Business Leaders*

- Do you think that underage drinking is a serious problem in this community?  
**Probe:** [If yes] Why? [If no] Why not?
- Where do you think people under the age of 21 in this community get alcohol (e.g., home, liquor store, grocery store, convenience store, bar/restaurant, friends)?

- Do you think that there are sufficient laws to reduce underage drinking?  
**Probe:** [If yes] What are the most effective laws? [If no] What additional laws need to be passed to reduce underage drinking?
- Do you think local businesses are aware of current underage drinking laws and regulations?  
**Probe:** [If yes] Why? [If no] Why not?
- What is the role of local business officials in reducing underage drinking?
- How would you improve local laws, policies, or procedures related to underage drinking?

### *Questions for Faith Leaders*

- Do you think that underage drinking is a serious problem in this community?  
**Probe:** [If yes] Why? [If no] Why not?
- Do you know youth in this community under the age of 21 who use alcohol?
- Do you know of parents or adults in this community who permit youth under the age of 21 to consume alcohol in their homes?
- What are the main reasons, do you think, that kids in this community drink alcohol?
- What role can the church play in reducing underage drinking?
- Do you think parents understand the seriousness of the underage drinking problem?  
**Probe:** [If yes] Why? [If no] Why not?
- What is the most effective way to keep underage youth from drinking alcohol?
- What resources are available in your community to address alcohol use among minors under age 21?

### **Part VII: Additional Comments, Observations, or Questions**

- **Question:** Do you have any other comments or observations you would like to make?
- **Probe:** Do you have any questions about this project?

### *KEY STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW SUMMARY FORM*

Use this form to record information related to setting up an interview and to provide a summary of the information you gathered. If you contact someone and he or she does not want to participate, record that information at the top of the form.

Key Stakeholder Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization and Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone, Fax, and E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Contacted: \_\_\_\_\_

Response? Yes / No

Interview Date(s), Time(s), and Location(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_



Additionally, make note of the following:

- Why you conducted this research: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- The general focus of your questions (note: please attach the actual questions you used): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- The themes that emerged: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Your conclusions—the big take-away messages: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_