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# A GUIDE FOR KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

## *Who Is a Key Informant?*

- A key informant is someone in your organization who can offer specific, specialized knowledge on a particular issue you wish to understand better.
- A key informant can frequently offer a particular perspective or communicate specific needs or challenges that a particular group in your organization may face.
- Key informants are people who, during the worksite assessment phase, can fill the information gaps that you may have with regard to accommodations for breastfeeding and pumping within the work environment.

A key informant could be:

- Someone from your organization's Diversity or Equal Employment Opportunities Committee.
- Someone knowledgeable about compliance with workforce and human resource policies and laws.
- A pregnant mother or someone recently returning from maternity leave.
- Fathers.
- Direct report supervisor.
- Administrator.
- Human resources specialist.
- Facilities manager.
- Wellness coordinator.
- Lactation consultant from the community.
- Business owners (those who are designated Mother-Friendly and those who are not).
- "Nay-sayers" or those skeptical about Mother-Friendly policy implementation.
- A professional association or community organization representative (Society of Human Resource Managers, state or local breastfeeding coalition, wellness coalition).
- Other key people in your organization or community.

While many of these people may already be on your Mother-Friendly Worksite committee, it may be important to conduct a more in-depth interview with different people to get a complete understanding of their needs, perspectives, or experiences to see how they fit into your planning process and Mother-Friendly Worksite policy and program.

### *When to Use a Key Informant Interview*

Key informant interviews, like focus groups, are another source of information that allows you to speak to someone with firsthand knowledge of the information you need or issues you seek to address. Key informant interviews can be useful for:

- **Initial assessment of an issue** Find someone who has been in your organization long enough to know the written and unwritten policy regarding combining work and breastfeeding, and develop your list of questions about the challenges and strengths of current organizational policy.
- **Beginning relationship building/buy-in with members in your organization** If you are the contact person in your organization, you might want to start by having a conversation with your human resources contact or others to get a sense of who would need to be involved in decision making, planning, and paying for worksite lactation support policy.
- **For getting more honest and in-depth answers about issues** that may have been too sensitive or divisive to address in a focus group or that were not feasible to address through a survey.

### *Planning for the Interview*

#### **What do you want to know?**

Consider what you need to know and ask yourself whether this is the most efficient way to access this information.

#### **Whom do you want to interview?**

- Select interviewees who have firsthand knowledge and a relevant point of view.
- Plan to explore a variety of perspectives around the issue.
- A key informant in the context of your organization's worksite lactation support program could be someone from your pool of committee member candidates who has firsthand knowledge of workplace procedures, or it could be a new employee from whom you can gather information on what she or he learned about combining work and breastfeeding when she was hired and how that was communicated, if at all.
- Other examples include an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant who has worked with businesses, a business owner who is already Mother-Friendly, or someone



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within or outside your organization who has actively supported or opposed the adoption of this type of policy. These are only examples; the possibilities for interviewees are unique to your workplace, considering where gaps in data collection exist.

### How many interviews will you do?

As with planning for focus groups, the number will be determined by the information you need and your time, staff, and financial constraints.

### Will the interviews be face-to-face, by telephone, or email?

Availability and logistics may determine which option is most feasible. However, keep in mind that you do not have to choose one method over the other—any of the methods can be used. Also consider other options, such as web video conferencing, if available.

### Who should do the interviewing?

If you will be doing more than one interview, it is best to have the same person conduct all the interviews in order to be consistent with information recording. This person should be someone with whom the interviewee can speak freely and without political, personal, or professional interference or pressures.

### How long will the interviews take?

The average interview should be scheduled for no more than about 30 minutes. Fifteen to twenty minutes will generally be plenty of time.

### Developing the interview questions

A general scripted guide is provided in the next section as an example of how your conversation could be conducted. From this general guide, you will be able to adapt the script to meet your organization's needs and interests.

### How to document and share the information you discovered

Decide whether you are going to record the conversation in addition to note-taking, and be sure you get written permission from your interviewee. (Also consider whether your method of documentation will change the responses of your interviewee or impede their responses. Will they be intimidated by seeing a recording device or be concerned about how the information may be used in the future?) Decide how you are going to communicate the results of your interviews to your interviewees and your planning committee.

## Creating Your Interview Questions

Interview questions should be customized to your interviewee.

