

ATSDR Regional Staff Communication Toolkit Interview Protocol

General Topic Guide for Policymaker Interviews

Supplies

- Informed consent forms (one copy sent to participant; one copy to be completed by interviewer)
- Protocol for interviewer
- Audio recording equipment, tapes, and batteries
- Interviewer clock

Obtain informed consent

Interview Background, Objectives, and Notes

Interview goals: To obtain an initial assessment of the community's thoughts, feelings, and expectations before the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) begins activities or the health assessment within a site, and to help quickly identify existing supporting elements as well as any challenges that will need to be considered as ATSDR's health assessment and community engagement begins.

Interview objectives:

1. Determine awareness of issues at the site.
2. Identify expectations about site activities and ATSDR involvement.
3. Discover challenges and elicit suggestions for addressing them.
4. Assess community needs (capacity, knowledge, or skills) to make the best use of ATSDR involvement and assistance.
5. Learn about collaborations that can be developed to leverage or make the best use of ATSDR involvement and assistance.
6. Begin to build trust in the community.

Important notes:

1. Interview 4–6 people from *each* group (conduct 4–6 community-based organization (CBO) interviews, 4–6 community member interviews, 4–6 industry interviews, *and* 4–6 policymaker interviews). In total, there should be 16–24 interviews completed to get an accurate view from the different groups within the community. ATSDR is submitting the Interview Guides as an information collection activity under the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA). Until the proper clearances have been obtained by ATSDR, the Stakeholder Interview Guides should not be used to collect data from more than nine persons per Guide, as tailored to any given site, if the data collection is federally funded.
2. Please consider the time estimates for the interview and use individual sections of the interview as guides. It is very important to listen to the interview participants and to give them the opportunity to express themselves. You may find

a few will speak longer than 15–20 minutes. In order to maintain rapport and trust, do not cut off respondents if you reach the 20 minute time limit. Ask respondents if they can continue for a few additional minutes in order to allow them to finish their thoughts and ask any final questions.

3. As part of the process to build trust, please maintain a respectful tone throughout the interview. It is important that interviewees do not perceive the interaction as “placating” or one where ATSDR has all the answers.
4. Once interviews are completed, summarize all interview answers and note any key differences within groups (differences between policymaker interviews and others, etc.)
 - a. Please share these summaries with all ATSDR professionals working in the community. This will be helpful in orienting them to the community and may be helpful for future work with the community.

Interviews (15–20 minutes total)

Time in Minutes for Each Section	Topic	Elapsed Time at End of Section (in Minutes)
2	Introduction	2
11–16	Interview questions	13–18
2	Closing and additional participant comments	15–20

Introduction (2 min)

Welcome and Purpose of the Interview

- Hello, my name is {NAME OF INTERVIEWER} and I will be talking to you today about {SITE/ACTIVITY}. I work for the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), a federal public health agency that is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). ATSDR’s goal is to help keep people safe from harmful chemicals in the environment.
- At the end of our questions, we have dedicated time for *you* to share *your* opinions about anything we did not ask you.
- I’m glad that you’re willing to talk to us about environmental health issues in your community. We are here today because {SITE} was listed on (is being considered for placement on) the Environmental Protection’s Agency National Priority List or ATSDR received a petition from the community requesting we investigate the potential health impact of {SITE/ISSUE}. We are talking to POLICYMAKERS to determine what health or other concerns you believe are important.

Procedures

- The interview will take about 15–20 minutes, and {NAME OF NOTE TAKER} will be taking notes during the interview. This is so that we remember correctly what you tell us. We know that we do not have all of the answers, so there are no right or wrong answers to our questions. What we really want, and need, is to know your opinions, because they matter to us and only you can share them with us.
- The information you provide us will be kept secure to the extent provided by law, and we will not include your name in any quotes or comments.

Obtain Informed Consent

- **IN PERSON:** Hand the person the consent form and give them time to read it, go over the form, ask if they have any questions, and obtain the signed form.
- **OVER THE PHONE:** The consent form is sent by email or mail prior the interview, and questions are read out loud over the phone to obtain verbal consent.

Obtain Permission to Record Audio


We would like to record the conversation today to help us make sure our notes are accurate. Only the people involved with this project will hear these recordings and the recordings will be destroyed after the project ends. **Do we have your permission to record?**

- [IF YES]: PROCEED AND BEGIN THE INTERVIEW.
- [IF NO]: SAY “That’s OK, we can continue without recording the interview” AND PROCEED.

Interview Questions (11–16 min)

I would like to start the interview with a question about the way you learned of the environmental health issues in your community. Then I’ll ask your opinion about what has worked well, what else is needed, and about any collaborations that you think can be developed.

1. Please tell me about how you first became aware of any issues at {SITE}:
 - a. What did you do?
 - b. Whom did you talk to about it?
2. What is your organizational title and role?
 - a. What are your overall responsibilities within your organization?
3. From a policy perspective, what are the salient issues and concerns for community members?
4. Before we contacted you about this interview, had you ever heard of ATSDR?
5. What do you, as a policymaker, expect ATSDR will do as it works with the community?
 - a. What do you think ATSDR will accomplish?
 - b. Who or what informs your thoughts about what ATSDR will accomplish?
 - i. Something you read?
 - ii. People with whom you have spoken?
 - iii. Other influences?
6. What existing activities, organizations, partners, or linkages are you familiar with that work well on issues related to {SITE}? How can ATSDR work with them, or learn from them, as ATSDR begins to work with this community?
7. What do you think are some of the specific challenges that ATSDR should be aware of as it begins to work with this community?
 - a. How would you advise ATSDR to begin addressing these challenges?
8. What do POLICYMAKERS need to make the best use of ATSDR’s involvement and assistance in {SITE}?

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- a. What kinds of resources, knowledge, capacity, or skills do you as a POLICYMAKER need?

The last question that I would like to ask you is about community collaboration.

9. What collaborations or partnerships do you think can be developed to make the best use of (leverage) ATSDR's involvement and assistance in {SITE}?
 - a. What community members or organizations should be included in ATSDR's work?

Wrap-Up and Closing (2 min)

Before we end our time together, do you have any other comments that you would like to share (e.g., about {SITE}, environmental health, or other concerns you believe are important) that could help ATSDR to achieve its goal of helping keep people safe from harmful chemicals in the environment? Is there any policy-specific perspective that you want to offer, related to ATSDR's work in this community?

Thank you for talking with us today. Your input was very helpful.