Community Interviews

Overview

Community interviews are conducted to gather information for a ***community involvement plan*** (CIP) or for a ***technical assistance needs assessment*** (TANA). These interviews are a way to meet with community members and learn about their site-related needs, concerns, and expectations, as well as how the community gets information and prefers to receive site-related information from EPA. Community interviews also can provide a valuable opportunity for the site team to explore community concerns in depth and build positive relationships with members of the community.

This and all tools in the Community Involvement Toolkit should be used in conjunction with the ***Community Involvement Handbook****, which provides guidance to EPA staff on how EPA typically plans and implements community involvement activities at Superfund sites.*

Why This Is Important

This is a required activity under the National Contingency Plan (NCP) [40 CFR §300.430(c)(2)(ii)(A)], to "Ensure the public appropriate opportunities for involvement in a wide variety of site-related decisions, including site analysis and characterization, alternatives analysis, and selection of remedy; and [B] Determine, based on community interviews, appropriate activities to ensure such public involvement…"

Consistent with the NCP [40 CFR §300.430(c)(2)(i); 300.415(n)(3)(i); and 300.415(n)(4)(i)], the Agency conducts "community interviews with local officials, community residents, public interest groups, or other interested or affected parties, as appropriate, to solicit their concerns and information needs, and to learn how and when citizens would like to be involved in the Superfund process." The CIP should be in place before remedial investigation field activities start, "to the extent practicable" (40 CFR §300.430(c)(2)).

The NCP addresses community interviews as part of the process of preparing a CIP. Community interviews generally should be conducted whenever a CIP is prepared or revised. As discussed in the NCP, EPA typically reviews the CIP prior to initiating the remedial design "to determine whether it should be revised to describe further public involvement activities during Remedial Design/Remedial Action (RD/RA) that are not already addressed or provided for" in the CIP (40 CFR §300.435(c)(1)).

For removal actions lasting 120 days or more, the NCP specifies that the lead agency must conduct interviews and prepare a CIP "by the end of the 120-day period" (40 CFR §300.415(n)(3)(i) and (ii)). For removal actions with a planning period of at least six months, the NCP requires the lead agency to conduct community interviews and prepare a CIP prior to completion of the engineering evaluation and cost analysis (EE/CA) (40 CFR §300.415(n)(4)(i)). Formal community interviews generally are not required for removal actions that do not require CIPs, i.e., those that will last less than 120 days or require less than six months to plan.

In addition, EPA's *Comprehensive Five-Year Review Guidance* recommends that "you may also wish to interview several community members…to get their views about current site conditions, problems or related concerns" during the five-year review process. This is in addition to notifying the community that the five-year review will be conducted or has been completed and providing the results of the review to the local site repository.

Community interviews are equally important at potentially responsible party (PRP)-funded sites, federal facilities, and sites using the Superfund alternative approach (SAA).

Implementation

The Community Involvement Handbook addresses the CIP and community interviews. Community interviews often are the single most important element of preparing a CIP. Conducting community interviews is a particularly effective way to gather information about community needs, questions, and concerns, as well as expectations and unique needs or cultural behaviors, customs, and values. Often issues emerge during the interviews that some citizens would hesitate to share during a public meeting or an availability session. In addition, the interviews normally provide for more depth and follow-up questions than usually is possible through those other means. The information and insights gained through community interviews help enable EPA to develop a highly responsive CIP, assess the potential need for technical assistance, and determine whether a TANA should be conducted. Community interviews also provide an opportunity for the site team to encourage the community's participation. (See ***Summary of Technical Assistance*** tool.)

When to Conduct Community Interviews

For remedial actions, community interviews usually take place when the release and affected areas (a.k.a., "the site") are formally listed on the National Priorities List (NPL), but it can be useful to conduct interviews sooner. Community interviews can provide information, such as patterns and practices of chemical usage at the facility, illegal disposal practices, and unique exposure pathways that the site team can use when developing the remedial investigation/feasibility study (RI/FS) work plan.

If the site team thinks that site issues are such that the community may need more EPA attention, consider conducting the interviews and other community involvement activities even before the site is listed on the NPL. This should help give EPA early insight into community needs, concerns, and expectations, and help EPA make better decisions and take actions that protect communities near potential hazardous waste sites. While there is no specific statutory or regulatory requirement for community involvement activities before a site is listed on the NPL, early community involvement usually is an important component of establishing a mutually beneficial and respectful relationship between EPA and the community.

For removal actions, community interviews should be conducted as soon as it becomes clear that the removal action will last more than 120 days or that removal planning will take longer than six months. In both cases, the interviews typically are done to complete the CIP.

Community interviews also are often an important part of the TANA process. Community interviews contain a few preliminary questions that may suggest a potential need for additional technical assistance in the community. (See Attachment 3.) If the preliminary questions in the community interviews suggest the need to conduct a TANA, you may wish to conduct the TANA interviews concurrently with a smaller number of individuals who can help define the community's specific technical assistance needs. If this is not possible, the TANA may be conducted at a later time.

It is recommended that a new round of community interviews be conducted whenever the CIP is revised, and in conjunction with the five-year review process.

How to Conduct Community Interviews

The community involvement coordinator (CIC) should start by meeting with the remedial project manager (RPM) or on-scene coordinator (OSC). He or she can tell you about site issues, help identify potential interviewees, and provide information about the community surrounding the site. Other members of the site team—the risk assessor; the enforcement case team; EPA contractor; state, tribal, or local agency staff; or others—may want you to find specific information during the interviews, such as little-known practices that could have contributed to site conditions or practices that could be relevant when identifying potential exposure scenarios.