1. **Introduction** We have provided a sample introduction in the Appendix. Feel free to modify it as you see fit, making sure it covers the following components:
  - a. Establish the purpose of the interview.
  - b. Explain who is involved, who will benefit, and the scope of the project.
  - c. Explain your role in the process and your credibility as interviewer.
  - d. Explain why you chose them and how they can inform the process.
  - e. Explain how the information will be used and shared after the interview process.
2. **Key Questions** These will be based on the information you need for your planning and on the informant's unique knowledge and experience. Depending on the time you have, plan for 5 to 10 key questions that will allow for probing and follow-up.
3. **Probing Questions** These questions encourage the interviewee to go further into a topic or expand on thoughts or feelings about an answer. You may observe body language, tone of voice, or other non-verbal cues that could indicate a need to explore an answer further. An initial response may be too vague, and probing will allow you to get more useful information.
4. **Closing Questions** Use an open-ended question to allow the informant to provide additional thoughts, comments, and recommendations for solving the problem or addressing the issue at hand.
5. **Summary** Quickly summarize the main points that you heard and reconcile them with the interviewee's intent and perception of what was offered. This is another way to let them give additional information or provide clarification.

## After the Interview

1. **Document** Write up final notes on your interview, expanding on any shorthand you may have used and organizing the material in a useful, cohesive, and comprehensible form.
2. **Review electronic recording** If you chose to record the interview, review the recording and compare it with your manual notes to ensure you captured all relevant information.
3. **Follow-up** After the interview, it is a good idea to follow up with your interviewee with a "thank you" and any follow-up questions you may have after reviewing your notes.
4. **Compile, analyze, and report results** This may be formal or informal. Remove all identifying details of the informant and translate the results of the interview into a format that is useful



and informative to your Mother-Friendly Worksite committee and other champions within your organization.

## Sample Interview Guide

This is a basic example. The information in brackets is meant to be customized for your particular workplace. Please feel free to modify your interview tool as needed.

### Introduction

*I am working with [Organization Name]. The organization has begun a strategic planning process to create and implement a worksite lactation support policy to become designated as a Mother-Friendly Worksite by the Texas Department of State Health Services. An important part of planning is to understand the environment of the workplace as well as the organization's challenges and strengths. We are interviewing people inside and outside of the organization as part of an information-gathering process.*

*The themes that emerge from the interview process will inform our planning; the interviews themselves will be confidential.*

*I am [a member of the planning committee, a supervisor in the organization, an independent interviewer] and will interview you based on your knowledge of HR policy, combining work and breastfeeding, how to add a room/designated space to our facility, etc.*

*Your knowledge will be very valuable as we complete our project. This interview should only last [15/20/30] minutes. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?*

## Sample Questions

Here are examples of key questions, with probing questions in parentheses.

### Who

*Tell me about yourself and how long you've been with the organization.*

*What services do you provide?*

*Have you worked in any other area of the organization?*

## Combining breastfeeding and work

If you are interviewing an employee, you might ask:

*Do you have children?*

*Did you and/or your partner decide to breastfeed? If not, would you mind sharing what went into making that decision? Was returning to work a factor?*

*Did you/your partner breastfeed for as long as you/she wanted?*

*Were other employees supportive?*

*Were you able to plan your return-to-work schedule before you left on parental leave?*

If you are interviewing an HR person, you might ask:

*Do you have a worksite lactation support program in place?*

*How do employees find out about the program?*

*How do you promote the program and educate parents about managing their paid and unpaid leave and combining work and breastfeeding?*

*What challenges have you observed in implementing this policy?*

If you are interviewing a facilities person, you might ask:

*We've determined that building x would be the best spot for a mothers' room; is there space available for use? Can we convert another space?*

*What modifications can we make (paint/electrical/lighting/plumbing/security)?*

*What is the process for securing use of the space? Are there any plans to modify this space in the future?*

## Outcomes

*What are you hoping will result from your participation in this process? What would your ideal worksite lactation support policy include?*

## Close

*Thank you very much for your time. Your knowledge and insights will be very helpful to us. The **Organization Name** expects to complete its planning process over the next **xx** months. When the process is complete, we would be happy to share a summary of our new plan. Would you like to receive a copy? Thank you again.*



This document was created using the following resources:

- The Access Project. Getting the Lay of the Land on Health: A Guide for Using Interviews to Gather Information (Key Informant Interviews). December 1999. Accessed February 28, 2011. <http://www.accessproject.org/downloads/final%20document.pdf>.
- UCLA Center for Health Policy Research Health DATA Program-Data, Advocacy and Technical Assistance. Section 4: Key Informant Interviews. Accessed February 28, 2011. [http://www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu/healthdata/ttt\\_prog24.pdf](http://www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu/healthdata/ttt_prog24.pdf).