

Supplemental Information Gathering

Compiling a community profile and conducting a needs assessment are two important components in planning for and designing community based primary prevention initiatives. However, numerical data is not a sufficient view of the way certain risk factors for sexual violence operate in your community. In order to get a clearer picture, it's important to interview other community members and/or conduct focus groups with different segments of your community. Often it is difficult to find data or studies on the kind of information that would be helpful in planning prevention activities. Focus groups allow you to gather some of that data yourself.

You can use information from these groups to get more information on trends you might have noticed from other information gathering efforts or to get information on risk factors you haven't explored via other means.

Sample focus group or interview audiences

- Cultural or "underserved" groups (African American, Latino, LGBTQI, etc)
- Sexual assault survivors and/or secondary survivors
- Community organizers (in your community)
- Teachers or others who work with youth
- Parents
- Youth (in general) or young men
- Business owners
 - *(e.g., to explore pay and hiring disparities, sexual harassment)*
- Staff from other nonprofits
- Pastors/clergy/church groups
- Folks from different areas of town (Community Centers, Libraries)
- Folks who are currently or formerly homeless
- Men's groups
- College students (fraternities, sports teams, other groups)

You will probably have different questions for each of these groups – different information you are going to want to gather. It's important to remember what the goal of your information gathering is. You want to find out which risk factors are the best ones to address at this time in your community, so this means you need to know which ones are prevalent, which ones you have the resources (including community support) to address, and which ones you can address strategically to support other work in your community.

Focus Groups vs. Interviews

Focus groups allow you to gather information from a cross-section of your community and get multiple points of view at one time. Another benefit of focus groups is that participants are able to "piggy back" off each other's answers. That is, one person may say something that sparks an idea in another member of the group. This cannot happen in interviews.

Interviews, on the other hand, allow you to get a lot of depth from one person. This can be especially useful when you have someone in the community with a lot of knowledge on a specific topic or population. Additionally some people are more amenable to being interviewed than to participating in focus groups. It is not a bad idea to do both focus groups and interviews, carefully selecting who will be invited to do each one. For example, you may want to conduct a focus group of youth (or a particular subsection of youth such as young men) but then also interview someone who works with those youth. Having youth in a focus group with adults who are in a position of power over them would likely inhibit their answers, and is not usually a good idea because of that power imbalance. However, you might still be able to get some useful information from talking to those adults, but it might be better to use an interview format to do so.

General Facilitation Notes

Be sure to capitalize on opportunities to help people “unpack” their ideas in order to help clarify what they mean when discussing risk factors. For example, although we know that lack of sanctions for perpetrators is a risk factor because it helps set community norms, this is actually a risk factor that involves assaults already having been committed. So, in this example, you might ask them to talk about why they think there are so few sanctions. In thinking that through, they might actually realize how this is connected to other risk factors. Another common answer to this is “lack of awareness.” For this answer, it might be a good idea to ask why this is a risk factor and to ask what kind of awareness.

Clarifying questions are also often helpful. For example, when people mention lack of awareness, you could ask if they mean that if everyone knew what sexual violence was, no one would commit it. Or, if someone mentions lack of sanctions or community response, you might ask them to think about what contributed to the assaults in the first place, independent of community response to assaults that already occurred.

Additionally, you can ask them to think about examples at each level of the ecological model if that helps them to come up with ideas. You might want to also ask them to think about why violence in general occurs in their communities.

Phrasing and Unpacking

It's important to remember that many of the terms related to primary prevention, the public health model and sexual violence work in general will not be familiar to many of these groups.

- Think carefully about the way you phrase questions and avoid jargon as much as possible. If it seems like the question has been misunderstood, rephrase it and check for understanding.

For example, through focus groups with youth, it was learned that their definition of “consent” was related to parental permission (e.g., consent forms for field trips) and not to mutually agreeing to sexual encounters. Thus, it is important to use different phrasing when talking with youth about what we would call consent.

- Look for ways to get information about a topic/risk factor without addressing the topic head-on.