Community interviews often are among the first opportunities for EPA to engage one-on-one with community members. The site's RPM or OSC should play a role. When RPMs and OSCs attend community interviews, they can better understand the community, learn things about the community that cannot be learned from written records, discover issues and uncover misunderstandings that can then be corrected, and explore issues with community members by following up an interviewee's answers with more detailed questions. Often community stakeholders have important information to provide in characterizing the site, developing cleanup solutions, and understanding the community's thoughts regarding the reasonably anticipated future land use at the site. In addition, one-on-one discussions can help build community trust and confidence, and allow community members to see the members of the site team as people, not federal bureaucrats. Some RPMs and OSCs conclude each interview with a short site update. This interaction also is an opportunity to personally inform community members about opportunities to be involved throughout the site investigation and cleanup process.

CICs often are supported by EPA contractors who assist with some portions of the community interviews. Use your contractor support wisely. The contractor generally conducts the logistics, including scheduling the interviews with community members, preparing directions for the interview team, taking notes or recording the actual interviews, and writing up notes summarizing each individual interview.

We encourage you to follow these recommended steps to plan for, conduct, and glean useful information and insights from community interviews:

Define the community and the geographical area of concern.

Before conducting community interviews, it is helpful to gather and analyze demographic information in order to prepare a draft ***community profile***. This should help you understand the characteristics of the community of concern and identify potential cultural, socioeconomic, and non-English-speaking subgroups within the population. The research conducted for the community profile also can help identify potential issues, sensitivities, and special considerations to keep in mind when scheduling and conducting community interviews. The community profile is a working document that evolves throughout the interview process and should be finalized only after completing the community interviews.

We recommend you define "the community" by determining the boundaries of the area in which residents may *feel* that they are affected by the site. This may include residents who live or work within a certain distance of the site, but it also could include others. Consider whether there are groups of people who live further from the site who may have an interest in, or be affected by, the site and its cleanup (for example, parents of children in a daycare center near the site, but who live beyond the boundaries of the geographical "area of concern").

Define objectives for interviews: What do you want to learn from the interviews?

Together with the RPM or OSC and other members of the site team, you should define the objectives for your community interviews—what information are you seeking about the community? (Use Attachment 1.)

Generally, community interviews are conducted to learn about community needs, concerns, and expectations. Key issues to learn about include site-related perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of community members; how community members would like to receive site-related information from EPA (i.e., via email, a website, a newsletter, etc.) and be included in the decision-making process; and whether there are perceived barriers to effective participation, such as past experiences of mistrust or any unique concerns. Interview objectives also should include gaining a better understanding of how people share information in the community, who they trust, and how they work together. Ask questions that will help you better understand who participates in community life and the most important meeting places in the community where people tend to gather or have informal exchanges (at a church, a weekly farmers' market, or local coffee shop, for example). With this information, you can better target community outreach and information dissemination and education.

We recommend you include questions that will help identify the key leaders (not just government officials) and groups that are active in the community. This information can enable you to work through existing social networks. Generally, it is useful to identify in advance the people you should interview, and to include a question asking each interviewee to help identify other groups or individuals whom you may have missed.

Community interviews should include questions that allow you to assess whether additional technical assistance may be appropriate. (See Attachment 3.) If you think additional technical assistance may be appropriate, the TANA should be conducted concurrently whenever possible. This should allow EPA to explore the types of technical assistance resources that might be consistent with the community's needs, evaluate the most appropriate vehicles for providing technical assistance, and identify existing groups in the community that may be able to manage a ***technical assistance grant*** (TAG) or an EPA/PRP's technical assistance plan (TAP), coordinate assistance provided through the technical assistance services for communities (TASC) contract, or work with universities or nonprofit organizations that may provide this assistance voluntarily.

Attachment 3 provides a recommended two-part process for assessing technical assistance options during community interviews. Part 1 of Attachment

3 provides recommended questions and guidance for determining whether Part 2 of the process, the formal TANA, may be appropriate. (If so, please consult the ***Technical Assistance Needs Assessment*** tool for the TANA questionnaire and for further information about completing the TANA process. Note that the questions included in the formal TANA will be asked of some, but not all people with whom community interviews are conducted.)

If the community's technical assistance needs cannot be adequately articulated or defined at the time that community interviews are conducted, the TANA can be conducted at a later date.

In general, objectives for community interviews include the following:

- Identify community members to be interviewed.
- Define the issues, questions, and concerns most important to community members.
- Explore community perceptions or opinions on specific issues or site concerns that the site team wants to better understand.
- Identify the past uses, practices, or other history about the site that could help inform any of the various aspects of the cleanup, such as the site investigation and risk assessment.
- Identify potential environmental justice issues, such as unique exposure scenarios, the potential for unequal access to the decision-making process, or a perceived or real disproportionate burden of exposure or environmental health effects along the lines of race, national origin, or income.
- Identify potential site reuses based on the community's needs.
- Identify additional stakeholders in the community to include, such as individuals and groups that may be marginalized, under-represented, or not represented at all due to social, economic, or cultural factors.
- Identify the most important communications outlets (newspapers, websites, blogs, newsletters, etc.) that are most frequently used by community members.
- Learn about additional official or unofficial community leaders and organizations that people already know and trust and who should be involved in community involvement efforts at the site.
- Determine the ways community members would like to receive news or information about site issues.
- Identify the places in the community, regular events, or situations in which community members often gather.
- Explore whether there may be unmet needs for technical assistance and whether a formal TANA should be conducted concurrently with the community interviews or at a later time.

