COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT
TOOL KIT

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INTRODUCTION

Community Action Agencies have been key players in the war on poverty since their inception in the 1960‘s. They are uniquely qualified to examine the needs of a community and people in a state of transition or struggle because the agencies are on the front lines and can see the issues facing families and individuals first hand. A community action agency’s structure can lend itself to a multi-view understanding of poverty in a way many other organizations addressing single issues can not. The governing board’s makeup of one-third publicly elected officials, one-third representatives of low-income persons, and one-third representatives of the private sector allow for various viewpoints and expertise on both the issues and solutions affecting those in poverty. Why then, does poverty continue to increase in Missouri? How can agencies step beyond operating services and become a catalyst for change, a convener, and an agency of first regard? How can agencies assess the needs of a community to develop processes that will work toward moving people out of poverty and still provide services to those in transition? A multi level assessment process can aid agencies in looking beyond the current status quo and help provide guidance in the planning process for such movement.

A comprehensive picture of the conditions combined with a good understanding of the causes is indispensable to the achievement of strategic community goals. This picture of conditions can do many things:

- Create openings for community by-in
- Create opportunities for new alliances and connections with new partners
- Form successful strategies
- Insure services meet the needs of the community
- Build credibility
- Provide a foundation for funding
- Guide board governance in sound decision making
- Guide staff training and educational planning
- Enhance capacity to respond to change
- Generate authentic input from stakeholders
- Indicate causes and conditions

Many organizations conduct community assessments “because we have to” - as a requirement for receiving funding. For many years all types of agencies and organizations became caught up in program mentality and needs assessments ran (and in some cases continue to run) the risk of becoming skewed to prove the need thereby fitting a funder’s or the agencies’ agenda. In some cases after so many years an organization’s needs assessment became an annual (or semi annual) collection of data to *prove* a need. Sometimes, those conducting the assessment held his or her breath to see if the statistics changed for the better - because if that happened (the service area didn’t show as much need) it might result in the agency receiving less funding.

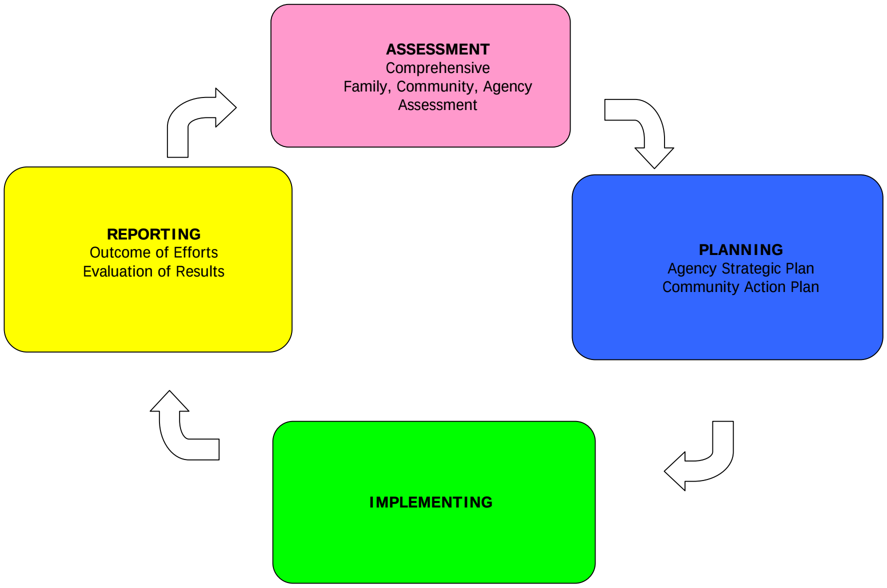
Many times agencies conduct multiple need assessments (one for each separate program or grant) rather than undertaking one assessment and building off the needs identified. The eventual goal of an agency should be to undertake one comprehensive assessment. By undertaking one assessment and asking some different questions, agencies can better coordinate services, direct change rather than just maintaining the status quo, and set the framework for innovation in service delivery.

The community needs assessment is also an integral part of the *Higher Ground* Initiative – an initiative moving Missouri agencies to a three year Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) cycle which will ensure local needs are met, document results, ensure focus on what agencies do (not how dollars are spent), allow CSBG to support other programs and ensure good management practices. An integrated comprehensive needs assessment is required in year one with plans and initiatives to build from there.

A comprehensive needs assessment is a vital part of the state's Missouri Agency Assessment Process. That tool, which was developed and encouraged by the state CSBG program, is used to help participating agencies "develop a picture of organizational quality, recognize best practices, and identify possible opportunities for improvement". When an agency is being reviewed, its review is graded as follows on the needs assessment process:

1. At risk	There is little or no needs assessment data, and the agency has no system for synthesizing available data to guide the direction of comprehensive agency strategic or operational plans.
2. Insufficient but making progress	There are needs assessments for specific programs required by funding sources. The data are only used to meet program requirements
3. Sufficient	Systems exist for utilizing the program needs assessment data on an agency level or for disseminating funding within the agency. There is a regularly conducted, broad based community needs assessment and a system is in place to utilize the data across program lines
4. Sufficient and making strides toward excellence	There is a regularly conducted, broad based community needs assessment and a system is in place to utilize data in developing the agency strategic plan and in formulating goals and objectives
5. Excellent	The agency meets the criteria in 4 and the information from the needs assessment is used in formulating agency goals and objectives in which the board members were involved and approved. Information is also shared with the community, local policy makers and legislators. The agency needs assessment and strategic plan are utilized in seeking funding through government and private funding sources.

Community assessments can and should be more than just a gathering and analyzing of data, they can also be a basis for creating change. A community based needs assessment can help the agency address families by providing a snapshot of families in the service area and their economic well being, educational status, health and welfare. Agencies can begin to create change either by setting a framework for programs and plans that work toward ending poverty (or helping individuals and families to move up and out) or family stabilization (helping individuals and families to stop moving down). It can provide important community information as to who may be working on issues and where gaps in community services lie. It provides an opportunity to meet and develop partnerships strengthening services for citizens in the area. Finally a community needs assessment helps the agency in its planning process by providing the foundation for strategic operational planning, assessing if the agency is meeting the needs of the community and determining what programs or projects may have become obsolete and what programs or projects may provide new opportunities for the agency. It is the beginning of a comprehensive strategic planning process.



There are multitudes of ways to conduct needs assessments - gathering data through conduction of focus groups, surveying, examination of federal, state and local statistics; focusing on target groups' needs, and assessing the assets in a community to name a few. But the collection of all the information is meaningless unless it is framed within the agency's mission and vision.

This tool kit was designed to provide a tool to help in conducting the need assessment. It is divided into **four** main arenas - *gathering* the information needed to understand the community, *analyzing* the information, *prioritizing* the issues, and an overview of the next steps in the process. A *resource section* listing possible resources and tools for use are also included in the appendix. It is important to remember this is just the first part in a continuum of the strategic planning process for success. This sets the framework from which the agency can then move into a specific action plan with goals, outcomes, measurements, and evaluations.

In Part 1 (Data Collection) each section addresses an issue area related to poverty.

The statistical data utilizes the Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment Web Based Tool (CCNWBT) developed by the Center for Applied Research and Environmental Systems (CARES) and the Office of Social and Economic data Analysis (OSEDA). It provides community statistics at the lowest level possible. The program was specifically developed for

Community Action Agencies in Missouri based upon the categories listed in this document, and can be accessed at: http://ims2.missouri.edu/maca. It is hoped that the agencies will collectively gather and utilize the same statistical data to help build a compilation which can be used to understand poverty throughout the State of Missouri. However each agency may gather additional information that is unique to their area. The web based tool will produce a report titled "Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment". This report will be produced in Word format and narratives can be added. *It is important to note that this report IS NOT a completed comprehensive needs assessment.* For the assessment to be complete, the information gathered by the agency through focus groups, surveys, and interviews along with the analysis and prioritization should be conducted and finished and added to the document.

Agency gathered data incorporates first hand information from surveys and focus groups and possible plans of potential partners. Included in each issue area are a list of potential survey questions, related plans for reference, and potential partners. It also incorporates select questions provided in the Missouri Community Scale developed by Annette Backs Edwards for the Missouri Association for Community Action (MACA) and the Missouri State CSBG Office. The survey questions are only samples and the agencies may access other questions in the comprehensive scale document through the MACA office.

Part 2 outlines suggestions for analyzing the information. It is important that this analysis be done at a minimum by a broad group of individuals from across the agency and inclusive of members of the Board of Directors and the Policy Council. Some agencies may also choose to broaden the analysis group by adding other stakeholders from the community to reflect on the issues raised.

Part 3 provides guidance on prioritization questions and tools. The Community Needs Assessment takes an agency from the beginning of looking at the issues to prioritization of the issues to address after which the agency can move forward with their strategic plan. Continuation of the broad group of individuals representing various parts of the agency and community helps the prioritization process and discussion reflect community wide needs.

Part 4 reviews the strategic planning process next steps and shows how different logic models can be used in the process.

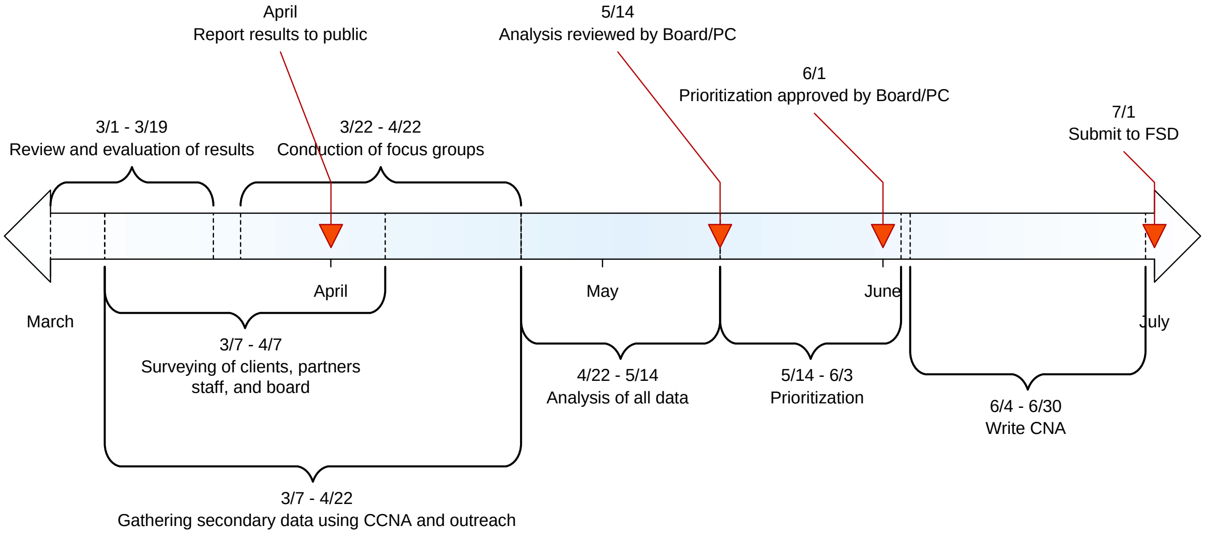
TIMELINE

The timeline for conducting a need assessment can vary greatly and oftentimes can take longer or shorter dependent upon the staff available, workloads, and size of the community being examined. The following is provided as a rough guide:

> Surveying – At least two weeks (if one is able to keep the survey open for a month, the agency has the opportunity of reaching a wider variety of clients).
> Electronic surveying – 1-2 weeks
> Focus groups – usually one month from beginning until end for each group. The number should be sufficient to cover the entire agency area.
> Data collection – may be done throughout the process

Analysis – two weeks with reporting out and a focused discussion at the end
Issue prioritization - One to two meetings.

SAMPLE TIMELINE
(BASED ON INITIAL HIGHER GROUND REPORTING)



STEPS IN THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS

1. Set the timeframe and timeline
2. Determine who will be the primary team to oversee the assessment and who will be responsible for the data collections, surveying, and information gathering
3. Review and evaluate results of past activities
4. Conduct the surveys, focus groups, interviews and collect the statistical data
5. Set up a cross functional team representing different programs and from across the agency structure as well as interested board members and stakeholders for review of the statistical and agency gathered data and analyze the information
6. Break into individual issue teams if necessary for review of the areas and hold discussions
7. Gather for reporting out and hold focused discussion to prioritize the issues
8. Write the needs assessment based on the information gathered

The *Higher Ground* process mentioned earlier has set the following for the timeline shifting the CSBG program to a three year process.

