Appendix 3.3.4: Interviews with Key Informants

An essential step in the Formative Assessment process is identifying local people who can offer insight into a host of issues specific to a Key Population, such as MSM, in your area. Often referred to as "key informants," these individuals are knowledgeable about and have access to Key Populations in the community.

Key informants serve as "cultural experts," offering insight into the context of HIV risk behavior among Key Populations locally, the make-up of their social networks, their interaction with different sectors of society, as well as the types of venues where Key Populations can be recruited. Although good key informants may not know everything there is to know about all Key Populations, they should be able to contribute to the understanding of how best to approach potential participants and identify problems that survey staff may encounter in the field.

[Key informants] have gained their knowledge by virtue of their position and experience in the community, their established networks of relationships, their ability to express themselves orally, and their broad understanding of their community. (Schensul et al. 1999)

Keep in mind that not everyone makes a good key informant. Individuals should be selected because they are knowledgeable about some aspect of the community that is relevant to the Key Population survey. Sites should solicit information from a diverse group of individuals to accurately reflect the characteristics of the Key Population, specifically the sub-populations of the Key Population who are at greatest risk of HIV infection, as identified in the secondary data review.

Key informants should come from different populations or groups in the community of study. Some key informants will be professionals who work with Key Populations and should not be compensated for completing a key informant interview since they are being interviewed due to their professional or academic role. However, another set of key informants will be members of the Key Populations. We refer to these individuals as "community key informants". Community key informants may be compensated since they will be participating in interviews during their personal time. Both types of key informants can offer valuable and important information for the implementation of the Key Population survey and should be considered for key informant interviews to answer questions identified during your secondary data review.

1 Adapted from U.S. CDC’s NCHHSTP/DHAP/BCSB: National HIV Behavioral Surveillance System MSM3 Formative Research Guidelines; Version date: January 20, 2011
To a large extent, key informant interviews take the form of conversations, allowing for an open exchange and free flow of ideas between the interviewer and the informant. Key informant interviews are unstructured, open-ended interviews that allow for in-depth discussion of issues or topics in detail. Information collected through key informant interviews can be exploratory in nature (e.g., the locations where Key Populations meet and socialize, sexual and drug use behaviors of Key Populations, and the demographic characteristics of local Key Populations) or can be focused on particular topics (e.g., the best days and times to recruit at venues, barriers to recruitment, and strategies for reaching specific groups of a particular Key Population.

Informed consent for key informant interviews must be obtained.

Ideally, a project site will seek the input of several key informants, keeping in mind that a key informant's perspective is shaped by his or her personal experience and position in society, including age, gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. A diverse group of key informants should be interviewed to accurately reflect the characteristics of the Key Population locally. The use of several key informants allows for a cross-checking of information, and helps ensure its validity and reliability (Schensul et al., 1999).
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<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Sample MSM Questions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barriers to survey participation</td>
<td>• What are the barriers to survey participation and HIV testing for MSM?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collaborating with the MSM survey</td>
<td>• What findings from an MSM bio-behavioural survey would be beneficial to your organization?</td>
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<td>Input on the local survey</td>
<td>• What other health issues or indicators should be monitored in the MSM survey?</td>
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|      | Methods of obtaining community support of MSM; Barriers to sustaining support | • What is the best way to reach and garner the support of MSM in this city/country?  
  • How should we go about getting buy-in and support from venue owners/managers?  
  • What are the barriers to working with venue owners/managers?  
  • What are the barriers to working with MSM?  
  • Do you know of any meetings and/or activities in the community that would help us learn more about MSM? |
|      | Identify advocates for the MSM survey | • Who would be a key person to be an advocate for the MSM survey?  
  • Which community groups/programs have the strongest ties to gay community?  
  • What about for the hard-to-reach MSM (e.g., minority, young, old, non-gay identified)? |
|      | Important characteristics of staff hired to work with community | • Are there important characteristics we should consider when hiring study staff? |
|      | Challenges (and solutions) to conducting research among MSM | • What challenges did you encounter with the research studies you’ve conducted among MSM? (community support, trust, participation rates, testing, etc)  
  • In general, what are the challenges facing MSM in this city/country?  
  • Can you offer any solutions or ways to overcome these challenges? |
|      | Methods for obtaining acceptance of stakeholders and community members (i.e., participants) | • What’s the best way to gain acceptance of stakeholders? (i.e., venue owners/managers)  
  • And community members (i.e., MSM)? (e.g., social marketing, one-on-one meetings, etc)  
  • Who are the community leaders/gatekeepers for MSM in this city/country?  
  • Who is an important advocate to have for the MSM survey? |
| References | Identify community leaders (general and for specific subgroups of MSM) | • Who are the community leaders for (specify group) MSM?  
  • What is the best way to reach and garner the support of MSM in this city/country?  
  • Who could help us work with (specify group) MSM?  
  • Which community groups/programs have the strongest ties to gay community?  
  • What about for the (specify group) MSM? |
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<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Example Questions</th>
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| Learn about population | Social networks of MSM: types of networks, differences between networks | • What different networks, or groups, of MSM are there in this city/country?  
• What makes them different from each other?  
• Are there social norms or socio-cultural issues that would present a challenge in working with certain groups of MSM?  

Non-gay identified MSM: How to reach? Who are the gatekeepers? Prevention challenges and solutions to challenges | • What are the challenges facing non-gay identified MSM?  
• What is the best way to reach non-gay identified MSM and garner their support?  

Subpopulations that make up gay community; identifying challenges facing these communities | • Can you characterize the gay community in this city?(i.e., subpopulations)  
• What challenges did you encounter with the research studies you’ve conducted among MSM (trust, participation rates, testing, incentives, etc)?  
• Can you offer any solutions or ways to overcome these challenges?  

Venues | Locations in the community where MSM gather in sizable numbers | • In what locations do men congregate?  
• Why do men gather in certain locations?  
• Where do young MSM, older MSM, non-gay identified MSM, minority MSM gather and why?  
• Do men who gather in these locations live here, or are they visitors?  
• How do you know they are residents?  

Service Needs | Use and extent of services available for sexually active men who have sex with men in the community; gaps in services | • What services do you offer for MSM?  
• To what extent are your services used by MSM?  
• What are the prevention priorities for this organization?  
• What do you perceive are the service needs of the gay community?  
• What challenges does your organization face with providing HIV prevention services to MSM in this city/country?  
• How do you deal with these challenges?  

Location of services and programs used by MSM | • What types of services and programs are used by MSM in the community?  
• Where do MSM go for these services?  

Services to various MSM populations | • Are there any particular groups of MSM that you don’t capture with your program?  
• What do you perceive are the service needs of the gay community?  
