



**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION**

Step 4a: Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews can play a critical role in needs assessments. A 'key informant' is an individual who provides important perspectives and firsthand knowledge of the community and more specifically, the needs of the community. For example, an assessment of the health status of the community would be enhanced by seeking the opinions of doctors, nurses, caregivers, and healthcare coordinators. Key informants can help you understand why something is happening or the history and context of an issue. A limitation of key informants is that they are not reliable reporters of the actual number of persons affected by a social problem or the demographic and geographic distribution of the problem. (This is one reason why we are complementing key informant interviews with secondary data collection and a broad community needs assessment (CNA) survey.)

In the case of CSUE's CNA, contacting key informants is important for five distinct reasons:

1. We are interested in their perspectives on issues important to the population they represent.
2. Informant interviews present opportunities to build or enhance partnerships for future programming/efforts. (Should an issue that a key informant is addressing rise to the top of community priorities, CSUE may wish to involve that same key informant in exploring programming partnerships in program planning later in the CNA process.)
3. In addition to providing us with valuable in-depth perspectives on issues, key informant interviews can also help us select issues to include on our CNA surveys.
4. Key informants can distribute our CNA survey to their contacts later on in the process.
5. We will ask key informants to also respond to the Civic Capacity Index electronic survey (step 4b).

Once a list of *potential* key informants is finalized, it is time to select 10-15 key informants to interview. Keep in mind all informants may not agree to participate in an interview or scheduling may not align, so have a prioritized list of people to contact. For cases where interviewing all listed isn't feasible (due to very large lists and/or resource and time constraints), a county should be strategic in selecting key informants to interview. The following are factors to weigh when considering key informants to interview:

1. Does interviewing an informant allow you to build a relationship with a new part of your community?
2. Is the issue or demographic that the key informant represents particularly significant in your community as confirmed by demographic data and/or seeing the issue come up repeatedly in the secondary data?
3. Can a single key informant represent multiple key demographics and/or issues? (For example, perhaps the Latino Chamber of Commerce can speak to both issues facing the small business community in general as well as issues facing the Latinx community in general.)
4. Is the issue that the informant represents one that you can reasonably see OEE addressing in some way, even if you don't currently know how?
5. Can the informant represent perspectives of those who are known to have challenges accessing the internet? (Because the CNA survey will exclusively or largely be electronic, it's important to

hear from those who can represent populations without easy access to the internet in the key informant interview step.)

6. If partnering with another county on the CNA, is a potential informant able to speak to issues that span multiple counties?
7. When looking at your list of potential key informants, do you have a mix that can speak to the needs of various cities and towns within your county?
8. In the spirit of partnership with other CSU units, ensure that key informants identified by an AES Station, Regional Engagement Center, and/or a State Forest Service office in your county are included in your final list of key informants.
9. Finally, because those about to graduate from high school are key demographic for CSU Online, consider representation from the school system when finalizing key informants.

Note that ***if you select a state agency to be a key informant, interviews of that agency will have to be coordinated with the CSUE AD for Program Support*** so that we are not contacting the same agency multiple times for the same interview (by different counties). One interview can be completed and the data can be shared across counties in this case. Also note that if county Extension offices are partnering with other adjacent county offices on the CNA, the grouping may choose to designate a lead county that would be responsible for all or most of the key informant interviews. This option is put forward in the acknowledgment that adjacent counties may have significant overlap in potential informants and that some counties may have more staff capacity to interview informants than others. Another option is to ask informants to fill out the Secondary and Key Informant Data spreadsheet ahead of interviews so that you can use the interview to go deeper.

The process of finalizing key informants is a good opportunity for staff to provide input and come to a consensus. It may also present an opportunity to work more closely with AES, Regional Engagement Center, and/or Forest Service colleagues (for the purpose of selecting key informants and understanding potential intersections of informants, issues, and work). Selecting key informants as a collective can allow for questions about the exercise, key informants, and the CNA process in general to surface and be addressed. CSUE and OEE staff should feel good about the final list in that it reflects current and potential OEE work and opportunities.

A separate document contains a protocol and sample questions for key informant interviews. When the interviews are completed, use the Secondary and Key Informant Data spreadsheet to enter key points.