
TIP SHEET: CONDUCTING A COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

A community assessment should seek to understand both the community's needs and its assets. There are a variety of ways to collect this information. The method(s) you choose will depend upon your capacity and how thorough you would like to be. Whether you are a school leader or a community organization, taking stock of community needs, resources, strengths, history, and culture is an important step in deciding which partnerships you should pursue.

While there are many different ways to conduct a community assessment, the Office of Community Services (2012) identified the following six steps as key components of the process:¹

1. Define your scope. Narrow down the questions you want answered.
2. Do the assessment alone or collaborate with other schools or community organizations.
3. Collect data. Start with secondary source data (data that has already been collected). Follow up with primary source data (data that you collect) as needed.
4. Determine key findings.
5. Set priorities and create an action plan.
6. Share your findings.

Below is a quick catalog of methods and sources to help with the data collection portion of this process (steps 1 through 3).

SECONDARY DATA SOURCES:

Community Profile Websites: These sites are good places to start to learn more about the demographics of your community. Both allow you to access data at the city, county, or zip code level:

- **US Census Bureau:** <http://factfinder.census.gov/>
- **Kids Count Data Center:** <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>

District and School Profile Websites: Youth-serving organizations can start at these sites to identify which schools could be potential partners. It is also a good idea to go directly to the district or school website to see current opportunities and information on policies and procedures.

¹ Office of Community Services. (2012). CCF/SCF tools conducting a community assessment. Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/resource/conducting-a-community-assessment1#needsandassets>

- **The National Center for Education Statistics** allows you to generate a list of schools by city or by zip code at <http://nces.ed.gov/globallocator/>
- **The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction** provides a wealth of data that includes school report cards and district maps for public schools in Washington State at <http://www.k12.wa.us/>

Youth Program Directory (<http://youthprogramdirectory.org/>): Schools can peruse this online directory of youth-serving organizations in King County and find a list of programs and services available in their community (see our one-page guide to the Youth Program Directory for more information on this resource).

PRIMARY DATA STRATEGIES:

Cultural considerations should be taken into account when collecting primary data. As the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction points out:

As student demographics become increasingly diverse, schools should be increasingly adept at reaching out to people, organizations, and agencies that reflect the varied ethnic and cultural aspects of their school and community. Outreach strategies familiar to the White, dominant culture may not be effective in these communities.²

The **City of Seattle Office for Civil Rights** (2012) presented six essential strategies for inclusive engagement

1. Build personal relationships with target population.
2. Create a welcoming atmosphere.
3. Increase accessibility.
4. Develop alternative methods for engagement.
5. Maintain a presence within the community.
6. Partner with diverse organizations and agencies.³

Below are some guidelines and examples:

Surveys- Surveys are an efficient way to capture information from a large group of people. When designing a survey, it is a good idea to pre-test questions with an audience similar to your target audience. This helps to ensure that your questions are clear and comprehensible. Here are some examples of community surveys used by others:

² Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Strengthening Student Outcomes (July 2015). Retrieved from <http://www.k12.wa.us/SSEO/pubdocs/RedDisruptBehaviorMenuBestPracticesStrategies2015.pdf>

³ Seattle Office of Civil Rights. Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide (April 2009). Retrieved from <http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/RSJI/GRE/IOPEguide01-11-12.pdf>

- **Community Strengths and Needs Survey (from the Coalition of Community Schools):**
http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/COMM_STR_NEEDS_assessment_pdf.pdf
- **Road Map Family Engagement Survey (from the University of Washington):**
<https://education.uw.edu/unassigned/2015-users-guide-road-map-family-engagement-survey-data-inquiry-equitable-collaboration>

Focus Groups- Focus groups can be a good way to get unstructured, in-depth information from a smaller number of people. Focus groups give you the opportunity to meet face-to-face and ask follow-up questions. You can conduct focus groups with youth, families, community members, or current or potential service providers. More information can be found at:

- **Community Toolbox: Assessing Community Needs and Resources:**
<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conduct-focus-groups/main>
- **Needs Assessment Focus Group Toolkit:** <http://www.socialent.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/needs-assessment-focus-group-toolkit.pdf>

Interviews- Interviews with key stakeholders in the community can be a great way to learn more about what is needed and shows a genuine interest in getting to know the community. These can be conducted by phone or in-person. Think about people in your community that could be key informants. These might be local leaders such as city council members, faith-based leaders, directors of local non-profits, school officials, PTA leaders, or other high-profile individuals representing your constituents.

- Sample script for beginning a key informant interview:

“Hello, good morning/afternoon! My name is [your name]. I work with the [name of organization]. We are developing a community program on [name topic]. We are in the process of getting to know the community and its leaders so that we can establish community partnerships. Your name was given to us by [name of referring community leader] because you’re a key community leader. I’d like to briefly ask you questions about your community, describe the project, get your thoughts on it and find out if you are interested in working with us. Also, if you can suggest other people who might want to get involved, that would be appreciated. Is this a good time? [If yes, continue. If not, arrange for a follow up face-to-face meeting or conference call].⁴

⁴Giachello AL, author; Ashton D, Kyler P, Rodriguez ES, Shanker R, Umemoto A, eds. 2007. Making Community Partnerships Work: A Toolkit. White Plains, NY: March of Dimes Foundation. Retrieved from <http://www.aapcho.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Giachello-MakingCommunityPartnershipsWorkToolkit.pdf>

Program Inventory: Taking stock of the existing programs or services at your school or community is an excellent way to pinpoint any gaps in available programs and services.

- **School Partner Programs and Services Inventory** (<http://ydekc.org/resource-center/partner-programs-inventory>): Partnership coordinators can use this grid to create an inventory of programs and services currently available at their school site.
- **Youth Program Directory** (<http://youthprogramdirectory.org/>): Schools can peruse this online directory of youth-serving organizations in King County and find a list of programs and services available in their school or in the broader community. Youth organizations can also use this site to find out what other partners are at their desired school site.