OSWER Directive #9230.0-20, *Innovative Methods to Increase Public Involvement in Superfund Community Relations* (November 1990), recommends conducting interviews with at least 15-25 persons for a CIP, depending on the complexity of the site and the level of citizen interest. The directive states that, "Increasing the number of interviews with citizens is one of the most effective methods to enhance citizen participation."

The actual number of interviews normally depends on many factors, including the size, complexity, and the stage of the cleanup process; the number and diversity of affected residents and community groups; the level of community interest; and the potential contentiousness of issues regarding the site. Fewer interviews may be sufficient in a very small community, where the level of interest is low, or where few residents will be affected by the site. On the other hand, if the site team believes that the site is likely to require more extensive community involvement, we recommend you plan to significantly expand interviewing efforts. In some cases, EPA has conducted dozens or even hundreds of interviews to reflect both the complexity and the level of citizen interest at a site. Although this may require substantial labor and resources at the onset of the community involvement process, it helps ensure that EPA identifies and focuses attention on the issues that are most important to the community and ensure protectiveness of human health.

We recommend you begin identifying the various stakeholder groups in the community, then the specific organizations and individuals who should be represented in your interviews. (Use Attachment 2 as a worksheet to help identify stakeholders, community groups, and individuals for community interviews, and to help you think about the questions to ask.)

Conversations should not be limited to the most visible or vocal groups of individuals. Special efforts should be made to interview residents who are not affiliated with any group, and to include all stakeholders in the community. We recommend interviewing a broad range of people in order to gain the greatest variety of perspectives about the site, including PRPs, if appropriate.

Conducting community interviews should be an interactive and dynamic process. The list of people to interview and guiding questions typically continue to evolve as interviews are conducted. To start, we recommend using information and insights gleaned from initial interviews with local officials and key citizens and perhaps an availability session or public forum to help identify potential site issues. We recommend you ask everyone you interview if other relevant stakeholders should have been identified, particularly those that may have been overlooked or are underrepresented at public meetings or other site events and may not participate in the most active community organizations. This information can then be used to help identify others who may not have been identified initially for interviews. This process may mean building time into the schedule for an additional round of community interviews.

For enforcement actions, the CIC should work with technical and legal staff to become informed of any enforcement action information that should not be discussed during community interviews (e.g., where there is sensitivity to pending litigation).

Determine how interviews will be conducted.

We recommend you plan in advance how interviews will be conducted, including who will ask the questions, how notes will be taken, and who should be present for the interviews. Community interviews generally should be conducted by EPA staff, preferably by the CIC, accompanied by the RPM or OSC. We recommend that you keep the group of EPA interviewers small so as not to be intimidating, especially when conducting individual interviews in people's homes.

Community interviews generally work best when conducted with an individual or with members of the immediate household. If others come, ask if you can schedule a time just for them. EPA's experience is that people talk more freely and completely when they are alone. Groups tend to self-censor or conform to previous answers. Interviews with groups of people can be dominated by one or more vocal participants, and some participants may defer to others who they believe to be more powerful or knowledgeable. You may wish to conduct one or more group interviews or focus groups in conjunction with individual interviews, but these are not a substitute for individual interviews.

While it may be appropriate to conduct some interviews by telephone depending on site-specific circumstances (e.g., remote location of some of the interviewees), telephone interviews normally are not as effective as interviews conducted face-to-face. Telephone interviews can be less personal and normally do not provide the same opportunity for getting to know and forming relationships with members of the community.

Contact interviewees and schedule interviews.

We recommend you let the community know EPA will be conducting interviews before you start calling individuals to schedule the interviews. It normally is helpful to issue a press release or include an announcement in the site fact sheet that is distributed to the community. This way, it is more likely community members already will know interviews are being conducted when you or your contractor start requesting interviews.

Depending on how many people will be interviewed, we recommend you plan on *at least* several days to complete the interviews. You should schedule interviews at times that are convenient for interviewees. This may mean scheduling interviews during early evening hours. You should indicate that you would like to conduct the interview at the person's convenience and at a place of their choosing. In addition, you should offer to come to their home or wherever the interviewee feels most comfortable.

We recommend you determine the dates that you expect to be on-site, and call each person you plan to interview about two to three weeks in advance to arrange an appointment. Generally it is helpful to explain the purpose of the interviews and what they can expect (e.g., how long the interview should take, how many people may be in the EPA delegation, and that someone normally takes notes). Also, you should assure confidentiality and explain that the interviews are designed to help develop a CIP. If there is reason to believe an interpreter may be needed, you should ask the person being interviewed if he/she would like to have an interpreter present during the interview. Provide a telephone number and email address the interviewee can use to contact you if their plans change. If you have contractor support, the contractor can make these calls and maintain the schedule. We recommend you confirm appointments a day or two in advance. (See Attachment 4 and Attachment 5.)

Normally, you should allow about an hour for each interview, plus travel time. If you plan to conduct a TANA at the same time, plan to schedule additional time for the interview. If possible, leave some open time in the schedule for additional interviews with people identified by others during the interview process, but who were not on the initial list of interviewees.

Prepare an interview protocol and prepare for interviews.

