

Data Collection Tips from Erin Whitaker

Understanding statistics is a good way to forecast your business's future. If your funeral home doesn't track demographics or if you'd like to add to your own list of resources, here are some ways to get started. Maps will show you demographic information, online for free. They are easy to find and reliable and verifiable.

1. **Be wary of paralysis by analysis.** You can get so much data you do not know which direction to go with it. Identify questions you want answered before you dive into the data. Where is my growth potential for the next 5 years? 10 years?
2. **Look at the data as points in time as well as trends.** It is important to understand what is happening now as well as to understand how things are changing over time. What is the largest-growing segment in my community today? What is the largest-growing segment five years and then ten years from now?
3. **Ask follow up questions.** How does this relate to my business? What business impact will this have? If my current target population is decreasing, what happens if I expand my service area? What happens if I change my target population?
4. **Look at it from neutral perspective.** Let the data tell you what they tell you, not what you want them to tell you. Do not pre-determine what information matters: "The Latin American population is increasing I should target my efforts there." The data may confirm that statement but you may overlook that the Asian American population is already larger in numbers AND is growing at an even faster rate.
5. **Challenge the data.** What are the parameters of the data collection? Can it be validated by other sources? What additional information do I need to understand how it relates to me? What age group within the Asian American population is increasing? Are they buying homes or are they more transient? Who is currently serving the Asian American funeral needs?

Excerpted from the Cremation Association of North America's quarterly trade magazine The Cremationist, Vol 51, Issue 2: "Know Your Community: Build Your Business" as transcribed from CAAN Board Members Archer Harmon and Erin Whitaker's presentation at CANA's 2015 Cremation Symposium titled "Meeting the Cremation Needs of a Growing and Diverse Population in North America."



As a third generation funeral director, Erin Whitaker brings a diverse and comprehensive background to her role at Foundation Partners Group as Vice President of Business Development. In her current role, she works to continue the company's growth and influence as the funeral and cemetery profession's most innovative privately-owned consolidator. Erin is certified as a Black Belt in Six Sigma methodology and has achieved the designation of Certified Funeral Service Practitioner and Certified Preplanning Consultant. She currently serves on the CANA Board of Directors and has previously served on the SC Funeral Directors Association Board, the NFDA Public Relations Committee, and the Piedmont Technical College School of Funeral Service Advisory Board.