Date	**Deliverable From CAA's to Division of Family Support, Department of Social Services**
July 2009	Comprehensive Family/Community/Agency Assessment Report
April 2010	Agency *Strategic* Plan for CSBG contracted fiscal years 2011, 2012, and 2013
July 2010	Agency Community *Action* Plan for CSBG contracted fiscal years 2011, 2012, and 2013
Early 2011	Agency holds a local outcome presentation to share results
July 2011	Comprehensive Family/Community/Agency Assessment Report
Early 2012	Agency holds a local outcome presentation to share results
July 2012	Agency *Strategic* Plan for CSBG contracted fiscal years 2014, 2015, and 2016
Early 2013	Agency holds a local outcome presentation to share results
July 2013	Agency Community *Action* Plan for CSBG contracted fiscal years 2014,2015, and 2016

PART 1 – DATA COLLECTION

A. STATISTICAL DATA

Perhaps the most daunting of tasks in a community assessment is determining how much and what data to gather and analyze. Equally important is the examination of the data after it has been gathered. This tool kit proposes a set of core data suggested for collection across the state by all agencies thereby aiding in providing a statewide picture of poverty in Missouri. Individual agencies may also choose to collect other data specific to their unique area. The suggested data revolves around the conditions of poverty and related issues of employment, use of income, education, housing, nutrition, transportation, and health. In addition, required Head Start Assessment data is also included within the education category.

The Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment Web Based Tool (CCNWBT) mentioned earlier developed by the Center for Applied Research and Environmental Systems (CARES) and the Office of Social and Economic data Analysis (OSEDA) provides community statistical data at the lowest level possible. The web based tool allows for agencies to select specific data elements and generates a general analysis of the statistical data in a report form that the agency can then use as a basis for the needs assessment document. CARES and OSEDA will continually update the information and add to the data elements so that a report can be generated providing a current snapshot in time. The tool kit lists the DATA ELEMENTS under each condition of poverty and issue area that is available in the CCNWBT.

In addition to the CCNWBT, a listing of questions that are a part of the statewide MIS system can give the agency client information. MIS is the management information system Missouri Community Action Agencies use for reporting. The MIS questions are those asked of clients during the intake and assessment process.

Depending on the timing of the needs assessment, some data may not be as recent as desired. At times, there is no other data available outside of the estimates that may be provided. However, the agency can still use this data especially if supplemented by information from the surveys and other methods suggested for gathering information.

B. AGENCY GATHERED DATA

1. SURVEYS

The agency will want to conduct some form of survey to determine ‘felt’ needs to supplement the statistical data that is gathered. An agency should consider surveying not only existing clients but also partners, community leaders, venders and other service providers.

1. Determine the questions to ask.
    a. The suggested survey questions in this document have been used by Community Services Inc., of Northwest Missouri. They are short and to the point. By adding an ‘other’ category, respondents may add their own comments as well.
    b. The Missouri Association for Community Action has available the Missouri Community Scale developed by Annette Backs Edwards as a tool for community surveys. This tool provides a set of questions one can choose from when conducting surveys as well as use in focus groups and personal surveys. This is essentially a bank of more than 2700 questions agencies can draw upon to use for the needs assessment. The complete document lists questions relative to civic capacity and other services and supports in addition to the issue areas in this document which can be drawn upon for additional consideration. The excel documents divide the questions into categories of surveys, interviews and focus groups as well as suggestions for which questions to ask of clients, potential clients, informants , and service providers.
2. Determine the types of people to ask
3. Determine the method of asking the questions – on site, through the mail, during meetings, or electronically.

For surveying clients you might consider having surveys available at all intake locations for clients to fill out. They could be distributed to Head Start families to fill out when services are provided, during parent nights, or Policy Council meetings. You may choose to mail the survey out to clients in a separate mailing or with other information you are distributing. The return rate may be small, therefore utilizing the mail as your only means of gathering the survey information is not recommended. Include the surveys in all courses that your organization may be involved in (leadership, life skills, homeownership) and consider distributing them to clients when making home visits, during weatherization of homes or when rehabilitating residences.

Considerations:

-One should consider having the document translated into the native languages of the agency's clients if it serves a high immigrant population

- When determining a time limit for surveys, think through when or what may affect the number of clients you might see – what times of the month do clients come in with certain needs (energy assistance, Head Start sign up)

- If using mail, consider the costs as you should include a self-addressed stamped envelop for replies (as well as with those left directly at clients homes).

- Think about asking a client the questions verses asking them to fill out a questionnaire for example while they are waiting for services. This will entail training of the staff to insure the questions are being asked in the same manner as well as providing for an area to insure confidentiality.

- Do not assume your clients are without access to the internet and computers. A kiosk type computer in the waiting room as well as maintaining internet e-mail addresses on clients can help to capture information in a quick and concise manner.

For surveying your partners, service providers, and community leaders, begin by compiling a listing of those who you want to contact. Personal interviews while often preferred cannot always be accomplished due to time. Other means may be to mail the survey, or use an electronic survey document such as Survey Monkey (http://www.surveymonkey.com) or Zoomerang (http://www.zoomerang.com). Notifying the partners, service providers and community leaders of this survey can easily be done via e-mail with a friendly reminder sent out half-way through the open time period.

Analysis of both of these surveys will not only provide information on what clients need from their own viewpoint, but will also provide a picture of how the partners, leaders, and others in the community perceive need - which may not always be the same.

2. FOCUS GROUPS

Another manner of gathering information is by holding a number of focus groups. This process can be used to further determine community needs and concerns. "Needs assessment surveys typically have written closed-ended, relatively narrow questions which are quantitatively scored.

Such surveys can be very useful; but they usually can't capture all that a person is thinking or feeling. Responses in a focus group, on the other hand, are typically spoken, open-ended, relatively broad, and qualitative. They have more depth, nuance, and variety. Nonverbal communications and group interactions can also be observed. Focus groups can therefore get closer to what people are really thinking and feeling, even though their responses may be harder -- or impossible -- to score on a scale." (Community Toolbox, University of Kansas)

Participants in the focus groups can be cross functional agency members, board members, community leaders, other service providers, venders, clients, partners and stakeholders. Keep in mind how to arrange the focus groups for maximum openness and encouraging participation. Always remember the perceived and real power structures in the community arena including the relationships between clients and staff. Some agencies hold focus groups by county, others by type of attendee and others may combine the two. Multiple focus groups are common and recommended.

Focus group questions such as these used by Missouri Valley and Central Missouri Community Action can give you a good sense of how the community might feel about poverty:

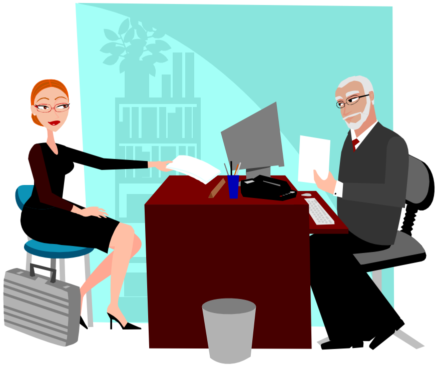
Missouri Valley sample:

-What would our community look like without poverty?
-What keeps families in poverty?
-What should we as a community do to address poverty?
- How do you define poverty?
- The look of poverty in your county is...

CMCA sample:

-What can CMCA do to support the community to achieve the outcomes to eliminate poverty in your county?
-What are the conditions and causes of poverty in our community?
-Identify programs, strategies and initiatives that have been successful in reducing poverty.
- What steps could be taken to reduce poverty in our community?
- What role(s) could CMCA and others interested in reducing poverty and creating an economy that works for all play in our community?

3. PERSONAL INTERVIEWS



A final way to gather viewpoints as to the felt needs of a community is to conduct personal interviews with the clients, partners, staff, and community leaders. Personal interviews allow for you to delve deeper into various aspects of the questions, however, the process of personal interviews will take more time.

General questions for *partnership or stakeholder* focus groups or personal interviews could include the following:

- Do you address this issue or need in the community? (Education, housing, employment, child care, etc.)
- How do you address this issue? (advocacy, direct service, referral)
- What do you see are the challenges facing this issue in the community?
- Who else is working on this issue in your area?
- How would you know your programs were successful?

It is recommended that the agency consider putting together a cross functional team of agency staff to discuss the issues facing the many clients who are served by the various programs. The community needs assessment, while required for CSBG (Community Services Block Grant) and Head Start funding, if comprehensive and multi-faceted should provide the background for the whole agency's strategic plan and provide the framework for discovering other programs and funding. The above questions can be revised for such a group and might look like the following:

- How do we address this issue or need in the community?
- What do you see are the challenges facing these issues in the community?
- Who do you partner with when you need to help someone who is facing this issue? Who should the agency partner with when addressing these issues?
- How will we know if we are successful?

4. PARTNERS

Many agencies participate in partnership with other service providers or groups. Partnerships however are more than just attending meetings. Active partnerships mean having a say at the table during discussions, a role in an organization's action plan, and is reciprocal. The partnerships listed in the document reflect common statewide groups. Your agency should also consider unique local partnerships with area developers, local service organizations, churches, faith based organizations, and others who may not be statewide in nature but who are just as important to the community and area.

5. RELATED PLANS

Many communities and areas have already undertaken a number of plans covering the same geographic area that the community action agency covers. These plans provide a wealth of knowledge for the agency and can inform the agency of what other programs are active in the region. The challenge of many regional plans is that other regional agencies often do not have the same boundaries as the lead organization in poverty matters. It is suggested that the local action agency look at other plans that touch on at least one issue area or aspect of the community needs assessment. By examining the plans, an agency can see what is being proposed by other groups, can adjust their plans if needed, or become active partners in helping the other agencies achieve their plans if the goals and objectives are a good match.

C. CONDITIONS OF POVERTY AND ISSUE AREAS

The following list the conditions of poverty and related issue areas, an explanation of why the issue area is relevant to poverty and provides suggested statistical and agency gathered data. The information listed in the statistical data portion is data available in the CCNWBT. Because the tool is continually being updated, all data may not yet be present on the web site; however, much of the data is currently accessible. Survey questions include a general survey question, sample questions from the Missouri Community Scale mentioned earlier as well as MIS questions. By using reports generated from these particular questions the agency can examine not only information on what client needs might be but the information on the clients themselves that can be added to statistical data for a picture of the community and region. The partners listing are suggested partners to consider when looking at a particular issue area and the plan section list potential plans that may be present in a community for those involved in the planning process to review.

ISSUE AREA-EMPLOYMENT

Understanding the employment situation in the community provides the background necessary for determining what type of jobs are available, what are the salaries available in an area, what skills business and industry are looking for and what it takes for a family to become self-sufficient. The poverty rate determined by the federal government is based upon a 40 year old formula which determined that Americans spent approximately 1/3 of their after tax income on food. Based upon three times the costs of the minimum (lowest) food plan the Department of Agriculture developed for an American family, the poverty rate does not consider any factors such as housing, child care, transportation, or health care costs. While understanding and knowing the poverty rate in the community is important, looking at the numbers of persons living below a county self-sufficiency rate, compared to the average county wages, may reflect more accurate employment conditions of the area. Unemployment rates are important to know when looking at employment issues however, one should keep in mind that in addition to those who are unemployed there are also those who are underemployed (those who are working at jobs that are below a person's capabilities) as well as those possibly working 2 to 3 jobs or multiple part time jobs that reflect additional need for well paying full time employment. Other employment considerations are the types of jobs available in a community – service sector, manufacturing, retail, government – all can have an influence on the quality of the job market as well as the wages paid.