An interview protocol can help guide the entire interview, but normally should not be read verbatim. We recommend you outline a set of guiding interview questions that includes prompts or bulleted reminders to help you remember to cover all key points. We recommend you start off by introducing yourself and others present and explaining the purpose of the interview. In addition, you should include a prompt in the protocol with other introductory information and reminders at the end of the interview to tell each interviewee how information from the interview likely will be used and where to find more information about the site.

We recommend you draft a list of guiding questions that address the specific interview objectives outlined earlier. Avoid questions that elicit multiple-choice, yes/no, or short answers. Generally, it is helpful to include a few such questions in the interview protocol, but whenever possible, it can be more effective to ask open-ended questions that invite the interviewee to talk or explain a response. Asking positive, thoughtful, and well-crafted questions can stimulate constructive conversations that travel beyond the interview. The usefulness of the information gathered during the community interviews and how it can shape the CIP and future actions taken at a site often depends on the quality of the interview questions. Strive to ask questions that surface underlying assumptions, stimulate reflective conversation, and evoke more questions. Using "why," "how," and "what" in your questions often encourages reflective thinking and can promote an engaged conversation. Try to ask compelling questions that lead to thinking about possibilities.

You may wish to group your questions by topic, at least at first. (Use column 2 of Attachment 1 as a worksheet for drafting questions to address the interview objectives that were defined in column 1.) The order of the questions can be rearranged depending on how a conversation might flow. You may wish to include the questions outlined in Attachment 3 as part of your protocol.

Typically there are appropriate variations in the questions. Generally, the goal is to engage the interviewee in a conversation (not to conduct a survey). Some questions may not be relevant for all interviewees, particularly elected officials and government staff. (We recommend you consider using column 3 of Attachment 1 as a tool to identify which questions may be appropriate to ask of interviewees.) During the interview, we recommend you use the guiding questions in the interview protocol as a way to engage the interviewee, listen closely to responses, and then pursue lines of questioning that flow from earlier responses.

It may be a good idea to ask a group of questions about the community first—questions that ask the interviewee to talk about familiar things—such as how long he or she has been a resident in the community. This should allow time for the interviewee to feel comfortable and for a rapport to develop. Usually, it is more effective to ask sensitive or controversial questions about the site, site-related issues, and perceptions of EPA, the PRP, or other more sensitive subjects in the middle of the interview. Consider ending the interview with positive, future-oriented questions: In xx years, how do you envision the site? How can EPA maintain an open, transparent relationship with the community?

It is a good idea to test the interview protocol. Even seasoned CICs can learn by practicing the interview with colleagues. Doing so should help you identify unclear questions, rearrange the order of questions, and practice active listening skills.

Conduct interviews.

Be on time, be courteous, and dress professionally. You should arrive on time for the interview. Normally, it is good practice to introduce yourself and everyone who has accompanied you; tell the interviewee why you are in the community; estimate about how long you expect the interview to take; and thank the interviewee for taking the time to participate. We recommend you reassure the interviewees that they need not be knowledgeable about the site or site issues and that there are no wrong answers. You should reiterate EPA's interest in hearing his or her views and the Agency's commitment to involving the community in the decisions that affect them. We also recommend you explain how you plan to use the information from this and other interviews.

Strive to be respectful of community standards in your dress. Extremes in dressing (e.g., expensive suits or overly informal clothing) generally are not recommended.

Assure confidentiality. Many residents fear retribution for talking with EPA. Reassure interviewees that their privacy will be protected. Explain that the information they provide will be captured by a notetaker and may be included in a summary in the CIP, but the information will *not* be attributed to any individual, nor will their name or identity be made public. (However, local officials or PRP representatives who are interviewed in their official capacity may be identified in the list of contacts.)

It is not recommended that you record the interview, but if you do wish to record the interview, ask for permission first. Some people may find an audio recording device intimidating and they may be less candid or more nervous about speaking frankly. If you use a recording device, assure the interviewee that the recording will be used to ensure accuracy of your notes, but for no other reason.

Actively listen. All cell phones should be turned off. Maintain eye contact, if appropriate to the cultural norm of the interviewee, and try to maintain open and friendly body language, no matter what is said or occurs during the interview. Other members of the team who have accompanied you also should be mindful of appearing attentive and engaged in the interview, even if they are saying very little. Sitting back, slumping, texting, or folding arms across your chest all can convey lack of interest or a closed mind. Restating the answer helps to ensure that you heard it correctly and demonstrates to the interviewee that he or she has been truly heard and understood.

Listening intently allows for follow-up with clarifying questions and for further discussion of issues or topics of interest. Be flexible; interviews are fluid and often change direction. Know what information is needed, but be prepared to respond to other issues or concerns that may arise during the interview. Be willing to move around the interview questions based upon responses.

Remain impartial and never become defensive. Remember that you are there to listen—not to justify, defend, or explain the Agency's actions or positions. The goal is to gather information about the community. Resist the temptation to justify or explain the Agency's actions or positions, or to correct misconceptions. Correcting can appear defensive and can negatively impact the interview. You will get a much more accurate picture of what the community thinks if you refrain from defending EPA or responding to criticism during the interviews. Corrections, if needed, can be made during the site update briefing (see below) that is recommended after the interview has been completed.

Consider ending interviews by having the site's RPM or OSC give a short site update briefing to the interviewee. This allows the RPM to fill in gaps in historical knowledge; bring interviewees up-to-date on site issues, activities, and plans; answer questions; and address any risk or hazard-related material that might be appropriate. It is an excellent opportunity for the RPM or OSC to provide information and make himself or herself available to each interviewee to answer questions directly. The briefing should come only after the interview has ended, after the interviewee has had an opportunity to express views freely.

