

Arts in Healthcare for Rural Communities Toolkit

Following are excerpted sections from the Arts in Healthcare for Rural Communities Toolkit, which can be found at www.arts.ufl.edu/cam/ruralLinks.aspx.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

What is a needs assessment?

By definition, a needs assessment is a systematic process of asking questions, comparing answers, and making informed decisions about what to do next to improve human (or organizational) conditions and performance. In essence, a needs assessment is a problem analysis. The goal of a needs assessment is to identify assets and significant concerns a community may face. In the field of the arts in healthcare, needs assessment is a method that is used to map the needs and resources within the arts and culture, health and wellness, healthcare, education and allied organizations to better understand how services or programs may serve a community. Often a needs assessment is conducted to help partner or program organizers become better acquainted and oriented to a new community, service population, or organization.

Why conduct a needs assessment?

Needs assessment is an essential component to successful program design, planning, implementation and most importantly, sustainability. Conducting a needs assessment allows the program planning team to think broadly and systemically, consider interdisciplinary approaches, and provide justification for decisions before, during, and after they are made. Additionally, the needs assessment process allows for responsive service delivery and offers a replicable process that can be used to focus partners on a shared understanding of issues and strategies. The completed needs assessment sharpens the strategic planning of a project or program guiding clear and measurable goals, objectives and outcomes. Using the needs assessment as a frequent point of reference will serve to strengthen shared values among key stakeholders, a formula that is central to program success.

How do you conduct a needs assessment?

To conduct a comprehensive needs assessment, a combination of methods is used to gather normative, perceived, expressed, and relative needs. Because it can be challenging to access a true picture of the needs of a geographic region or service population, it is vital that multiple approaches are employed to gather the most valid and reliable assessment as possible. Ideally, needs are assessed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Effective methods include extrapolating data from existing studies, using resource inventories and service statistics, conducting social surveys, and holding focus groups or public forums. Once identified, needs are translated into measurable objectives, resources, and criteria necessary for program planning and evaluation.

Four types of needs are often considered in a needs assessment. It is helpful to understand how needs can be viewed in these four categories as you plan your assessment. The four types of needs are:

- Normative need
 - Existence of standards or criterion established by custom, authority or general consensus against which quantity or quality of a situation or condition is measured
 - Work with existing data
 - Generates objective targets
 - Need levels change as knowledge, technology and values change
- Perceived need
 - Need defined by what people think or feel about their needs
 - Allows for responsive service delivery
 - Interviews, focus groups, town meetings
 - Standard changes with each respondent
- Expressed need
 - Need defined by the number of people who have actually sought help
 - Focuses on circumstances in which feeling is translated to action
 - Major weakness is the assumption that all persons with need seek appropriate help
- Relative need
 - Gap between level of services existing in one community and those existing in similar communities or geographic areas
 - Must consider differences in population and social pathology
 - Concerned with equity

In the field of the arts in healthcare, a needs assessment is often narrowed to inquiry regarding health-related needs and resources, arts and cultural needs and resources, and educational needs and resources. Needs assessments are ideally conducted in partnership with arts organizations, health organizations, local community leadership, an academic institution, and any other primary community representatives. To begin, it is important to

establish rapport and relationships with key community partners and consider what methods you may use to gather information. Engaging community stakeholders is a highly efficient and effective way to begin the needs assessment process to learn more about the community or target service population needs. To gather normative needs, you will mine existing data on the Web, in public libraries, at the Chamber of Commerce, through the County Health Department, and in additional community arts, health, and education settings. It may be useful to ask partners to contribute sources of published information such as local newsletters, collaborative meeting minutes, websites, or city and county demographics. Members of the team will likely have print materials or archival information pertaining to the needs you are assessing. Additionally, a thorough literature review during this phase will help to acquaint you with trends in published data about your target audience or geographic region.

During the early phase of needs assessment, it is helpful to schedule time to meet face to face with community partners to establish a clear purpose for the needs assessment and delineate roles of each partner in the needs assessment process. Community strengths and resources can play a primary role in the needs assessment process, design and implementation, from the onset. Consider inviting additional community members, especially from the target service population, throughout the process of conducting needs assessment to ensure that the assessment is accurately designed with diverse and inclusive perspectives. As a team, discuss and agree upon a needs assessment methodology, or more likely a combination of methods that will work best for the team. Decide on a timeline for completion and identify the audience who will be accessing the information in the final needs assessment. Review plans for analyzing information and writing a summary that will be accessible to the target audience.

At this time, the group will begin to develop a survey that will accurately represent the concerns and assets in the community being assessed. Open-ended questions provide excellent qualitative data to round out the normative needs gathered in published data. Sample needs assessment questions are listed below. Once the needs assessment questionnaire items are determined, the needs assessment survey may be distributed in focus groups of individuals who share a common objective, or in individual questionnaires via email, hard copy, or online software such as Survey Monkey.

Needs assessment interviews may also be conducted via telephone or in person. During this phase of needs assessment, it is valuable to spend as much time as possible in the community or with the target service population socializing, engaging and getting to know needs and resources directly. In the field of the arts in health, direct contact time during needs assessment cannot be emphasized enough. A public event or forum in the community, including food and camaraderie, can be a wonderful way to identify assets and resources as well as learn about concerns. Analysis of needs assessment surveys, focus groups, and contact with the public will allow for perceived and expressed needs to be documented and considered.

Needs Assessment Example Questions

1. What are the five most significant health concerns in your community?
2. What are the most significant arts or cultural needs of the people you serve?
3. What other concerns are significant in your community?
4. What is needed to address those concerns?
5. What is unique about your community? What are its strengths?
6. What services or programs don't exist that should?
7. Is there anything that you would like us to know about your community?

Helpful resources and sources utilized in the preparation of this material:

Bradshaw, J. (1972). *The concept of need*. *New Society*, 30, 640-643.

Kettner, P.M., Moroney, R.M., Martin, L.L. (2008). *Designing and managing programs: An effectiveness-based approach*. Los Angeles, Sage.

Maslow, A. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper & Row.

Ponsioen, J. (1962). *Social welfare policy: Contributions to theory*. The Hague, the Netherlands: Mouton.

Wallace, H., Gold, E., & Dooley, S. (1967). Availability and usefulness of selected health and socioeconomic data for community planning. *American Journal of Public Health*, 57, 762-771.

<http://www.needsassessment.org/>