Data elements:
Current average annual unemployment and unemployment changes
Factory/Plant/Business closures in last 2 years
Current average county wages
County living wages
High school graduation rates
Average child care costs
Licensed child care facilities
Child care waiting lists
Median household income
Commuter travel patterns
Public transportation

Top 10 employers in county
Veteran status
Graduate analysis (where graduates go after high school)
High School Graduate performance report

Survey questions:

General (check off type) question:

Employment is a problem in this area because:

_____People lack skills to obtain a job
_____Unable to find jobs in the area
_____People lack education to obtain a job
_____Lack of good paying jobs with benefits
_____Lack of child care during the hours needed
_____Lack of computer skills
_____Cost of child care
_____Few jobs for people without skills
_____Current jobs are low paying
_____Cost of transportation
_____Long commute to jobs
_____Employers leaving the area
_____Lack of transportation

Sample Community Scale Questions:

1. To what extent are child care facilities and providers located in areas accessible to low income parents? SCALE 1-10
2. To what extent are child care facilities located in areas near employment and educational opportunities for low income persons? SCALE 1-10
3. To what extent are child care fees for parents who work non-standard, or non-consistent work hours the same or similar to those charged to parents who work standard business hours? SCALE 1-10
4. To what extent do you feel there are opportunities for economic and community development within your community? SCALE 1-10
5. To what extent are the interests of the low income community considered during the development and planning of economic and community development projects? SCALE 1-10
6. To what extent are small business incubators present in the low income community (e.g., business spaces with common administrative and managerial support)? SCALE 1-10
7. To what extent are members of all racial and ethnic backgrounds able to obtain full-time employment? SCALE 1-10
8. How would one find out which careers available to persons within the low income community have opportunities for advancement?

MIS Questions:

1. Please answer the following regarding the employment status for family members:
    Currently working
    Full-time employment earning minimum wage or less

Temporary full-time
Temporary part-time
Part-time employment
Retired
Disabled
14-25 years old and not working
Unemployed less than 3 months
Unemployed more than 3 months
Full time homemaker
Unemployed never worked
Not applicable, young child

2. If you could improve your current employment what areas would you focus on?
    More hours
    Better pay
    Increased benefits
    Increased responsibilities
    Reduced required overtime
    Change career or position
    Job stability
    Location of Job
    Flexible working hours
    Not applicable

3. Please identify your strengths and barriers for employment
    Formally trained or certified skills
    Skills gained from experience
    Positive work history
    Education
    Dependable transportation
    Dependable childcare
    Other strengths
    Lack of reliable transportation
    Lack of reliable childcare
    Permanent health/disability problem
    Temporary disability problem
    Lack of High School Diploma/GED
    Pregnancy
    Emotionally unable to work
    Lack of Adult Dependent Care
    Discrimination (age, race, gender)
    Other Barriers
    No Barriers

4. Do you need any of the following employment services?
    Unemployment

Support achieving goals
Missouri Career Center/WIA
Career Search
Shelter Workshops
Skills Training
Business Ownership
Job Seeking
Vocational Rehabilitation

Potential Partners:
Local governments
Chambers of Commerce
Economic Development Agencies
Workforce Investment Boards
Regional Planning Commissions

Related Plans

WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARDS – Workforce investment boards are boards covering multiple counties charged with implementing various job development and training programs around the state. They are required to develop plans for their respective areas. Those plans can be accessed at the following site: http://ded.mo.gov/WFD/System

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Many regional planning commissions are designated the Local Economic Development Districts through the Economic Development Administration of the US Department of Commerce**.** Their responsibilities include the development of a comprehensive economic development strategies (CEDS) plan approved by the EDA You can locate your Regional Planning Commission by accessing The Missouri Association of Council of Governments (MaCOG) website at http://www.macogonline.org/

Many communities have local economic development professionals who can be a good resource for economic and employment information. Many are listed in the Missouri Economic Development Council directory at http://www.showme.org/

ISSUE AREA - EDUCATION

Data and information on the educational levels of clients as well as the issues surrounding access to education provide a framework for helping to move people from poverty into self-sufficiency. Education begins early and access to quality child care can make the difference between later success and failure. It has been shown that low income children who attend Head Start are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college (National Center for Children in Poverty) yet less than 60% of eligible children were served by Head Start programs (Koball and Douglas-Hall, 2004). Every year of college increases ones ability to gain higher income. Yet those in poverty are least likely to access higher education and many do not finish high school. According to references in Dr. Donna Beegle's book, *See Poverty, Be the Difference*, as recently as 1996 a person in the lowest income quartile was only 10% as likely to complete a bachelor's degree as a person from the highest income quartile.

Data Elements:

Public School Enrollment
Literacy levels ages 18 and older
Licensed child care
Education levels (no degree, GED, BS, MS, PhD)\
Average child care costs
Head Start eligible children and families
Number of child development and child care programs serving Head Start eligible children
Number of Head Start eligible children served by above programs
Estimated number of 4 year old or younger children with disabilities
Types of disabilities of children 4 years and younger
Number of children participating in First Step Program
Number of children with disabilities receiving services
Number of public school districts
Number of private schools
Number of pre-school providers
Children with limited English proficiency
Drop out rates
Colleges, Universities and Trade Schools in the area

Survey Questions:

General (check off type) question:

Education is a problem in this area because

____No high school diploma
____Lack of GED
____Lack of access to programs for obtaining a GED
____Cost of child care
____Lack of child care
____Lack of computer skills
____Lack of programs for gaining computer skills
____Cost of transportation
____Lack of transportation
____Lack of tuition money
____Lack of vocational skills
____Lack of access to programs teaching vocational skills
____Lack of college education
____Threats of violence in Schools
____Lack of dropout prevention programs

____Lack of preschool programs

Sample Community Scale Questions:

1. Do public libraries in rural areas operate book-mobile type services to promote library usage in rural areas? [If yes,]: How frequently?
2. To what extent do you utilize the public library system? SCALE 1-10
3. To what extent do you feel your community has access to facilities available for educational meetings and classes? SCALE 1-10
4. To what extent are materials and resources for educational programs (e.g., computer equipment and software, text books, writing materials) available to members of the low income community? SCALE 1-10
5. Are both public and private schools available within the low-income community?
6. To what extent are there on-line computer facilities available in the low income community? SCALE 1-10
7. What do on-line computer facilities in the low income community customarily charge for usage of their facilities and equipment?
8. To what extent are public and private school buildings and grounds available for educational programs and purposes during non-school hours? SCALE 1-10
9. To what extent do educational program planning committees and teams invite representation from the low income community? SCALE 1-10
10. To what extent are there youth employment programs available for you or your children? SCALE 1-10

MIS Questions*:*

1. Please answer the following questions regarding education for family members.
    -Satisfied with education
    -Would like to improve reading skills
    -Would like to improve writing skills
    -Would like to improve English or language skills
    -Would like to improve math skills
    -Would like to obtain a GED
    -Would like training in a specific area
    -Would like to earn a two or four year degree
    -Other areas of improvement

2. Please answer the following regarding strengths and barriers to education for family.
    -Done well in school before
    -Have support for education, including family
    -Have specific educational goals
    -Dependable transportation
    -Dependable childcare
    -Other strengths
    -Lack transportation
    -Lack childcare
    -Previous difficulty with school
    -Lack high school diploma or GED

- Cost of school a problem
- Language issues a problem
- Discrimination (age, race, gender)
- Other barriers

3. Do you need any of the following educational services?
    - One on one support achieving goals
    - ABE/GED classes
    - Vocational rehabilitation
    - Missouri Career Center/WIA
    - Pell grants/Financial aid
    - Specialized skills training
    - Community college/university
    - Literacy/Reading tutoring
    - English as a second language

4. Please answer the following questions regarding Head Start services
    - Already enrolled in Head Start
    - On waiting list for Head Start
    - Needs Head Start
    - Not interested in Head Start
    - Enrolled in Early Head Start
    - On waiting list for Early Head Start
    - Needs Early Head Start
    - Not interested in Early Head Start

Potential Partners:
Public School Board and school officials (including post secondary education)
Pre-school providers
Private school officials
Vocational, technical and college placement officials
Local Parent as Teachers Program
First Step Program http://www.eikids.com/mo/matrix/

Related Plans:
Workforce Investment Board Plans referred to earlier have reference points related to educational needs in the area and should be reviewed.
School Districts

ISSUE AREA - HOUSING

Finding affordable housing (both rental and housing for homeownership) continues to be a challenge for many Americans. Safe, decent, sanitary and affordable housing provides not only shelter for clients, but stabilization for children, and in cases of homeownership – housing becomes a way to build and retain an asset for the future. The foreclosure crisis and tightening of the lending market has added to the need for affordable rental housing as well as the need to address the vacant homes to stabilize neighborhoods. The recent crisis also has renewed emphasis on how much a family should be paying toward housing and utilities. Finally examination of homes in light of their energy consumption and costs broadens the understanding of the housing issue area in the service area.

Data Elements:

Rental vacancy rates
Owner occupied vacancy rates
Average costs of homes
Fair Market Rents
Foreclosures
Percent houses overcrowded
Number of homeless
Number of homeless children
Number of unsafe, unsanitary homes
Section 8 wait lists
Housing Authorities wait lists
Housing affordability (hourly wage a worker must earn to afford housing)
Number of families using Emergency Utility Assistance
Number of families using Energy Crisis Intervention (ECIP) assistance
Average dollar amount of Emergency Utility Assistance payments
Average dollar amount of ECIP payments
Average age of houses
Number of homes weatherized

Survey Questions:

General (check off type) Question:

Housing is a problem in this area because
_____Cost of rent/house payment
____Cost of utility/rent deposit
____Housing size doesn't meet family needs
____Lack of temporary emergency housing
____Affordable housing not available
____Need weatherization
____Need repairs (roof, foundation, plumbing, etc.)
____Where housing is available, neighborhood conditions are not acceptable
____Lack of shelters for emergency situations (domestic violence)
____Lack of shelter for emergency situations (natural disaster)

Sample Community Scale Questions:

1. To what extent is there affordable housing in the low-income community? SCALE 1-10
2. To what extent are you able to find affordable housing suitable for your family size within your community? SCALE 1-10
3. To what extent are organizations such as Habitat for Humanity and other non-profit builders active in the low-income community? SCALE 1-10
4. To what extent are you able to stay in the same dwelling from year to year (e.g., you are not forced to move every year due to rising rental costs)? SCALE 1-10
5. To what extent do you feel you would lose your housing if you were unexpectedly unemployed? SCALE 1-10
6. To what extent do you feel you could purchase a home in your community? SCALE 1-10
7. To what extent do you feel you have options in terms of the price you pay to live within you community? SCALE 1-10
8. If you needed to find temporary shelter, to what extent would you be able to find someplace within your community? SCALE 1-10
9. To what extent do you feel there is assistance available in your community for landlord/tenant disputes? SCALE 1-10

MIS Questions:

1. Do you have any of the following housing problems? (Listing)
2. Does your home have the appropriate number of bedrooms?
3. Monthly amount your family pays for housing
4. Does your family receive subsidized housing?
5. Would you be interested in owning your own home?
6. Has your home been weatherized?
7. What is your primary heat source?
8. What is the average cost of heat per month?
9. If you are homeless, please check all that apply to you (listing)

Potential Partners

City building officials, city planning and zoning officials
County Assessor
Local Community Development Departments
Local Office of Rural Development (USDA)
Local Realtors

Related Plans

Local (*entitlements - Jefferson City, St. Peters, St. Charles, O'Fallon, Lee Summit, Jefferson County, Independence, Florissant, Blue Springs, Kansas City, St. Louis, Columbia, St. Joseph, Springfield, Joplin, St. Louis County)* or State CONSOLIDATED PLAN. The State consolidated plan is located at the Missouri Department of Economic Development, Community Development Block Grant program, Missouri Department of Mental Health, Housing Programs, or Missouri Housing Development Commission. Local *(City of St. Louis, St. Louis County, Kansas City, Springfield, Columbia, Independence, St. Joseph)* or the state HOME PLAN (if separate from the consolidated plan). These plans are also available through the US Department of Housing and Urban Development at http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/about/conplan/local/index.cfm

Regional Planning Commission plans

Governor's Council to End Homelessness Report
http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/604
http://www.hrsa.gov/homeless/state_pages/pa3/mo.htm

ISSUE AREA - NUTRITION

Those struggling in poverty as well as many families moving out of poverty find it difficult at times to provide food for their families. Food pantries are seeing many new clients who are oftentimes working more than one low-wage job or have recently lost employment. Children cannot learn and parents find it difficult to work when hungry and undernourished. Rising obesity rates among children and adults leads to increasing health issues and costs. Addressing hunger and nutritional needs is *basic* to moving people into self-sufficiency.