For enforcement actions, remember that members of the site team are not investigators of PRP actions at the site. If this type of information is volunteered during interviews, the CIC should advise the resident that the information will be passed on to the RPM/OSC and other appropriate EPA officials. If warranted, civil investigators may follow up on this information.

Immediately after the interviews, send a thank-you note to each interviewee and summarize notes from each interview.

After each interview, review what you heard with those who accompanied you. Did you hear the same things? Did you get the same impressions? Do this as soon as possible, but certainly not while standing outside the interviewee's house. Quickly follow up by phone for any additional information or clarification that might be needed, or to provide any information that was promised to the interviewee. It also is a good idea to send a thank-you note promptly to everyone who was interviewed.

Summarize notes from each interview as soon as possible, when memories are fresh and notes are easier to transcribe. Use this information to prepare a general summary of community interviews.

Make appropriate changes to the process as you go along. Use information and insights from earlier interviews to refine interview protocols to explore emerging patterns or issues in subsequent interviews.

Expand the list of interviewees based on the advice provided by the people you talk to.

Identify key community needs, concerns, expectations, and communications preferences derived from community interviews.

After all of the interviews are conducted, meet with the RPM or OSC and the contractor, if appropriate, to discuss what was learned and the overall "feel" of the interviews. The CIC is responsible for preparing a summary of all the interviews. Use the summarized notes from individual interviews to prepare a general summary of the community interviews. This general summary of community interviews typically is the basis for the "Community Needs and Concerns" section of the CIP.

Generally, when writing the summary of community interviews, remember that the individual interviews are protected from disclosure; therefore, they should not be released. The summary may include quotes from community interviews, but interviewees should not be identified. Names, addresses, or phone numbers of private citizens obtained during the community interviews process should not be released or appear in any public document, nor should information be included that will allow others to deduce the identity of any individual. Generally, the list of the private-citizen interviewees and the interview schedule also are not to be released.

The summary and analysis of the information from community interviews should be more qualitative than quantitative—generally, in a narrative describing what was said rather than giving raw numbers. It can be useful to show responses in a table or other visual format. Since interviews typically are not based on a scientific sample of the population, responses generally should not be considered statistically representative of the community as a whole.

We recommend that the summary include information about the number of interviews conducted, when they were conducted and by whom, and how interviewees were selected or how they represent the stakeholder groups in the community. It also should describe what was heard from community members during the interviews, as well as what may have been learned from community interviews—the themes and major concerns that may have emerged. Were there things that were heard over and over and common views or perceptions? Were there differences in views, perceptions, needs, or concerns expressed by people from different perspectives, stakeholder groups, or socioeconomic groups?

Tips

- We recommend you consider conducting more than 15-25 interviews when:
  - A site is complex.
  - A site is controversial.
  - The affected community is large.
  - There are many community groups or groups with differing views.

- We recommend you be sensitive to cross-cultural issues. Seek to understand the cultural and behavioral expectations of the community and the interviewee, and modify your behavior accordingly, if necessary.
- Consider and address language needs by arranging in advance to bring along an interpreter when interviewing people for whom English is not their primary language, or a sign language interpreter for the hearing-impaired. Even if the interviewee is fairly comfortable speaking English, it sometimes is useful to have an interpreter/translator available in case translation is needed at some point in the conversation.
- In many cases, it is useful to schedule the first set of interviews with state and local officials to obtain background information and to let these counterparts know of your plans to interview area residents. If you are aware that the community mistrusts local officials or if the local government is a PRP, you may want to interview community members first, and then follow up with local officials. It is important to ensure that all stakeholders understand EPA's intent is to listen to as many viewpoints from the community as possible.
- You may wish to conduct one or more group interviews or focus groups in conjunction with individual interviews. Keep in mind, however, that group interviews have a different dynamic and are not a substitute for individual interviews. Interviews with groups of people can be dominated by one or more vocal participants, and some participants may self-censor or defer to more powerful or knowledgeable speakers. What can emerge is a picture of what the group thinks rather than an accurate idea of what individuals in the group think or feel.

- When conducting community interviews, we recommend you use a map of the site and its surrounding areas to provide a visual reference of areas of concern within the site and to help interviewees understand the site's location in relationship to them.
- In the rare cases where there is strong mistrust of EPA, it may be useful to ask a third-party contractor to conduct community interviews. In these cases, contractors should be accompanied by EPA staff.
- Another option for conducting community interviews is to visit residents via door-to-door engagement. This can be an effective method of outreach for sites with a timely need for completion of the CIP, or at the time of the five-year review. As with the method of scheduling interviews by initial phone contact, door-to-door "calling" as a first method of contact should be conducted with the same sensitivity. A resident should not receive a visit too early in the day or too late in the evening. Consider sharing with residents a fact sheet or meeting announcement that contains the site repository location(s) and site team representative contact information as your "calling card." Introducing yourself as a representative of the Agency who wants to relay information about Superfund's short- or long-term presence in the community is the key message.
- There are many ways to summarize what was heard and what was learned from community interviews in a clear and meaningful way. Many CIPs summarize this information by organizing the responses from community interviews in a number of categories.