For example, you will probably get more meaningful answers to the question, “How do you think women are treated, as compared to men, in the workplace?” than to “In what ways does sexism manifest itself in the workplace?” Likewise, when talking to youth, you will probably get more meaningful answers to the question “How are terms like “gay”, “sissy” and “fag” used among your friends and what impact do you think they have on the person who is called these names?” than with a question like “How do you think homophobia and rigid ideas about masculinity play out in your peer group and what impact does that have?” Meaning is more important than terminology, so avoid buzzwords and get at concepts instead.

- Remember that the best information is not always in the exact answers given but also what those answers might imply. Read between the lines.

For example, let’s say you are interviewing a business owner who says there is no income disparity between men and women or between white workers and people of color. There are at least two possibilities for what’s really going on. First, what the person is saying could be true, at least at their business/organization. If this is the case, this person and the organization could be potential allies in your work. However, there is plenty of evidence to the contrary (at least nationally), and you might have talked to other business owners or seen community data that contradicts this. So, perhaps another possibility - and a potentially important point to take away from this encounter - is that some people are not aware of the disparities or choose to ignore them. Remember to always put answers in context and examine the various potential meanings.

In Closing

As you are wrapping up, assuming there is time, you might want to ask “What else would you like us to know/consider?”

Focus Group Methodology

Focus groups take time out of people's days, so to be respectful of their time, it is best to keep the focus group fairly short, perhaps one and a half or two hours at most. Additionally, in order to be able to hear from as many folks as possible, keep attendance under 10 or 15 people. These are not hard and fast rules, but rather suggestions. Feel free to experiment and find what works best for you.

You will need a report of what is said in the focus groups with as much detail as possible. Ideally, you would be able to video or audio record it or have someone who can take copious notes during the process so that you can get the full depth of participant responses. If someone is going to take notes, they should try to capture *exact wording* as much as possible and not paraphrase. This will help with finding themes in answers later. If you are going to video or audiotape the focus group, **you must get permission from all attendees**, and you will need someone to transcribe the conversation.

You will want to keep a record of how many attendees you had and preferably their organization or affiliation. You do not need names but you might want to get demographic data (e.g., race/ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, education level, income, etc.) for statistical purposes.

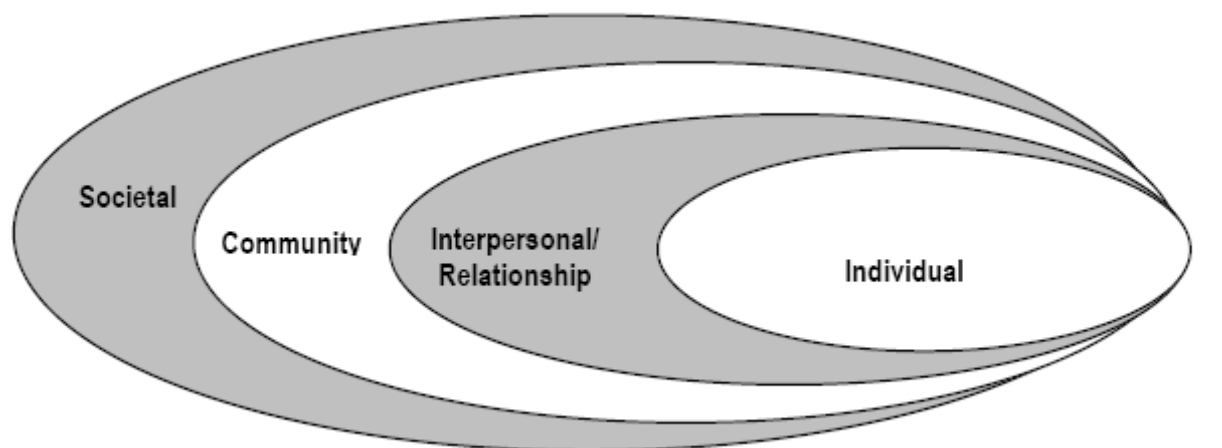
Depending on which set of questions you ask, you might want to consider explaining the ecological model to participants. (This should be completed within the first five minutes and should not be a lengthy exercise.) Do not list off risk factors from the ecological model, but do explain the various levels and that, in answering focus group questions, you would like them to think about risk and contributing factors at various levels. You might want to point out that risk/contributing factors are also known as root causes. You can give them a diagram of the ecological model to better illustrate it. The idea behind presenting them with this framework is so that they understand that you don't just want to know about individual behaviors or situational factors that might influence a given sexual assault but rather general factors at various levels that create a culture where sexual violence is likely to happen.