Data Elements:

Number of children receiving free/reduced lunch
Average number of recipients receiving food stamps
Total food stamp benefits received
Number of food pantries
Number of households served by food pantries
Number of grocery stores in the community
Number of farmer's markets
Number receiving WIC (Women, Infant, Children) aid
Number eligible to receive WIC
Number of Senior Nutrition Centers

Survey Questions:

General (check off type) Question:

Nutrition is a problem in this area because
_____Lack of transportation to available grocers
_____Not enough income to purchase food
_____Food stamps run out before end of month
_____Don't use resources available
_____Not eligible for food stamps
_____Lack of education in nutrition
_____Alternative food resources not available (pantries)
_____Lack of food

Sample Community Scale Questions

1. To what extent are there senior citizen centers located in areas accessible to elderly members of the low-income community? SCALE 1-10
2. To what extent does your organization utilize senior citizen centers for the provision of services to elderly members of the low-income community (e.g., adult day care, card clubs, meal delivery)? SCALE 1-10
3. How does your organization help to coordinate school-lunch programs for low-income children?
4. Is there a reduced fee/free school-lunch program at the school your child(ren) attend?
5. To what extent are there enough community organizations providing community supports to meet the needs of the low-income community (e.g., community members aren't required to wait in long lines at distribution points for food stamps or WIC benefits)? SCALE 1-10

MIS Questions:

1. Is your food supply adequate?
2. Does your family have any barriers to obtaining and preparing nutritious meals?
3. Do you need WIC?
4. Please mark any of the following that apply to your family's situation (Listing)
5. Do you need food stamps?

Potential Partners

Local food pantry
Social Service office
Local ministerial alliances
Grocers
Local farmers groups
Area Agencies on Aging/Meals on Wheels programs
http://www.dhss.mo.gov/AAA/index.html

Related Plans

Food bank information
St. Louis http://stlfoodbank.org/
Central Missouri http://www.centralmofoodbank.org/
Ozarks Food Harvest http://www.ozarksfoodharvest.org/
Kansas City http://www.harvesters.org/
St. Joseph http://www.stjofoodbank.org/
Bootheel Phone: 573-471-1818
State Nutrition and Food Action Plan http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/SNAP/Plans/Missouri.htm

ISSUE AREA - USE OF INCOME

All Americans face challenges relative to use of income. As a society, we are constantly bombarded with commercials wanting to sell us the latest and greatest. Those of low income are not the only persons facing a crisis in money management with debt spiraling and costs of health care and other items rising. The recent downturn in the economy shows that in fact, many Americans are living one paycheck away from financial crisis. According to the Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED), the foundation for reaching the American Dream “rests on two pillars: first, a family's ability to build assets that can be used to invest for the future, send children to college, and weather unexpected financial storms; and second, safety nets and safeguards that provide financial security in the event of a job loss, medical emergency, or other life events that could otherwise put a family in a tailspin.” The information a community gathers on use of income can help an agency think about services which can lead to individuals building their safety net and eventually achieving many goals.

Data Elements:
Income levels
Persons receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
Children receiving free/reduced lunch
Recipients receiving food stamps
Total food stamp benefits received
Earned Income Tax Credits received and average return
Number receiving SSA and/or SSI benefits
Average SSA or SSI benefit amount
Average household size receiving SSA and/or SSI benefits
Number paying child support
Number receiving child support
Average child support amount paid/received
Number of payday loan, check cashing businesses
Number of banks, credit unions, savings and loan businesses
Number of pawn shops

Survey Questions:

General (check off type) question:

Use of income is a problem in this area because
____Lack of knowledge of budgeting
____Difficulty with money management
____Lack of use of earned income tax credits
____Lack of knowledge about savings

Sample Community Scale Questions:

1. To what extent are there opportunities for low-income persons to participate in savings programs in your community? SCALE 1-10
2. To what extent do you feel you could apply for and obtain a savings account at a bank in your community? SCALE 1-10
3. To what extent do local banks offer community development loans to members and organizations in the low-income community? SCALE 1-10
4. What kinds of financial counseling or budgeting assistance does your organization provide for families in order to determine affordable monthly payments and develop budgets to help

ensure families will not lose their homes?
5. To what extent is there financial counseling and budgeting assistance available to members of the low-income community? SCALE 1-10

MIS Questions:
1. Which of the following is true of your family's income? (Listing)
2. Which of the following is true regarding your family and child support? (Listing)
3. How does your family manage money?
4. What past due bills does your family have?
5. Does your family have any of the following credit debts? (Listing)
6. Regarding your family's taxes, please check all that apply (Listing)
7. In the past six months has your family done any of the following to meet basic needs? (Listing)
8. Has your TANF, Medicaid, or FSS been sanctioned?
9. How much longer will you be receiving TANF?
10. Are you interested in budgeting and/or financial education/training?

Potential Partners
Local Banks
Local Credit Unions
Local Savings and Loan
Schools

Related Plans
Local bank Community Reinvestment Act reports and plans

ISSUE AREA - TRANSPORTATION

Missouri's rural environment makes transportation a challenge for many in the state. And where public transportation is available, many times it does not run on a schedule benefiting those employed or seeking employment. Available, affordable transportation is another key element to self-sufficiency.

Data Element:
Currently not in the CCNWBT
Suggested data:
Commuter trends (census)
Public transportation trends (local)

Survey Questions:

General (check off type) Question:

Transcription is a problem in this area because

Transportation is a problem in this area because
______Lack of knowledge on how to buy a car
_____Cost of buying/down payment for a car
_____Lack of credit to buy a car
_____Cost of maintaining a car
_____Cost of car repairs
_____Cost of gasoline
_____Lack of help in learning to drive or getting license
_____Limited public transportation

Sample Community Scale Questions:

1. To what extent do public transportation routes cover are all areas of the low-income community? SCALE 1-10
2. To what extent are you able to obtain transportation to the nearest town or commercial center during business hours when you need to? SCALE 1-10
3. To what extent are you able to obtain transportation to the nearest town or commercial center to participate in recreational, social or cultural activities? SCALE 1-10
4. To what extent are you able to obtain transportation in the case of an emergency? SCALE 1-10
5. To what extent are bus stops located in well-lit and safe areas? SCALE 1-10
6. How frequently do public transportation routes run in low-income neighborhoods?
7. Are reduced fares for children and elderly riders of public, rural and shuttle transportation available?
8. Have you ever not been able to go an appointment or meeting due to inability to afford transportation?

MIS Questions

1. Dependable transportation
2. Lack of reliable transportation
3. Lack of transportation for health services

Potential partners

Regional Planning Commissions
Local Economic Development Department
Chamber
City/County government
Local Highway District

Related Plans

Many of the regional planning commissions work with the Missouri Department of Transportation in the development of regional transportation plans which may provide information in statistics relative to transportation needs of those living in the region. http://macog.mo-acte.org/default.htm

State of Missouri Highway plan

ISSUE AREA - HEALTH

According to Families USA, 86.7 million people under the age of 65 in the United States went without health insurance for some or all of the two-year period from 2007 to 2008 and one out of three people (33.1 percent) under the age of 65 was uninsured for some or all of 2007-2008. As of December 2008, 54% of unemployed Missourians were without health insurance. Approximately 100,000 Missourians lost health care coverage in 2006 through changes in Medicaid. Cover Missouri (a project of the Missouri Foundation for Health) estimates that 772,000 Missourians are without health insurance. According to Cover Missouri, *The State of Missouri's Health* Briefing paper, 2008 the rankings for Missouri's health outcome indicators include rankings such as:

37th for years lost due to premature death (8,112 years lost per 100,000 population),
43rd for cardiovascular deaths (355.7 deaths per 100,000 population),
42nd for cancer deaths (213.7 deaths per 100,000 population), and
42nd for poor mental health days (3.7 days in previous 30 days).

Missouri ranks 40th and 41st for the percent of its population that is obese (27.2%) and that smokes (23.2%). Information on health, access to health care and health care is important to understand because they go hand in hand toward helping individuals and families to be successful.

Data Element:

Medicaid and Medicare providers
Birth to teens
Number of doctors in the area accepting Medicaid
Number of dentists in the area accepting Medicaid
Number of hospitals
Number of Federally Qualified Health Clinics
Waiting list for dental and health care at Federally Qualified Health Clinics
Number receiving MoHealth Net benefits
Number receiving Medicare
Number paying Medicare SMI
Number paying Medicare Part D
Number uninsured
Number of Child abuse and neglect reports
Cause of death numbers
Number of mental health facilities
Number of alcohol and drug treatment facilities
Number of licensed counselors
Number of in home health care workers

Survey Questions:
General (check off type) Question:

Health care is a problem in this area because
____Doctors will not accept Medicaid
____No clinics or doctor offices in same town
____Waiting list for dental services
____Hospital/emergency room not available in same town
____Lack of transportation
____Lack of insurance
____Existing health conditions
____Lack of income to pay for prescriptions
____Lack of income for medical emergencies
____Lack of resources for alcohol or drug abuse treatment
____Lack of resources for mental health treatment

Sample Community Scale Questions:

1. To what extent are there multiple providers/companies offering plans for individual and family health insurance coverage within the low income community? SCALE 1-10
2. Approximately how many different health insurance providers are present within the low income community?
3. To what extent are primary care providers who participate in health insurance plans offered in the low income community located in areas accessible to the low income community?

SCALE 1-10

4. In terms of proportion of a family's total income, how much do premiums for basic health insurance plans typically cost in your community?
5. To what extent are routine inpatient, outpatient and ambulatory procedures are available at hospitals serving the low income community? SCALE 1-10
6. How long do low income patients typically have to wait to be seen for routine services and procedures at area hospitals?
7. To what extent do hospitals and/or community organizations sponsor support groups for families of patients and patients (e.g., burn care families, trauma families, single-mother newborns)? SCALE 1-10
8. To what extent are there specialists available in the low income community? SCALE 1-10
9. To what extent are low income individuals able to choose a primary care provider that they will establish and maintain a relationship (as opposed to reporting to a clinic and seeing whoever is available on any given day)? SCALE 1-10

MIS Questions

1. Has medical or prescription co-pays and deductions
2. Good health
3. Temporary health problems
4. Chronic health problems
5. Needs in-home health worker
6. Needs a home chore worker
7. Needs hospice services
8. Needs immunization services
9. Needs medical services
10. Needs dental services
11. Needs vision services
12. Needs drug/alcohol abuse services
13. Needs counseling services
14. Needs mental health services
15. Needs prescription medications
16. Needs family planning
17. Need prenatal care

Potential Partners

Local Physicians, nurses
Local Clinics or hospital personnel
Local County Health Offices
http://www.dhss.mo.gov/LPHA/index.html

Related plans

Health Improvement Plans– community health plans developed in many of the state counties through the local health departments.

ADDITIONAL GENERAL STATISTICAL DATA

Data Elements:
Population Change (2000-Current)
Most current population estimates
2000 population by sex and age
Poverty rate per county
Number of children in poverty
Number of households in poverty
Number of seniors in poverty
Number homicides
Number domestic violence incidents
Number of juvenile court referrals
Immigration statistics (Change 2000-Current)

PART 2 – ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION
STRATEGIC THINKING RELATIVE TO THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The agency's vision should help to guide the next step of this process – the analysis of information. What makes a community needs assessment conducted by Community Action unique is the framework by which this analysis takes place. The mission and vision of each agency and community action in general sets the tone for success.

- Is the vision of the organization to eliminate poverty? If so, the strategic thinking should push beyond continuing operating programs as has been done in the past. This is not to say current programs would be eliminated - however, they may be changed to insure that the outcome of eliminating poverty can be achieved. Will an agency totally eliminate poverty - no, for as people move up and out, there will always be others who, due to circumstances, will find themselves living on the edge and in need of assistance. However, within the frame of eliminating poverty one might ask when looking at the information, – is this particular data a result of poverty or a cause of poverty or is the community's view of poverty realistic and how might it be changed to help eliminate poverty.
- Is an agency's vision to stabilize families? Programs then can be thought of as tools to stabilize situations for families who can then begin the journey out of poverty. One might ask questions such as what are the trends and causes of changes in data so that positive changes might be replicated.

The percentage or amount of time, finances, and staff to dedicate to each form of the analysis is up to each agency and the following questions are posed to help look at the data and information and help set the framework for moving into the next step of the planning process – prioritizing the issues to address and choosing what activities to focus on to best address the issue.

Why should the information be analyzed?

The information gathered is just that – information. The data (both statistical and agency gathered) gives a snapshot of the real and perceived conditions in the region. Analysis provides the opportunity to not only look at needs but also discuss various assets the community has that can be brought to the table at the time of solutions. It puts the data into context. Without context, the information is meaningless.