Attachments

- Attachment 1: *Determining Interview Objectives and Drafting Questions*
- Attachment 2: *Recommended Guide to Identifying People to Interview*
- Attachment 3: *Community Interviews—Recommended Questions for Assessing Community Technical Assistance Needs*
- Attachment 4: *Sample Scheduling Call*
- Attachment 5: *Sample Confirming Letter or Email*

Attachment 1: Determining Interview Objectives and Drafting Questions

You should consider using the recommendations in this tool to define objectives for community interviews and start crafting specific questions to ask interviewees. The recommended objectives and questions are not listed in the order in which they would be addressed in an interview.

Once the questions are defined, you can use them to prepare an interview protocol questionnaire. We recommend you carefully reorganize the questions in an order that will allow you to touch all bases and engage the interviewee in a conversation-like interview. Once the master interview protocol is developed, you may need to customize it for interviews with different people based on their needs, perspectives, and interests.

Recommended Objective	Recommended Questions to Ask[1]	Who to Ask
Identify the issues and concerns most important to community members.	Please explain why this site is important to you. What do you know about the XX site? What are your concerns about the site and its cleanup? What is your biggest concern? Do you know if anything has been done? What is your understanding of the contamination related to the XX site?	
Gather information about specific site issues, including past uses, practices, or other history about the site that the site team would like to ask community members about. Specify: ________________________	What is your understanding of the operations, history, and environmental issues at the XX site? Are you aware of any events, incidents, or activities at the site such as vandalism, trespassing, or emergency responses from local authorities? If so, please give details. What needs our immediate attention going forward?	
Identify potential site reuse options based on the community's needs.	Do you think there may be any opportunities for future reuse? Do you have any comments, suggestions or recommendations?	

[1] Sample questions are from interview protocols for the following sites: Iron King Mine; Motorola-52d Street site CIP Update interviews; Mountain View site Five-Year Review interviews; and Safety Light Corporation.

Recommended Objective	Recommended Questions to Ask[1]	Who to Ask
Gain insights about perceptions and experiences of community members with EPA, state, or other government agencies.	What is your opinion of the government's commitment to cleaning up hazardous waste at the XX site? What has your experience been with government agencies at the site? Have you had any site-related experiences with EPA, the state, or any other government agencies or officials? If so, how would you describe your experience? What contacts have you had with government officials about the site? Do you feel that these officials have been responsive to your concerns? Why or why not? In your opinion, what do people in this community think about the presence of federal (or state) regulatory agencies in the area? Who do you consider to be site officials? How trusted or credible do you think they are in the community? Have you contacted the state or EPA in the past to inquire about the site? (If so, were your questions or concerns answered to your satisfaction?) Have you shared site concerns with anyone from the project? Are you aware of anything that has been done to address these concerns?	
Determine the ways in which individuals currently seek or receive news and information about the site and site-related issues.	How did you first become aware of contamination associated with the site? How did you get information about the site? How are you currently receiving information about the site? How effective has EPA's or the state's communication been in the past? Is the information from EPA or the state clear and easy to understand? Do you currently receive site information? If so, how are you currently receiving information about the site? How frequently?	

Recommended Objective	Recommended Questions to Ask[1]	Who to Ask
	Is the information clear and easy to understand? Whom would you contact with questions about the site? Do you feel you have been kept adequately informed? If not, what can be done to change this? How do you feel about the level of community involvement and outreach from the project to the residences and businesses affected by the site? What would enable you to feel fully engaged in the cleanup of the XX site? How can we support each other in making this happen?	
Determine the ways in which individuals would like to be kept informed about site issues and news, the frequency of communications or notifications, and the types of "triggering events" or circumstances to be used to determine that they want notification of site news.	How can we provide you with information about site cleanup? Fact sheets? Internet? News media? Workshops? Public notices? Community meetings? Other? ■ How often? What is the best way to provide information to you? (Newsletters, fact sheets, community meetings, Community Advisory Groups (CAGs), other) In what ways would you like to be informed about upcoming or future site-related activities? How often do you want to get information about what is going on at the XX site? (Weekly? Monthly? Quarterly? Only when something significant happens?) What kind of information about the site do you want or need? Are you interested in being on the mailing list to receive information updates on environmental cleanup activities at the XX site? ___Yes___No ■ If so, can we confirm your address (and email address)?	

Recommended Objective	Recommended Questions to Ask[1]	Who to Ask
Identify existing communications outlets (newspapers, websites, blogs, etc.) most frequently used by community members and the trusted organizations that could be used to help disseminate site-related information or news.	What newspapers, newsletters, church bulletins, local websites, or blogs do you read regularly? Do you know where to find information on the XX site? Are you aware of the information repositories for the site? Have you ever used them to find information for the site? Are you aware of EPA's website?	
Identify the places in the community, regular events, or situations in which community members often gather. (These could be good places or opportunities for public meetings, availability sessions, or for posting site information, etc.)	Are there community or church bulletin boards, storefronts, or other places where people post notices or signs about local events or activities? Are there particular community newsletters, websites, local newspapers, church bulletins, or other places that community members often consult to learn of local activities and events? Where are the best places to post signs or notices about activities and events? What days and location would be best for public or community meetings?	
Determine whether there are potential environmental justice issues or perceptions of environmental injustice among community members.	Do you think that there are stakeholders in the community who are not having their concerns addressed? Who should we speak with to learn of these stakeholders' needs?	
Identify additional community groups, organizations, and leaders who should be involved in community involvement efforts.	Do you participate in any civic or community organizations? If so, which ones? What organizations or individuals do you consider to be the most credible on environmental issues in your community? Who do you consider to be leaders in the community? Are there local entities in the community that you trust to receive environmental information from (e.g., local college or university?)	

