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Kansas Health Foundation
“Listening Tours”

The Kansas Health Foundation conducts periodic “listening tours” across the state to assess the health needs of the Kansas community. The foundation’s single agenda item is to listen to what Kansans have to say. Reliable and current information helps the Foundation assess and respond to the health needs of the state. The foundation’s “listening tours” have proven to be innovative, responsive and appealing to many different groups of people.

The “listening tour” is often arranged by an independent consultant hired by the foundation. The consultant is responsible for making contacts, sending out invitations, arranging for transportation, housing and meals. The consultant also assembles briefing books for the “listening tour” facilitators.

Foundation staff members travel all around the state, for a period of two weeks, meeting with various interested groups. For example, in 1995, the foundation visited 17 cities and towns and met with a myriad of community groups including health care providers, teachers, entrepreneurs, public officials, historians, and health care consumers. Participants were asked a broad range of questions including their perceptions on the major health issues in their communities, specific disease prevention issues, barriers in addressing those issues, history of public/private partnerships in their communities, and community leaders and resources. A typical meeting usually lasted for one and one half hours.

The results of the initial tours were surprising. People were not as concerned with traditional medical issues (i.e. cancer and heart disease) as they were with greater societal problems such as keeping their communities free from drugs, violence and crime. Specific urban issues included teen pregnancy, substance abuse and violence inside and outside the home. Many of these problems effect a large spectrum of society ranging from the very young to the very old.

Although not a scientific study, the “listening tours” facilitate discussion and public input and give the Kansas Health Foundation a way to assess general trends in their community. The Foundation has used this information to create and fund grant initiatives and prioritize future health spending. A listening tour is one way the Foundation practices good grant making.