Who should be involved in the strategic thinking relative to the analysis?

Needs assessments and their analysis provides an agency an opportunity to educate the board and staff about the community as a whole, discuss service delivery, and develop ways to work across programs to address the needs of the community. Oftentimes, agency staff has ideas as to how to coordinate services and programs, but do not take the time to develop these ideas further. A cross functional team representing different programs and different levels within the agency and inclusive of interested Action Agency board members as well as members of the Head Start Policy Council can lay the foundation as the agency moves from the needs assessment to the strategic plan, and the development of programs and activities. In addition, partners and stakeholders in the community can be a part of the analysis of the data and information. While

they may not be involved in the decision making regarding the setting of action steps and implementation, they can offer insight to data and information from a different prospective.

SUGGESTED PARTICIPANTS

- Agency staff (frontline, middle management and upper management)
- Member(s) of the Board of Directors
- Member(s) of Head Start Policy Council
- Member(s) of other advisory and related internal boards (Housing Agency)
- Community stakeholders (service providers, local government planners)

STEP 1

Prior to assessing each issue area the group should discuss general and issue specific statistical data. What does the population information show? Is there a growing minority population? Are many persons moving out of the area? How many persons, children, and elderly are in poverty and has this changed over the years?

STEP 2

The group can then break into smaller sub groups if desired to discuss the statistical data and agency gathered data related to each issue area. The agency gathered information brings to the discussion those perceived issues as well as an understanding of what is taking place in the community. This discussion time may also lead to some ideas for possible programs, outreach, and coordination. If this happens, make note of the ideas for future use by those preparing the strategic plan, but do not become sidetracked by determining solutions, as this is still the analysis stage. After discussing the issue areas, the groups can then report back to the larger body for the issue prioritization.

SUGGESTED ISSUE AREA QUESTIONS:

Suggested questions listed under each issue area are provided to facilitate the analysis discussion. The CCNWBT document will provide some analysis of the statistical data, but the analysis should go deeper to bring together the agency gathered information.

The questions also ask about identifying root causes to an issue. A root cause is the basic reason a problem exits. Understanding the root cause to an issue provides a basis for solving the problem. It can be used to find which individual factors could provide targets for change, it can explore social causes, and it can uncover multiple solutions for a problem. The appendix provides a sample of using the “But Why” technique to help identify root causes to problems.

ISSUE AREA - EMPLOYMENT

What do the information gathered and plans reviewed tell us about the community?

- Is the unemployment rate low? If so, do businesses have a difficult time finding employees?
- Are there a variety of jobs available requiring different job skills? Do the jobs available predominately require only one or two types of skills?
- How close are the average county wages to the wage needed for a family to be self sufficient? Are there plans for increasing the wages in the community?
- What appear to be the predominate barriers to employment in the area?
- Is it easy for an individual to get to work? Are the community residences commuting to areas of higher wage jobs?
- Is child care readily available? Is there a need for child care outside the ‘normal working hours’?
- Are resources available to help persons find employment? How far must one travel to access these services?

What might be some of the root causes of the problems identified by this data?

What assets does the community have in this issue area?

- Are vacant buildings available to be used for training purposes?
- Are the job skills that are prevalent in the community ones that can be used to attract or start new businesses?

ISSUE AREA - EDUCATION

Will addressing this issue eliminate poverty or stabilize a family to help them move out of poverty?

What does the information gathered and plans reviewed tell us about the community?

- Is there a high incidence of students not completing high school? If so, are they able to get their GED? If there is a high incidence of drop-out and low GED attainment - why? Is there a correlation between low unemployment and high drop out rate? Is the drop out rate related to mothers giving birth?
- Where do students go after graduation? How many graduate from college?
- Is child care available for students to remain in school? Is child care available for adults to return to school or further their education? Do the hours of child care services relate to educational opportunities? (For instance, is care available for evening learning classes)
- Are there eligible children not taking advantages of Head Start or Early Head Start programs?
- Are there transportation issues affecting a family’s ability to access education?

What might be some of the root causes of the problems identified by the data?

What assets does the community have in this issue area?

- If a high number of students are remaining in the community, how can they participate in community work?
- Can an empty school building be used for other purposes?

ISSUE AREA - HOUSING

Will addressing this issue eliminate poverty or stabilize a family to help them move out of poverty?

What does the information gathered and plans reviewed tell us about the community?

- Is there sufficient diverse affordable housing in the community?
- Are financing alternatives available for homeownership?
- What is the connection between ‘use of income’ credit issues to housing?
- Are utility rates creating a burden for community members?
- What is the relationship between available housing and homelessness in the community?

What would be some of the root causes of the problems identified by the data?

What assets does the community have in this issue area?

- Can the foreclosed houses be used for other purposes in the neighborhood?
- Are local lenders able to partner with you in providing classes or information on homeownership?
- What are the talents of the homeless population that could be tapped into for the betterment of the community?

ISSUE AREA - NUTRITION

Will addressing this issue eliminate poverty or stabilize a family to help them move out of poverty?

What does the information gathered and plans reviewed tell us about the community?

- Are eligible children who receive access to meals during the school year receiving meals during the summer?
- Why would persons be utilizing the food banks on a regular basis?
- Is food accessible? (grocery stores, farmers markets)
- What type of food is accessible?
- Does transportation needs affect access to food?

What would be some of the root causes of the problems identified by the data?

What assets does the community have in this issue area?

- Are vacant lots available for development of community gardens?

- Is there a community kitchen available for training of food preparation and cooking classes?
- Do individuals want to start their own businesses related to food and food products?

ISSUE AREA - USE OF INCOME

Will addressing this issue eliminate poverty or stabilize a family to help them move out of poverty?

What does the information gathered and plans reviewed tell us about the community?

- Is there an apparent demand for budget information?
- Does the number of check cashing facilities reflect on a need not met by the financial institutions?
- Does the use of pawn shops reflect on the need for monthly cash or the need for cash to meet emergency needs?
- What are sources for emergency funds in the community?
- What educational information may be needed relating to use of income?

What would be some of the root causes of the problems identified by the data?

What assets does the community have in this issue area?

ISSUE AREA - TRANSPORTATION

Will addressing this issue eliminate poverty or stabilize a family to help them move out of poverty?

What does the information gathered and the plans reviewed tell us about the community?

- Is there a relationship between employment and transportation (commuting, public transportation access)
- Is there a need for personal vehicles to help in transportation needs?
- Is there a relationship between access to food and transportation?
- How close are major services (education, health care, employment opportunities, and grocers) to the community?

What would be some of the root causes of the problems identified by the data?

What assets does the community have in this issue area?

- Are there abandoned railways, trails, or other areas that can be transformed to other transportation modes (bikeways, walkways)?

- Are there buses no longer in use that can be used for transporting people to jobs, medical centers, or commercial areas?

ISSUE AREA - HEALTH

Will addressing this issue eliminate poverty or stabilize a family to help them move out of poverty?

What does the data tell us about the community?

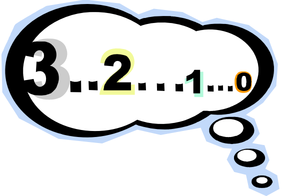
- Is there a relationship between access to health care and health care costs?
- How long does it take for an individual or family to get access to a doctor or to dental services?
- How far are emergency services from the community and what is the transportation means to access these services?
- Do the businesses in the community offer health insurance?
- Are there any excessive health concerns or conditions (pockets of chronic disease, high numbers of disease or indicators)?

What would be some of the root causes of the problems identified by the data?

What assets does the community have in this issue area?

- Are there retired medical personnel that could provide guidance on the issue?
- Are there buildings that could be converted to clinics in various areas of the community?
- Is there a possible alternative transportation method to get individuals to appointments?

PART 3 – ISSUE PRIORIZITATION



The last step in the needs assessment process is the prioritization of the issues to give the agency an idea of which area to focus on first. All of the issues are important and have an effect on poverty and the community. By prioritizing issues, an agency with limited time and resources can determine which issue to address, whether addressing one issue more comprehensively may help to solve other issues, and whether an agency should address an issue or let it be addressed by others. After prioritizing issues, the agency can then move on to determine goals, objectives and action steps for their strategic plan. Finally, prioritization can help the agency focus on areas for new funding, trying new strategies, developing more partnerships, integrating services and creating change.

Prioritization questions

One way to begin the process is to hold a general conversation around questions relative to each issue area.

1. What has been done in the past to address this issue?
2. Why should we be interested in this issue?
3. What can be done to address this issue?
4. Who (what agency, group, organization) should address this issue? Can the agency address the issue alone, who should partner with the agency to address the issue, who in the agency should address the issue?
5. Do we have control over this issue? Do we have control over an aspect of this issue? Control does not mean dominance. In this context it means the agency can actually effect change regarding the issue. For instance – can the agency create the jobs in the community, or can it train the potential employees for jobs that are created by others?
6. Do we have the capabilities (skills, funding, and knowledge) to address this issue? Do we have to spend time and resources learning new skills or programs to help address the issue?
7. What programs do we currently have that can help address this issue?
8. What might we change in our way of doing business that could help address the issue?
9. If this is an important issue and we do not have the capabilities to address the issue, who can we partner with to help create the change and address the issue?

Prioritization tools

There are various tools that can be used to help in the prioritization of issues. Through the analysis process a listing of issues more detailed than the general issue areas might have emerged (for instance, instead of addressing the broad area of housing, the issue may actually be the rising number of foreclosed houses in a neighborhood or community). Prioritization tools help in reducing the large listing of issues into manageable numbers.

1. *Nominal Group process*

One of the first ways to begin narrowing down the multiple lists of issues is to use a nominal group process. The most common way this is done is to put on a large paper all of the issues and give the individuals in the group a certain number of sticky notes/dots/or markers and let them 'vote' with those dots the issues of their highest priority. Individuals may place one dot/marker on each concern or they may place all their dots on one area if they believe it is the one that is of highest priority. Counting up the dots then provides a reduced list of issues to further refine.

2. *Paired comparison technique*

By using a paired comparison technique, the team can decide on which issue or issues are a priority In addition, it may help in determining which issue or programs to consider reducing or eliminating. It directly compares one issue to another and allows for the group to decide between two equally important issues

Process:

Set up a matrix identifying all the issue areas you have ranked as most important You will only compare each set of issues once. Through your group discussions you may have determined sub parts of the broader issue categories that need addressing rather than the whole category. For instance, perhaps the graduation rates in the area are adequate; however there is a need for more pre-school services. The example below is utilizing the major categories; however, you should substitute other more defined issue areas that resulted from your discussions.

Initial Matrix for discussion

	Employment	Education	Housing	Nutrition	Use of Income	Transportation	Health
Employment	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨
Education		▨	▨	▨	▨	▨	▨
Housing			▨	▨	▨	▨	▨
Nutrition				▨	▨	▨	▨
Use of Income					▨	▨	▨
Transportation						▨	▨
Health							▨

Using information gained through your discussions of the issues, and thinking about whether addressing the issue will either end poverty or stabilize families the individuals in the group will choose one issue as a priority over the other. The group facilitator reads each possible pair and individuals vote on which is the preferred choice to address first.

EXAMPLE OF COMPARISON CHOICES

Comparison	Preferred Choice
Employment/Education	Employment
Employment/Housing	Housing
Employment/Nutrition	Employment
Employment/Use of Income	Use of Income
Employment/Transportation	Employment
Employment/Health	Health
Education/Housing	Housing
Education/Nutrition	Education
Education/Use of Income	Use of Income
Education/Transportation	Education
Education/Health	Health
Housing/Nutrition	Nutrition
Housing/Use of Income	Housing
Housing/Transportation	Housing
Housing/Health	Housing
Nutrition/Use of Income	Nutrition
Nutrition/Transportation	Nutrition
Nutrition/Health	Health
Use of Income/Transportation	Use of Income
Use of Income/Health	Health
Transportation/Health	Health

After all the issues are compared one to one they are scored as to how many times an issue was chosen.