Recommended Objective	Recommended Questions to Ask[1]	Who to Ask
Ensure that all segments of the community are identified and reached with information about the site. Explore whether there are members of the community who may be forgotten, under-represented or not represented at all in community groups, due to cultural, language, racial, economic, or social factors.	Is English widely understood in this community? What other languages do people speak in the area? What other individuals might we contact about the site? Who are or would be the first five people you would share project information with? Can you suggest other individuals or groups that should be contacted for additional information or added to the mailing list? Is there anyone else that you think might be useful for us to talk with about the site? Do you know of any individuals or groups that may have special needs or need special considerations (deaf, blind, disabled, homebound, etc.)?	
Determine whether there is a need for technical assistance services for the community. *If there appears to be a need for additional technical assistance services in the community, plan to conduct a technical assistance needs assessment (TANA) concurrently, if possible. If community members cannot yet articulate or define specific technical assistance needs at this time, the TANA can be conducted later.	See Attachment 3.	
Identify and explore community perceptions or opinions toward specific issues or site concerns that the site team wants to understand more about, including the following: ____________________________ ____________________________	Do you think there may be any opportunities for future reuse? Do you have any comments, suggestions or recommendations? Questions regarding vapor intrusion sampling issues, etc.?	
Other:	Is there anything else you would like to share about the site? Is there anyone in particular whom you think we should be sure to include in our community interviews?	

Attachment 2: Recommended Guide to Identifying People to Interview

Site Name ____________________________ Date ______________________________

EPA ID # _____________________________ CIC _______________________________

You should consider using the recommendations in this tool to help define the segments of the community and community groups that should be represented in interviews and to identify the individuals who should be contacted for interviews.

1. Recommended Ways to Identify Segments of the Community and Community Groups

- All residents who live contiguous to the site.
- All residents who live within known paths of migration.
- Local and state officials—mayor, supervisors/council members, police chief, fire chief, and state officials/staff, if appropriate.
- Civic leaders—presidents of service and civic clubs (e.g., Kiwanis, Rotary), Chamber of Commerce, Parent-Teacher-Student Association officers, principals, teachers, clergy.
- Representatives of environmental and public interest groups.
- Representatives of community-based, grassroots organizations, including neighborhood associations and informal community groups.
- Potential responsible parties (PRPs), as appropriate.
- Persons identified by the question: “Who else should we be talking to?”
- If interviews are being conducted for a community involvement plan (CIP) revision, persons interviewed previously for the CIP process.
- If interviews are being conducted for a second five-year review, persons interviewed for the previous five-year review.

Additional groups to consider including:

Other individuals and groups that are likely to be affected by, feel they are affected by, or who are interested in news about the site:

____

____

Individuals and groups who are likely to be concerned about site issues:

____

Individuals and groups who may be disadvantaged, under-represented, or not represented at all (due to social, economic, or cultural factors):

____

____

2. Identify Individuals Who Should be Interviewed

You should consider using the information above when you begin identifying specific individuals to interview who represent each group or segment of the community.

Examples of Groups or Segments of the Community	Individuals/Key Contact	Specific Concerns/Issues
Local officials		
State agency staff		
Other federal agencies (Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry [ATSDR], Department of Defense [DoD], Department of Energy [DOE])		
Area residents directly affected by the site		
Others who are likely to be affected by or feel they are affected by the site, or who are interested in news about the site		
Workers and their families (if applicable)		
Civic groups/leaders		
Local business representatives		
Environmental and public interest groups		

Examples of Groups or Segments of the Community	Individuals/Key Contact	Specific Concerns/Issues
Community activists and community-based and grassroots organizations		
Technical Assistance Group (TAG)/ Technical Assistance Plan (TAP)/ Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) recipient group or groups		
Community advisory group (CAG)		
Local school principals, etc.		
People interviewed in previous community interviews (if applicable)		
Potentially responsible parties		

Examples of Subgroups	Individuals/Key Contact	Specific Concerns/Issues
Non-English speakers and recent immigrants		
Groups and individuals with potential environmental justice concerns		
Interviewees identified by other community stakeholders		
Others		

Additional Notes:

Attachment 3: Community Interviews—Recommended Questions for Assessing Community Technical Assistance Needs

Part 1—Screening-level Technical Assistance Questions for All Community Members Interviewed:

During the Superfund process, EPA will provide information to keep you informed about and help you understand the work that is going on at the site. This information sometimes is relatively non-technical information such as fact sheets.

1. Have you seen or read any information about the site that EPA sent to you or was published or posted on a website? If you saw it but didn't read it, is there a particular reason why you didn't read it?

2. If you have read information from EPA, what did you read?
   - Did you find the information easy to understand?
   - What do you not understand? How could we make this information easier to understand?
   - Is there additional information you are interested in receiving?

EPA will produce technical reports and analyses that describe site contamination and how EPA plans to address the site. These reports include sampling plans and results, the Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS), Proposed Plan, Record of Decision (ROD), and construction documents.

3. Are you, or do you know of others who are, interested in reading site technical documents to better understand EPA's assessment of site problems and recommendations to address the problems?

4. Are you interested in reviewing and providing comments on EPA's analyses and recommendations?

5. Do you feel that you have the background or experience necessary to understand and comment on the technical documents?

