

DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT



What is a Community Needs Assessment?

Community needs assessments seek to gather accurate information representative of the needs of a community. This involves identifying the strengths, assets, needs, and challenges of a specified community.

Needs can be defined as the gap between what is and what should be. A need can be felt by an individual, a group, or an entire community. Assets can include individuals, organizations and institutions, buildings, landscapes, equipment -- anything that can be used to improve the quality of life. Every individual is a potential community asset, and everyone has assets that can be used for community building.

Community needs assessments plan for identifying local needs and resources can help changemakers understand how to improve their communities in the most logical and efficient ways possible.



Why develop a Community Needs Assessment?

Community needs assessments gain a deeper understanding of the community. A community assessment helps to uncover not only needs and resources but the underlying culture and social structure that will help you understand how to address the community's needs and utilize its resources. These assessments will help you make decisions about priorities for program or system improvement.

An assessment will encourage community members to consider the community's assets and how to use them, as well as the community's needs and how to address them. Identifying needs and resources before starting a program or initiative means that you know from the beginning what you're dealing with, and are less likely to be blindsided later by something you didn't expect.



Who should be involved in the development of a Community Needs Assessment?



- Those experiencing needs that should be addressed
- Health and human service providers
- Government officials
- Influential people
- People whose jobs or lives could be affected by the eventual actions taken as a result of the assessment
- Community activists
- Businesses, especially those that employ people from populations of concern



How do you develop a Community Needs Assessment?

- Recruit a planning group that represents all stakeholders and mirrors the diversity of the community
- Design an evaluation process for the assessment, including the development of the plan
- Decide why you want to conduct the assessment
- Determine what data is already available (population, race/ethnicity, workforce, education, homelessness, income, transportation, etc)
- Figure out what other information you need
- Decide what methods you'll use for gathering information (focus groups, surveys, etc.)
- Decide whom you'll gather information from
- Decide how you'll reach your information
- Decide who will collect data
- Decide who will analyze the data and how they'll do it
- Plan whatever training is needed
- Decide how you'll record the results of the assessment and present them to the community
- Decide who will perform what assessment tasks
- Create a timeline
- Present the plan, get feedback, and adjust it to make it more workable



Questions to ask while creating new policies or practices:

1. What is proposed/recommended?
2. What is the desired result/outcome?
3. What does the data say?
4. Who will benefit/be burdened?
5. What are unintended consequences?
6. What can be done to mitigate harm?*

*Reference: Sharon Williams, City of Durham & GARE
For further information, visit the [Community Toolbox website](#).