

Tool #33: Networking Interviews

The purpose of networking interviews is to learn from people who are knowledgeable about the community, and to make connections that can lead to fruitful ministry partnerships and long-term relationships.

Interviewing is best done in pairs. It's helpful if one person takes notes while the other person asks the questions. Begin the interview by identifying yourself and your church. Explain the purpose for the interview (e.g., "Our church is exploring new ways of serving the community, and we're interested in learning more about the community and about your role here."). Afterwards, follow up with a thank-you note to show your appreciation for people's time.

Be sensitive to the spiritual and personal concerns of those you contact. Be on the lookout for hidden "family" -- brothers and sisters in Christ working for secular organizations. As it seems appropriate, offer to pray for or with people.

The following questions are suggested for meetings with government officials and leaders of nonprofit agencies, schools, police, churches, civic clubs, neighborhood associations, or other groups. Also seek to identify and contact unofficial community leaders like long-time residents, community activists, and "block mamas". Use the Networking Log on the next page to keep a record of your contacts, opportunities for partnerships, and follow-up ideas. The chart of Community Needs, Assets, and Dreams (tool #40) and the more detailed chart in the Community Asset Inventory (tool #34) provide other tools for summarizing your networking learnings.

Questions for community contacts:

1. What are the greatest assets and strengths you see here? What gives you hope when you think about this community and its future?
2. What are your main concerns about life in this community? What do you see as the major social, economic, cultural or spiritual challenges here?
3. What kinds of changes have you seen in the community? What seems to be getting better, what seems to be getting worse, what is just different from the past?
4. Finish the sentence: "The most important thing for people to know about this community is ..."
5. Finish the sentence: "This community will be stronger and better for everyone when ..."
6. How have you and your organization been working to improve life in the community? Tell us about your activities and goals.
7. Our church is considering ways to serve this neighborhood. Do you have any suggestions? Are there ways we might support the work of your organization or partner with your organization to serve the community?
8. Can you recommend two other people or organizations that we should talk to, to help us learn more about this community?