6. Are you interested in assistance from EPA to help you to understand site issues, technical documents, and decisions? If so, how can EPA best help you to understand complex technical information about site problems and cleanup solutions? *(If the interviewee does not offer specific suggestions, read the following list and check all that apply.)*

When is technical assistance provided by EPA sufficient?

a. Easy-to-read summary documents and fact sheets	e. Workshops or training sessions on technical topics offered on the internet
b. Easy-to-understand information about remediation technologies and related topics	f. Information translated into another language (Specify: ____________________)
c. Availability sessions where members of the site team are available to talk with you and answer questions	g. Assistance provided by a non-EPA technical expert working with a community organization. (This can be provided only to qualified community groups willing to manage this assistance and share it with the broader community.)
d. In-person workshops or training sessions on technical topics	h. Other:

In many communities, generally where there is a high degree of trust and transparency and where the community has not requested additional assistance, the information provided by EPA through its community involvement process usually is sufficient to meet the technical assistance needs of community members affected by a Superfund site.

Sometimes, the site team may provide additional resources to the community to help it understand technical issues. The conditions or situations that can suggest the need for additional informal technical assistance (assistance that generally is provided *by the site team*, such as fact sheets, workshops, availability sessions, etc.) include:

- Obvious community interest to become involved in the process or to partner with EPA.
- Lack of, or limited expertise or understanding within the community about the Superfund process and cleanup options.
- Clear or increased community interest in the site and EPA's role in the cleanup, measured by an increase in the frequency of contacts from the community.
- Obvious community interest to understand the Superfund process, remediation options, technical documents, and EPA's rationale for its decisions.
- Media coverage of the site and EPA's efforts at the site.

When should a TANA (Technical Assistance Needs Assessment) be conducted?

If one or more of the following conditions become evident during the initial interviews or later during the Superfund process, a TANA should be completed with selected interviewees to help you determine the community's potential need for additional technical assistance. This may include additional informal technical assistance (as described above) or formal technical assistance (assistance that generally is provided by an outside technical expert or mediator/facilitator working with a community organization, usually through an EPA program or funding mechanism [Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) program, Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) program, Conflict Prevention and Resolution Services (CPRS) contract, etc.] or through an external partner such as a university or nonprofit organization):

- Existence of a community group—either a formal group or a loosely organized group—interested in the cleanup of the site and/or its future use.
- A specific request for technical assistance, such as inquiring about TAG, requesting training, or asking for help convening a community advisory group (CAG) or similar group.
- Clear concern (both organized and unorganized) regarding the characterization of the site, the risk assessment, or proposed remedies.
- Stated intention by the community or individuals of plans to submit comments to EPA.
- The receipt of numerous or significant comments, both formal (as a result of the comment period) and informal (through phone calls or emails).
- Significant media coverage of the site and EPA's efforts at the site.
- It becomes evident that some community stakeholders have not been given the chance to fully engage in the Superfund cleanup process, and the TANA will provide an opportunity to expand the conversation on environmentalism.
- The technical assistance needs of the community are significant and complex.

Part 2—The Formal TANA:

Please see the Technical Assistance Needs Assessment tool for additional questions for community leaders, representatives of community groups, and others who may be able to help define the community's potential technical assistance needs.

Attachment 4: Sample Scheduling Call (by Contractor or Community Involvement Coordinator)

Hi, My name is_______________. [I'm the community involvement coordinator (CIC) for the _______________ site in your community ***OR*** I'm a contractor to the United States Environmental Protection Agency and am calling on behalf of EPA about the _______________site in your community.] EPA believes that community members like you have valuable insights and can often provide information that can be helpful in determining how to address a site.

In [*XX*] weeks, [I ***OR*** _______________, EPA's community involvement coordinator for the site,] will be in your neighborhood. [*I/He/She*] will be conducting interviews to learn more about the community and what it needs from EPA. We would greatly appreciate your participation. The interview should take about an hour and your participation will be kept confidential. Your participation will help EPA get a better picture of what is important to you about this site and how EPA can ensure that the community's needs and concerns are addressed. I would like to arrange a time that will be convenient for you to meet with [*me/him/her*].

Would you be available [*give the choice of 2-3 different days/times*]?

[*If they agree, use the following language*] Great! In addition, I expect [*site RPM name*], the site remedial project manager (RPM), to participate as well. [Our contractor ***OR*** I] will also be in attendance to take notes at the interview. [*Identify others, if appropriate*.]

Can we meet with you at your home? Or is there another location that you might prefer? Let's plan to spend about an hour together, but it could be less.

We'll confirm our appointment before that date. If you need to reach me, please don't hesitate to call me at [*give telephone number*]. If you prefer, I can contact you by email, if you'd like to provide your email address. [*Note email here:* ___________________].

Thank you for your participation. Your input can help shape this cleanup. We look forward to meeting you on [*date, day, and time*].

Attachment 5: Sample Confirming Letter or Email

Dear [_______________],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the community interviews for the [_______________] site. We look forward to learning more about your concerns about the site and the impact it has had on your community. We are interviewing a broad range of people in the community to ensure that all views are heard.

What you tell us will remain confidential. We may talk about what we learned from community interviews, but we will never attribute specific views or comments to an individual or talk about them in a way that would allow others to know who talked with us. Combined with what we learn through interviews with other members of the community, your views will help EPA create a community involvement plan for the [_______________] site that is specifically designed for the members of your community.

I have scheduled our interview for [*insert date and time*]. If your schedule changes, I can be reached at [*insert telephone #/email address*]. I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

[*insert name*]

Community Involvement Coordinator