EXAMPLE SCORING:

Issue	Times Chosen	Total
Employment	Xxx	3
Education	Xx	2
Housing	Xxxxx	5
Nutrition	Xxx	3
Use of Income	Xxx	3
Transportation		0
Health	Xxxxx	5

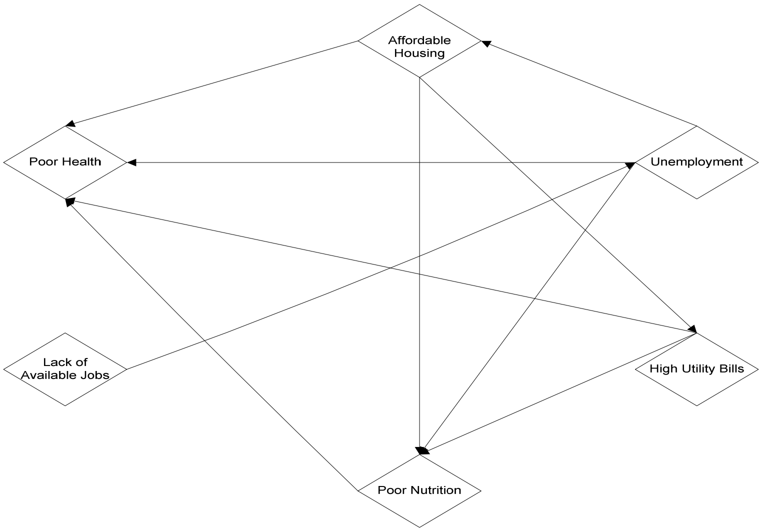
All ties go through the process again to come up with the prioritized issues. In this case, the new matrix would compare health, housing, employment, nutrition, and use of income. If another tie results, you would then repeat the process until a final prioritization results with no ties.

3. *Interrelationship Diagram*

A third way to help determine what issue to prioritize is to examine the interrelationships between the core causes of poverty. It helps you to see how addressing one issue may affect another issue.

Process:

Begin by listing the top 5 or 6 issues in a circle on a piece of paper. Starting with the first issue, ask whether addressing it will affect the next issue, the third issue, etc. If it will affect the issue, draw an arrow to the issue. If addressing the second issue however will affect the first, draw an arrow from #2 to #1.



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The issue having the most arrows going outward will have the most affect on the others and therefore might be the one to consider as the first priority.

4. *Force Field analysis*

A final tool to aid in prioritization takes a look at the various forces that are in play around the issue. What forces are keeping the situation the same? What forces are causing it to change?

Process:

The appendix shows a sample force field analysis sheet. List the issue in the center. On the left side, list all the forces for change and on the right side, list all the forces against change. For instance the issue area might be "Transportation does not meet the needs of the low income community."

Forces for change might include – employers want reliable workforce, families members will not need to provide transportation, it provides independence for individuals.

Forces against change might be – need to run buses past 'normal working hours', private sector transportation does not want competition.

Assign a score for the forces from 1 (weakest) to 5 (strongest) for each force. Add the scores to help determine what forces are dominate which can help to determine how to address the issue.

How to come up with final priorities?

The final priorities are actually a balancing between looking at the various results of the tools, discussing the issues relations to the agency's mission and vision, and looking at existing funding, knowledge and assets. There are no 'right or wrong' final priorities. Each agency's priorities will be different. The key to the selection of the priorities is the fact they were determined by going through an analytical process and the decision was based on a reasonable set of results. After prioritization, the document is ready to be written and the first phase of the Higher Ground project is considered complete.

PART 4 – STRATEGIC PLANNING AND LOGIC MODELS

THE NEXT STEPS

The next step in the *Higher Ground* process is the preparation of the strategic plan. Quoting from the Higher Ground initiative:

> "The strategic plan is a three year disciplined coordinated, systematic and sustained effort that will enable an agency to fulfill its mission and achieve its vision. The strategic plan should be reviewed annually to monitor progress and ensure alignment with other planning cycles. It establishes imperatives, goals, strategies, performance measures and targets for the organization that can be used as a management and communications tool."

This final chapter provides an introduction to the logic model and how this process can be used for multiple funding sources.

Many funding sources require strategic plans although terminology might differ somewhat in the actual planning document. For instance one funder might use the term goal meaning an achievable outcome within a one year period, while another refers to an outcome as a long term goal. Therefore it is important to understand the terminology per funder. Once that is understood, however, it becomes easy to fit the strategic plan within each funders frame.

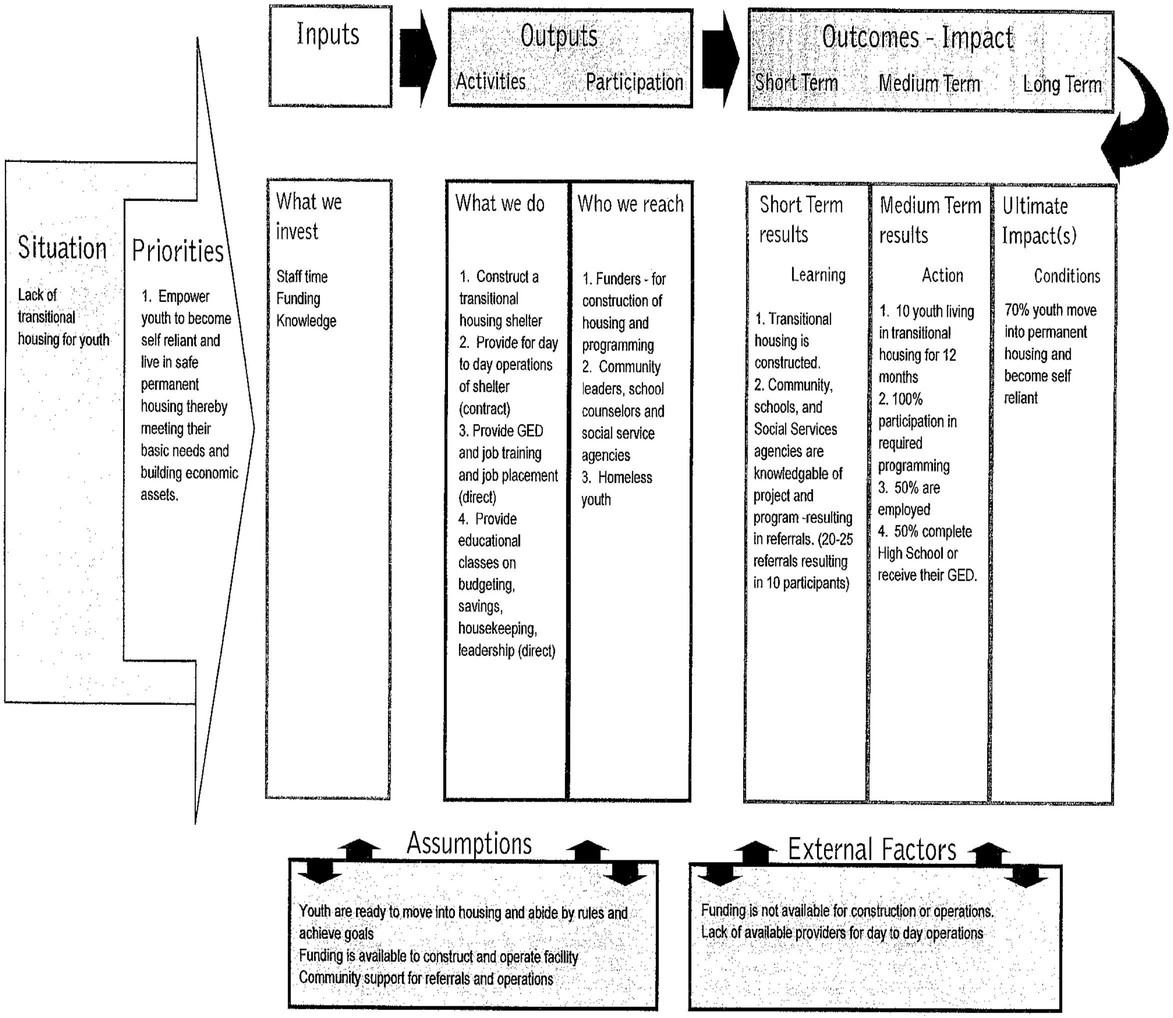
Similarly different funders define logic models in slightly different ways, and understanding this can help in matching the prioritized issues for different funders. The samples on the following pages show how a project can be adapted to flow for two different types of funder logic models.

EXAMPLE OF LOGIC MODELS
PROJECT: Development of a Transitional Housing Complex for Homeless Youth

COMMUNITY SERVICES BLOCK GRANT LOGIC MODEL
STRATEGIC COMMITMENT: Assure that all people have their basic needs met.

PROBLEM	CONDITION	CAUSE(S)	OUTCOME(S)	INDICATOR(S)	TARGET(S)	STRATEGY(S)	PROGRAM(S)
Community, Family or Agency issue, need or condition.	What is the condition of poverty that will be addressed?	What is creating this problem?	What change do we want? What difference will we make? So What?	How will we measure this change? When will we know we have achieved it?	What is our goal?	What will our intervention be?	What funding sources will the agency secure to support this strategy?
A. Homeless youth are unable to meet their basic needs.	Inadequate housing availability	A1. Lack of transitional housing for youth to stay in for 12-18 months	A1. Obtain safe affordable housing	6.4.a (Number and percentage of families that obtain safe and stable housing) 1.2h (Obtain safe and affordable housing in support of employment stability) 2.1.b (Safe and affordable housing units created in the community)	10 youth 5 youth 5 units	Planning, funding, and construction of the housing	Missouri Housing Trust Fund Department of Housing and Urban Development
	Inadequate education and illiteracy	A2. Lack of support systems or knowledge of support systems for homeless youth	A2. Homeless youth have increased knowledge of and a greater support system established to help them implement their goals and avoid risk taking behaviors.	1.3b.1 (Number and percentage able to complete and maintain a budget for over 90 days) 6.3b.1,2, and 3 (Youth improve physical health and development, youth improve social and emotional development, youth avoid rick taking behavior over a period of time)	7	Life Skills Education Financial Education Comprehensive Assessment Referral and Follow up	Community Services Block Grant Homeless and Runaway Youth Program

MISSOURI HOUSING TRUST FUND LOGIC MODEL



Situation

Lack of transitional housing for youth

Priorities

1. Empower youth to become self reliant and live in safe permanent housing thereby meeting their basic needs and building economic assets.

What we invest

Staff time
Funding
Knowledge

What we do

1. Construct a transitional housing shelter
2. Provide for day to day operations of shelter (contract)
3. Provide GED and job training and job placement (direct)
4. Provide educational classes on budgeting, savings, housekeeping, leadership (direct)

Who we reach

1. Funders - for construction of housing and programming
2. Community leaders, school counselors and social service agencies
3. Homeless youth

Short Term results

Learning

1. Transitional housing is constructed.
2. Community, schools, and Social Services agencies are knowledgable of project and program -resulting in referrals. (20-25 referrals resulting in 10 participants)

Medium Term results

Action

1. 10 youth living in transitional housing for 12 months
2. 100% participation in required programming
3. 50% are employed
4. 50% complete High School or receive their GED.

Ultimate Impact(s)

Conditions

70% youth move into permanent housing and become self reliant

Assumptions

Youth are ready to move into housing and abide by rules and achieve goals
Funding is available to construct and operate facility
Community support for referrals and operations

External Factors

Funding is not available for construction or operations.
Lack of available providers for day to day operations

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APPENDIX

DEFINITIONS

Comprehensive Family, Community, Agency Assessment Report– the completed assessment document inclusive of data, analysis, and prioritizations of actions required by the Higher Ground Initiative

Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment Web Based Tool – the web based tool developed by CARES that provides statistical data for needs assessment work

Community Needs Assessment Tool Kit – the tool provided to act as a guide for conduction of the needs assessment process

Comprehensive Family, Community, Agency Needs Assessment Process – A comprehensive approach to gathering data on the community, families, and the agency, using a variety of methods as well as analyzing the information and prioritizing so the agency can complete the next ROMA step of planning and meet the expectations of Higher Ground

Higher Ground Initiative - – an initiative moving Missouri agencies to a three year Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) cycle which will ensure local needs are met, document results, ensure focus on what agencies do (not how dollars are spent), allow CSBG to support other programs and ensure good management practices

Conducting Focus Groups

THE COMMUNTIY TOOLBOX, UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

Contributed by Bill Berkowitz Edited by Phil Rabinowitz

What is a focus group?

A focus group is a small-group discussion guided by a trained leader. It is used to learn more about opinions on a designated topic, and then to guide future action.