Individual Level: These are personal factors or characteristics that are related to sexually violent behavior, including biological factors and personal history.

Relationship Level: Factors on this level are related to the interactions between an individual and the important individuals in their lives (e.g., family and peer groups) and the behaviors that are learned from these interactions.

Community Level: Community level factors also greatly influence a person's beliefs and behaviors and can set a standard for how people are supposed to behave. These influences include one's workplace, school, various government entities and neighborhood. Risk factors at this level are related to community systems, their responses, and also general community attitudes.

Societal Level: Societal, in this sense, refers to the broader workings of a culture, including norms about gender roles, religious beliefs and the balance of power between certain groups.



Sample Focus Group Questions

The following are samples of focus group questions you might use. Most of them are meant for general audiences and general information gathering. If you are looking for ideas to fit a specific need or for questions to use with a specific group, feel free to contact us for additional help.

Option 1

Purpose: Finding out what your community thinks about causes of sexual violence and what they think should be done about it.

Audience: General, or perhaps community or organizational leaders

1. When thinking about our community, what factors do you think are contributing to or causing sexual violence?
2. What factors do you think protect against sexual violence?
3. What do you think a community plan for preventing sexual violence in our community should include?
4. Who else do you think we should talk to or interview?

Option 2

Purpose: Finding out what your community thinks about causes of sexual violence, what kind of community they would rather see and how they think they can get there.

Audience: General

1. What does a healthy community look like? What factors contribute to a healthy community?
2. What factors do you think contribute to sexual violence?
3. What do you think it will take to get from the kind of community we have now to a healthier community with some of the factors you mentioned above?
4. Who else do you think we should talk to or interview?

Option 3

Purpose: To find out how power and privilege play out in the workplace; to corroborate other information gathered about risk factors for sexual violence.

Audience: People who work in organizations or businesses

1. How do you think women are treated, as compared to men, in the workplace?
2. How do you think people of color are treated, as compared to white people, in the workplace?
3. How are issues related to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender handled in your workplace, if at all?
4. What kinds of sexual harassment have you seen or experienced in the workplace?
5. What kind of discrimination have you seen or experienced in the workplace?

Sample Key Informant Interview Questions

Key informant interview questions are likely to be much more specific than focus group questions because you are usually interviewing someone based on their specific knowledge/expertise related to a population, issue, or program. You can also ask many more questions in this format because you are only getting answers from one person. You will, however, want to be flexible enough to allow for follow-up questions when the interviewee says something that leads you to other ideas or questions. The following is just an example of how key informant interview questions might look.

Option 1

Purpose: To understand the role of equitable organizational practices and the potential challenges and benefits to an agency.

Interviewee: Manager of a business that consistently engages in organizational practices supportive of equality, including in their advertising, hiring, promotion and compensation. They are seen as a leader in the community because of this.

1. Can you tell me a little bit about why your organization/agency/business prioritizes equitable business practices?
2. Were there specific events that resulted in these practices? Or were they proactively implemented?
3. How do you think these practices impact your bottom-line (if it is for-profit entity)?

4. How have these practices impacted your reputation in the community?
5. What challenges, if any, have you encountered because of these practices?
6. What rewards do you see?
7. Do you know of other organizations that are implementing similar practices? Or trying to?
8. How do you handle complaints from staff members that are related to discrimination?
9. In what ways have these practices impacted the overall environment, as well as employee morale and productivity?
10. Who else would you recommend talking to about these issues?

Option 2

Interviewee: Program manager at the local Boys & Girls Club

1. What factors do you think are the most influential in the lives of teens?
2. What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the teens you work with?
3. What do you see as their greatest strengths?
4. What do you think the key factors are in helping them to live healthy, non-violent lives?
5. What kind of success have you had in helping foster youth leadership?
6. What about in creating community and a sense of mutual accountability among youth?
7. Who else do you think I should talk to about issues facing youth?

Resources on conducting focus groups and key informant interviews:

Community Toolbox

Focus Groups http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/section_1018.htm

Interviews http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/section_1047.htm

Engaging Communities in Sexual Violence Prevention

http://www.taasa.org/prevention/pdfs/TAASA_ECGuidebook.pdf