



Reaching the Masses: Assessing Community Needs Through Key Informants

Objectives:

- ✓ Improve communications between Extension groups and key community leaders
- ✓ Develop a plan for incorporating input from key community leaders
- ✓ Involve advisory members in intentional dialogue with key community leaders

Advance Preparation:

- ✓ Review the "Interview with a Community Leader" and revise it to meet your local situation and issues. Rename the document with your county, community and state.

Materials Needed:

- ✓ Chalkboard and chalk or flipchart and marker
- ✓ One copy of the revised Handout "[Interview with a Community Leader](#)" for each participant
- ✓ One copy of Handout "[Tips for Face-to-Face Interviews](#)" for each participant
- ✓ Blank copies of the Handout "Interview with a Community Leader" for advisory members to use for intentional dialogue with community leaders

Time Needed: 1 hour

BACKGROUND

Often the cornerstone to a community is found in its leaders and decision makers. Therefore, it would not be wise to plan an educational program without first consulting the leaders for input. They tend to have an influence on the community patterns of growth, community habits and situations, and general trends in the population. This is not anything new. Extension has strived to include community leaders in their programs since the beginning and particularly attempt to use the leaders

in an advocacy and advisory role. Many of the current advisory leaders across the United States are, have been or will be community leaders and decision makers. Therefore, if careful forethought has been given to the make-up of the advisory council, we have an edge in this area.

However only involve a small handful of the potential leaders and decision makers are involved in our Extension programs or advisory councils. Therefore, it is important to go beyond who we have and attempt to canvas the community for more input from this group. Why you ask? This group contains individuals who are knowledgeable about the community and can accurately identify priority needs and concerns. While it must be acknowledged that this input may be biased by their age, position, area of residence, family..., their input is still too valuable to exclude.

INTEREST APPROACH

- Tell a story (or ask the advisory members to share one) about how one individual in your community totally "turned the tide" on how the community viewed or did something. Usually there are many local stories in this area:
 - Perhaps someone was the first to buy a new car, a new type of tractor or open a new industry.
 - Perhaps a innovative daycare center or community action program.
 - Even maybe something as simple as the color they painted their house or how they kept their lawn.
 - Perhaps they earned respect from the way they conducted their business and personal affairs and the community began to look at them as setting a precedence.
- After they have had a chance to share their stories, ask how one person can influence so many? Do these people have magical powers? Are they natural leaders or risk takers?

LESSON

- Have the advisory council brainstorm a list of local leaders in the community, county or state. Record their responses on a chalkboard or flipchart. Make the list as long as comprehensive as you can.
- Once everyone is satisfied with the list at hand, ask the following questions (and add names to the list as they arise):
 - Have we included all the political leaders we can think of?
 - Have we included people from each major category of people we reviewed in the Existing Data lesson?
 - Are there other people who have a high influence on

- many people in the community but are not currently serving in a leadership capacity?
 - Are there people in the community that command a great deal of respect from most residents? Social power? Advice givers? Business leaders? Youth leaders? Civic Organization leaders? Volunteer Organization leaders?
- Inform the participants that we are on a mission to uncover what these community leaders have to share about our programs. Since we have a roomful of community leaders, there is no better place to start than here.
- Have advisory members pair up in groups of two and distribute the "Interview with a Community Leader" handout.
- Review the "Tips for Face-to-Face Interviews" handout and have one member from each group practice one of the suggestions on the handout.
- Ask them to interview each other using the "Tips" and "Interview" handout. Each should record the other's input and turn in their responses to you.

APPLICATION

- Look back over the brainstorm lists and assign each advisory member to interview leaders. Suggest at least two or three each, but they can do as many as they like. Write down which advisory members are interviewing which leaders.
- Using the blank copies of "Interview with a Community Leader", have each advisory member contact the people they were assigned and conduct the interviews. Suggest that they do a thorough job of recording the responses to the interview questions and that they may want to take along a cassette recorder so they can review the interview later for details. Much of this depends on how well they know the person being interviewed.
- Ask them to be prepared to share what they found out in the interview at the next meeting and use it in a discussion about Extension programs and directions. As the advisory members are disclosing what they found out, take notes to create a "Key Informant Summary" for use in a later lesson.

REFERENCES

Black, J. (2002). Tips for conducting in person (face-to-face) interviews. Retrieved June 27, 2002 from Write to Inspire Web site:
<http://www.writetoinspire.com/article1092.html>