Examples:

- A focus group of parents of pre-schoolers meets to discuss child care needs. Parents share their views on local child care programs, and on what could be done to improve them.
- A focus group of senior citizens meets at the new senior center. What do they think of the programs being offered? What are their own suggestions and ideas?

An agency wants to open a group home for mentally handicapped adults in a quiet residential area. It convenes a group of prospective neighbors. What are their concerns? Can this work out?

How are focus groups different from regular "groups"?

A focus group is different in three basic ways:

1. The main difference is that it is focused. The group has a specific discussion topic. The group's task is to stay on it, and not wander all over the place.
2. The group has a trained leader, or facilitator. The leader's job is to keep the group on course.
3. The group's composition and the group discussion are carefully planned to create a nonthreatening environment, in which people are free to talk openly. Members are actively encouraged to express their own opinions, and also respond to other members, as well as to questions posed by the leader.

Because focus groups are structured and directed, but also expressive, they can yield a lot of information in a relatively short time.

Why are focus groups used?

Focus groups help people learn more about group or community opinions and needs. In this respect, they are similar to needs assessment surveys. But needs assessment surveys typically have written, closed-ended, relatively narrow questions which are quantitatively scored. The person being surveyed often responds with a numerical rating, rather than with a verbal statement. Such surveys can be very useful; but they usually can't capture all that a person is thinking or feeling. Responses in a focus group, on the other hand, are typically spoken, open - ended, relatively broad, and qualitative. They have more depth, nuance, and variety. Nonverbal communications and group interactions can also be observed.

Focus groups can therefore get closer to what people are really thinking and feeling, even though their responses may be harder -- or impossible -- to score on a scale.

Which is better? Both of these methods are useful. And both can be used together, to complement each other. Which should you use in a specific situation? That depends upon your own needs and purposes, and the resources available to you. The next heading explains this further.

When should you use a focus group?

- When you are considering the introduction of a new program or service.
- When your main concern is with depth of opinion, or shading of opinion, rather than simply with whether people agree or disagree.
- When you want to ask questions that can't easily be asked or answered on a written survey.
- When you want to supplement the knowledge you can gain from written surveys.
- When you know, or can find someone, who is an experienced and skilled group leader.
- When you have the time, knowledge, and resources to recruit a willing group of focus group participants.

Try this exercise:

Here are several situations when you might want to know more about community opinions before taking action. How useful would a focus group be in each case?

1. A new strain of flu is going around. Half the town seems to be catching it. What should be done about it?
2. A wave of break-ins has hit a nearby neighborhood. How can this be stopped?
3. A new playground is being planned. What features should go into it?

Our viewpoints:

1. Controlling the flu is not a matter of citizen opinion, but rather of medical facts, and of public health prevention and treatment. A focus group is probably not helpful here.
2. Increased police presence may help; but a structured discussion among neighbors might hit upon other useful solutions. A focus group could be quite worthwhile.
3. Citizen input is definitely called for here. A focus group could be an ideal way for finding it out.

A focus group is not for every social situation. But it can be useful in many situations where action should be guided by public opinion.

The Pros and Cons of Groups

Should you collect your opinions from groups, or from individuals? The focus groups are, of course, groups. Most surveys, though, cover one person at a time. One advantage of focus groups is depth and complexity of response, as mentioned before. And group members can often stimulate new thoughts for each other, which might not have otherwise occurred. But there are some downsides, too. For example, focus groups usually take more time per respondent than individual surveys -- because the group has to be recruited, and because the group itself takes time. Some group members might feel hesitant about speaking openly. And the focus group leader may sometimes need to be paid.

Of course, it's also possible to combine the advantages of both methods, and interview one person at a time in depth. But this can be time-consuming, and take more resources than you have on hand.

Consider your own situation.
How do these factors trade off?
What is the best solution for you?

Suppose you decide to conduct a focus group. This could be a good decision. Now, how to do it? Here is a step-by-step approach, with some comments attached. We think this may work for you.

How do you run a focus group?

Before you begin

1. **Recheck your goals. <u>Ask</u>:**
    - "Why do I want to conduct a focus group?"
    - "Why am I you doing this?"
    - "What do I hope to learn?"
2. **Consider other methods**.
    Are you planning to use <u>other</u> methods for learning about opinions as well?
    - If yes, which ones, and why?
    - If no, is this the single best method to use to find out what you want?

In other words, so far:
Think before you start.
Look before you leap.

3. **Find a good leader**.
    This is not a casual matter: Your leader will determine the success of your group. What kind of leader do you want? Probably someone who:
    - Has experience facilitating groups
    - Knows something about the topic at
    - Will relate well to the focus group participants
    - Will work together with you to give you the outcomes you want

    Take a careful look around. Perhaps you can find the right leader within your own organization. It's possible you can do the job yourself (but don't overestimate [or underestimate] your own abilities.) Depending on the situation, you might consider looking for someone outside your organization, someone that specializes in facilitating these kinds of groups.
4. **Find a recorder**.
    A small but important point, often neglected. You want to make sure people's ideas don't get lost. Someone should be writing down what is said, in the same way as taking minutes at a meeting. Arrange for this in advance. (Alternatively, you can tape-record, with the group's permission. This will take more time -- to transcribe the tape, and interpret the transcription-- but you will have a more complete, accurate, and permanent record.)
5. **Decide who should be invited**.
    Ideally, those invited should be a <u>representative sample</u> of those whose opinions you are concerned about.

    Suppose you're concerned about the opinions of public housing tenants. You would then want to spread your invitations across the different public housing facilities in your community -- not just the best, or the worst, or the most vocal.

Or suppose you are concerned about the opinions of Main Street shopkeepers. Get a complete list. Select a representative group, for example by size, type, or whether they have local or outside ownership. You probably want to hear from all kinds of businesses; so make sure you do.

You could even pull the names out of a hat. (This approaches a "random sample.") Or, better yet, if you had time, you could run several different groups, to include more people, and more different kinds of people.

6. **Decide about incentives**.

   That is, should you offer an incentive for people to participate? Maybe not. In that case, why should people come? What's in it for them?

   Possibly people will come just because they want to help. Or because they think they will meet other interesting people, or learn something, or just have fun. Maybe the novelty of the experience itself will be a motivator. And maybe all these reasons are true. (Or at least people believe them.)

   But maybe those reasons aren't enough, and some other incentive is called for. Money is one; sometimes focus group members get paid, even a small amount. (Focus group leaders may get paid, too.) If you can afford this, consider it. If you can't, then think about other possible incentives: food and drink (more than chips and soda?); public recognition; something to take home; a later training opportunity. What will do the job?

7. **Decide on the meeting particulars**.

   Specifically:

   - What day?
   - What place?
   - What time?
   - How long?
   - How many groups?

   Pin these down before you start signing people up.

8. **Prepare your questions**.

   When you go into the group, go in prepared. Don't wing it. Instead, you should make up (and write out in advance) a list of topics you want to and questions you want to ask. This doesn't mean you will recite your questions from your prepared list, one-at-a-time. Your question list is a guide, rather than an exact script; but have that guide with you.

9. **Recruit your members**.

   Call them up. Write them a letter. Or find them.

   Remember:

   - Other things equal, personal contact works best.
   - Stress your benefits. Why should people come?

10. **Double-check**.

    Review the arrangements. Is everything ready to go?

    "Preparation is ___% of success." (We don't know the exact percentage, but we do know it's high!)

    When the group meets

11. **Conduct the group**.

A common sequence of events for many focus groups goes something like this: (The leader usually takes responsibility for carrying them out.)

- Thank people for coming.
- Review the purpose of the group, and the goals of the meeting. Set the stage.
- Go over the flow of the meeting -- how it will proceed, and how the members can contribute. Lay out the ground rules. Encourage open participation..
- Set the tone.
  This is important, because probably few of your members will have been in a focus group before.
- Ask an opening question. This could be a very general question ("What are your general thoughts about X?"), or something more specific. Both choices are justifiable; and both types of questions might be asked before the group ends.
- Make sure that all opinions on that question get a chance to be heard. How do you do this?

Some common techniques:

- Summarize what you think you have heard, and ask if the group agrees;
- Phrase the same question in a different way;
- Ask if anyone else has any comments on that question;
- Ask a follow-up question;
- Look around the room, and make brief eye contact, especially with those who may not have spoken.
-

Reminder #1: Be sure to record. If the group is not being tape-recorded, someone should be writing the key points down.

Reminder #2: Of course, the leader's job is to elicit opinion, and not judge it. All opinions should be supported. Judgments come later.

- Ask your next question -- and proceed with other questions in the same general manner.
  The phrasing of the questions, the follow-ups, the ordering of the questions, and how much time to spend on each one are points that the leader will have to decide -- sometimes on the spot. An experienced leader will be able to do this. This is why you have spent time looking for one!
- When all your questions have been asked, and before the group ends, ask if anyone has any other comments to make. This can be an effective way of gathering other opinions that have not yet been voiced.
- Tell the members about any next steps that will occur, and what they can expect to happen now.
- Don't forget to thank the group for coming!

After the meeting

12. **Look at the data**.

If you have tape-recorded, make a transcript. If not, make a written summary from the group notes. But in any case, look closely at the information you have collected.

- What patterns emerge?
- What are the common themes?

  - What new questions arise?
  - What conclusions seem true?

  In some cases, you can devise and use a coding system to "score" the data and count the number of times a particular theme is expressed. Experience helps here. But whether you do this or not, try to have more than one person review the results independently. (Because even the best of us have our biases.) Then come together to compare your interpretations and conclusions.

13. **Share results with the group**.

    They gave you their time. The least you can do is to give them some feedback -- it's an obligation that you have. This can be done by mail, phone, or email if you'd like. Sometimes it's even possible to bring the group back for a second session, to review results, verify their accuracy, and/or explore other themes.

    And note: Perhaps members have now become more interested in the issue, and would like to get more involved. Consider offering them an opportunity to do so. A focus group, indirectly, can be a recruiting tool.

14. **Use the results**.

    Of course, this isn't part of the group itself - at least not directly. But collecting useful information was the reason you wanted to do a focus group in the first place. Now you've got what you wanted. You have the opportunity, and perhaps also the responsibility, to put it to use. You can improve the situation that originally motivated you, and made you think about a focus group at the very beginning.

What kind of questions do you ask in a focus group?

Below are some examples of general questions. These apply largely to groups discussing a current program or service, but they can be adjusted for planned (as vs. current) programs, as well as for groups dealing with other concerns. The precise language and order of presentation will depend on your topic and group, but some of these questions may be adapted to your own needs.

- "What are some of your thoughts about what's going on now?"
- "Would you say you are satisfied with the current situation, with the way things are going on?"
- (If so) "What are you satisfied about? Why is that?" (*Or, "What's going well...?"*)
- "Are there things you are dissatisfied about, that you would like to see changed?" (*Or, "What's not going well...?"*)
- (If so) "What are they? Why is that? How should they change? What kinds of things would you like to see happen?"
- "How about this particular aspect (of the topic). What do you think about that?"
- *Repeat for different aspects of the topic, with variations in style. For example, if the main focus group topic was "community policing," some key aspects to cover might be visibility, sensitivity, interaction, respect, etc.*
- "Some people have said that one way to improve **X** is to do is to do **Y**.
- Do you agree with this?' (*Or, "How do you feel about that?"*)
- "Are there other recommendations that you have, or suggestions you would like to make?"
- "Are there other things you would like to say before we wind up?"

- Some "probes, or follow-ups, designed to get more information on a given question:

"Can you say more about that?"
"Can you give an example?"
"Jane says **X**. How about some others of you. What do you think?"
"How about you, Joe. [Or, "you folks in the corner over there...."] Do you have some thoughts on this?"
"Does anyone else have some thoughts on that?"

Conducting Needs Assessment Surveys

THE COMMUNITY TOOLBOX, UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

Contributed by Bill Berkowitz and Jenette Nagy

What is a needs assessment survey?

Very briefly, it's a way of asking group or community members what they see as the most important needs of that group or community. The results of the survey then guide future action. Generally, the needs that are rated most important are the ones that get addressed.

Depending on your resources (time, money, and people) a needs assessment survey may take many different forms. It can be as informal as asking around with people you know in your community: your postal carrier, the people you work with, the woman at the corner gas station. Or, it could take the form of a professionally-written survey that is mailed to hundreds of people.

In general, however, true needs assessment surveys have some common characteristics:

- They have a pre-set list of questions to be answered.
- They have a pre-determined sample the number and types of people to answer these questions are chosen in advance.
- They are done by personal interview, phone, or by written response (e.g., a mail-in survey).
- The results of the survey are tabulated, summarized, distributed, discussed, and (last, but not least) used.

What is a need?

In most needs assessment surveys, a need means something that specifically relates to a particular group or community. It's not usually a universal need, such as the need for food or affection. But it's more than an individual need, as in I need a new couch for the living room, or I really need a vacation. Those may truly be needs, but they are not generally the types of needs that are assessed in needs assessment surveys.

Instead, such a survey usually asks about needs that concern your particular community or group. This could include hundreds of possibilities, ranging from trash on the streets to vandalism, or from stores moving out of downtown to ethnic or racial conflict. These are examples of needs that might be perceived as a group or community issue or problem.

- Note that some surveys are very **broad**, and ask about any and all kinds of needs. Others are **narrow**, and limit themselves to learning more about one or two. Broad and narrow surveys are both often done; both are worthwhile; which one to do depends on what you want to find out.

Why should you do a needs assessment survey?

Try out these reasons. Do they make sense for you?

- To learn more about what your group or community needs are. A good survey can supplement your own sharp-eyed observations and experiences.

  It can give you detailed information from a larger and more representative group of

people than you could get from observation alone.
- To get a more honest and objective description of needs than people might tell you publicly.
- To become aware of possible needs that you never saw as particularly important or that you never even knew existed.
- To document your needs, as is required in many applications for funding, and as is almost always helpful in advocating or lobbying for your cause.
- To make sure any actions you eventually do get involved in are in line with needs that are expressed by the community.

And also for two more reasons, which are less commonly understood:

- To get more group and community support for the actions you will soon undertake. That's because if people have stated a need for a particular course of action, they are more likely to support it. And, for the same reason....
- To get more people actually involved in the subsequent action itself.

When should you do a needs assessment survey?

Some good times to do a survey include:

- When your group is just starting out
- When there is doubt as to what the most important needs are
- When your group members disagree on this point among themselves
- When you need to convince outside funders or supporters that you are addressing the most important community problems (Sometimes, these assessments are required.)
- When the community asks you to do it
- When you want to be sure that you will have community support for whatever you choose to do.

And are there times when you shouldn't?

There are. A needs assessment is not necessary before every action, and especially:

- When there is *absolutely no doubt* what the most important needs in the group or community are
- When it is urgent to act right now, without delay
- When a recent assessment has already been done, and it is clear that the needs have not changed
- When you feel the community would see an assessment as redundant or wasteful, and that it would be harmful to your cause

How do these factors bear upon your own situation now? Do you think things would work better if you had some needs assessment data to guide you?

And please note: There are other ways to learn about community needs. You can do **interviews** with community members, or conduct **observations**, or study community **records**. And certainly, you should always check about past surveys that might have been done before, and use them as best you can. Don't reinvent the wheel!

How do you carry out a needs assessment survey?

A step by step approach

Here's an important point to consider: Most effective community actions start with thought. That thought takes place not in the community, but inside the thinker's head. Needs assessment surveys are no exception. So if you choose to do a survey here are some internal steps you (or your group) should take, and decisions you should make, before any information is collected at all:

Helpful hint: An assessment can be done by one person, acting alone. But generally speaking, a needs assessment survey will be more effective and more useful if it is designed and carried out by a group. This is especially true when no one has special experience in this field. In most needs assessment cases, many heads will usually be better than one. So try to assemble a small group of interested people to help you answer the questions below, make decisions, and carry out the job.

1. Ask yourself: What are my reasons for choosing to do this survey? Why am I getting involved in this? The answers may be immediately clear to you. They may also include many of the reasons previously listed. But perhaps your reasons are not entirely clear. Asking these questions gives you the chance to become clearer.

2. Ask yourself: What are my goals in doing this survey? What do I want to get out of it? How will the results be used? Again, your goals (and uses) may be very apparent; they may also relate to your reasons above. But you ought to be able to state them before you begin.

3. Ask yourself: Am I ready (or, Is my group ready?) to conduct this survey? Am I prepared to do the work that needs to be done, with high-quality effort ? Before you begin, make sure your answer is Yes.

Our point of view: These three questions may seem obvious or trivial; but they are neither. Much success in community work, as in life, depends on prior preparation, both technical and mental. **The better you are prepared, both technically and mentally, the more effective your work is likely to be.**

Now for the more technical side of things. We'll go through them, step by step:

4. Decide how much time do you have to do the survey, from start to finish? How much time can you allow? Your answer will depend upon what is already known; upon the size of your target group; upon the importance involved; and upon the resources you have at your disposal. (How many people can help? How much money is available to spend?)

If nothing is known, the community is large, resources are low, and importance is high, your survey may take considerable time, several months or even more. And properly so. But if the reverse is true, you could complete a good survey in a month or less.

These figures are approximations. We would like to be more specific, but that is hard to do. There is no one universal answer to How much time? A minimum standard might be this:

Collect enough reliable information from a representative group so that you are sufficiently confident in using that information to guide future action.
Apply this standard to your own situation. How much time do you think might be involved?

5. Decide: <u>How many people</u> are going to be asked? If you are surveying the needs of a small or even medium-sized group, you can (and should) include every single person. But suppose you have a neighborhood of 5,000 people, or a larger community still; you probably will not be able to ask everyone directly.
When the group is larger, you can make your survey available to everyone who wants to answer it. But a more objective technique, which will usually give you more reliable information, is to construct a sample a pre-determined percentage of the total group -- and to ask each member of the sample for their input.

6. Decide <u>what kinds of people</u> will be asked? For a smaller group, where you are asking everybody, this question will not arise. But with a larger group, when you are using a sample of the total population, you may want to be sure that certain parts of that population are included. For example, are you assessing community childcare needs? You'd then want to be sure to include parents of young children; and you might also survey or interview that group separately.

7. Decide <u>what questions</u> will be asked? These questions will depend upon the scope of the assessment. If you are asking about all possible needs in the community, then phrase your questions accordingly, and allow for a wide range of possible answers. On the other hand, if you are asking only about certain types of needs let's say transportation, or violence prevention then your questions will naturally be geared to transportation or violence prevention issues.
Either way, you have a choice between asking more quantitative, or closed-ended questions, and more qualitative, or open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions involve a choice among fixed alternatives -- you might state your degree of agreement with certain questions, or place your preferences in rank order. Open-ended questions allow more freedom; they give those answering the chance to say anything they want, even though the answers may be less precise. In many cases, your survey can include both types of questions.

8. Decide who will ask the questions? If you do interviews, the more people asking, the more ground you can cover; but the more interviewers will have to be trained. And they will need to be trained to use a standard procedure, so that results don't vary just because the interviewers operated differently. If you use written surveys, this question is less relevant; but even here, those who give out and collect the surveys should be thoroughly and uniformly instructed.
And remember: If you can, bring together a group to help you design the actual questions. Your group members will almost always think of good questions and ideas you wouldn't come up with alone.

9. Now that you've answered all the questions above, create a draft of the full survey. (Include the instructions; this is an often-neglected part of survey work, but don't forget it. Your instructions will set the tone for those who will be responding.)

10. Then, try out the survey on a test group. The test group should ideally be composed of the same kinds of people who will be taking the full survey. Why a test group? Because they will let you know if your instructions are clear and if your questions make sense. Even if your survey is perfectly clear to you, it may not be clear to them! You need to find this out before the full survey gets administered. Don't bypass this step your test group is like a trial run, or dress rehearsal, which will help you get rid of the rough spots before you hit the big time.

11. Revise the survey on the basis of your test group feedback. Sometimes this test-and-revision process may need to be repeated more than once.

12. Finally! When you are satisfied that all necessary revisions have been made, administer the survey to the people you have chosen.

13. Tabulate your results. For closed-ended questions, this can be a matter of simple addition. For open-ended questions, you can code the results into categories. What categories to use? Get some feedback from others, because the categories you decide on will shape how you interpret the data which is the next step.

Force Field Analysis Worksheet

Forces For Change	Score

CHANGE PROPOSAL

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Against Change	

Forces	Score

Analyzing Root Causes of Problems: The "But Why?" Technique

THE COMMUNITY
TOOLBOX, UNIVERSITY
OF KANSAS

Contributed by Christine Lopez, Adapted from Altman et al Edited by
Steve Fawcett

What are "root causes?"

Root causes are the basic reasons behind the problem or issue you are seeing in the community. Trying to figure out why the problem has developed is an essential part of the "problem solving process" in order to guarantee the right responses and also to help citizens "own" the problems.

What is the "but why?" technique?

The "But why?" technique is one method used to identify underlying causes oft a community issue. These underlying factors are called "root causes."

The "But why?" technique examines a problem by asking questions to find out what caused it. Each time an answer is given, a follow-up "But why?" is asked.

For example, if you say that too many people in poor communities have problems with alcoholism, you should ask yourself "but why?" Once you come up with an answer to that question, probe the answer with another "but why?" question, until you reach the root of the problem, the root cause.

Why should you identify root causes?

Identifying genuine solutions to a problem means knowing what the real causes of the problem are. Taking action without identifying what factors contribute to the problem can result in misdirected efforts, and that wastes time and resources. However, by thoroughly studying the cause of the problem, you can build ownership, that is, by experiencing the problem you will understand it better, and be motivated to deal with it.

The "But why?" technique can be used to discover basic or "root" causes either in individuals or broader social systems:

1. It can be used to find which *individual* factors could provide targets of change for your cause, such as levels of knowledge, awareness, attitudes, and behavior.

- Do people need more knowledge about nutrition?
- Do children need to learn refusal skills to avoid smoking?
- Do teenagers need to learn how to use contraceptives?

2. It can explore *social* causes. For example, it could help us determine why a certain neighborhood seems to have a higher rate of a specific problem. These social causes divide into three main sub-groups:

- Cultural factors, such as customs, beliefs, and values;
- Economic factors, such as money, land, and resources;
- Political factors, such as decision-making power.

3. It can uncover multiple solutions for a certain problem and allow the user to see alternatives that he or she might not have seen before. It increases the chances of choosing the right solution, because many aspects of the problem are explored during the "But why?" exercise.

When should you identify root causes?

- Whenever you are faced with addressing a challenging community problem. Of course, the "But why?" technique is not always your best bet and should not be used 100% of the time. It's extremely efficient to find a variety of solutions and is a quick and inexpensive technique that can be done by anyone, at any time, anywhere. For some issues, however, you should use more sophisticated methods, such as surveys, interviews and data collecting.
- When there is support for a "solution" that does not seem to get at the real causes of the problem. For example, if there is hunger in community, let's distribute free turkey at Thanksgiving.
- When there is ignorance or denial of why a community problem exists.

How does the "but why" technique work?

Technique Guide

Here's how it works. A group examines a community problem by asking what caused it. Each time someone gives an answer, the "asker" continues to probe, mostly by asking "But why?" or "How could that have been prevented." Example:

Problem:

Too many (too few) people are ________.

Q: But why?
A. Because...

Q: But why?
A. Because...

Q: Could that have been prevented?
A. Yes

Q: How?

Q: But why?
A. Because...

Q. But why?
A. Because...

Q But why?
(and so forth)

1. First, invite people who are both affected by the problem and are in a position to contribute to the solution (see Chapter 18, Section 3: *Identifying Targets and agents of Change: Who Can Benefit and Who Can Help*) to brainstorm possible causes. The more representative the working group is, the more likely it is for the root causes to be uncovered.

2. The working group should then examine a community problem, such as substance abuse or violence, by asking what caused it. Each time someone gives an answer, the group asks, "But why?" Here's an example:

Problem:

A child has an infected foot.

Q: But why?
A. She stepped on broken glass while walking.

Q: Could that have been prevented?
A. Yes.

Q: How?
A. She could have been wearing shoes.

Q: But why doesn't the child have shoes?
A. Because the family can't afford shoes.

Q. But why?
A. The father or mother has no job.

Q. But why?
(and so forth)

In this example, the "But why?" analysis leads to at least two very different conclusions. The criterion for choice between them is to look into the environment of each one. Many solutions may apply to your problem, so it's up to you to find the one that fits it better. The "But why?" analysis by itself doesn't lead automatically to the best solution. It just points out many paths you may take.

Resources

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