

# THE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PROCESS



## TECHNICAL SUPPORT MANUALS

### Module 2

FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER COALITION OF  
NEBRASKA INC.

# **Family Resource Center Coalition of Nebraska Technical Support Manuals**

## **Module II**

### **The Community Assessment Process**

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- Family Support America (FSA) formerly known as the Family Resource Coalition of America. The materials originally appeared in their *Guidelines for Family Support Practice* published in Chicago, IL, 1996.
- University of Kansas Community Toolbox located on the World Wide Web.
- The Family Resource Center Coalition of Nebraska, Help Manual 4, Building Site, Procurement and Management, George Dillard & Richard Nation.

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# Family Resource Center Coalition of Nebraska, Inc.

## History

Family Resource Centers are family-focused community collaborations that strengthen and preserve families and individual members within the community. Accordingly, they coordinate and support human service programs that encourage self-sufficiency of the family unit.

On July 20, 1993 family resource center coordinators and directors from across Nebraska met at the Northeast Family Center (formerly known as Whitehall Family Resource Center) in Lincoln. From this meeting, the Family Resource Center Coalition of Nebraska, Inc. (FRCCN) was formed.

FRCCN is a nonprofit consulting and advocacy organization working to support Nebraska's children and families. They support the existing family resource center network by sharing information and resources. They work to expand the network by providing technical assistance to interested communities. Through the family support movement, FRCCN seeks to strengthen and empower family and community practices that foster optimal development of children, youth and adult family members.

## Mission

To articulate, develop and promote attitudes that strengthen and support families by providing resources, technical assistance and networking; and by being an advocate for quality Family Resource Centers.

## Purpose

To provide a network of communication and coordination for family resource centers throughout Nebraska; encourage the development of research based on issues relating to family resource centers; articulate, develop and promote attitudes that strengthen and support families; and educate the public regarding the aims and accomplishments of family.

## Activities

The FRCCN state office strives to heighten public awareness of the importance of coordinated, multidisciplinary, community-based family services. Accordingly, staff and members work with communities to initiate and develop family resource centers. Staff and members provide technical support throughout the development process.

As a focal point for fiscal support, FRCCN and local members work with numerous public and private sector representatives at the national, state and local level. FRCCN coordinates funding and support across agencies and programs related to family resource centers, child and family support efforts, and comprehensive community planning. This ensures efficient and effective utilization of scarce resources.

# Introduction

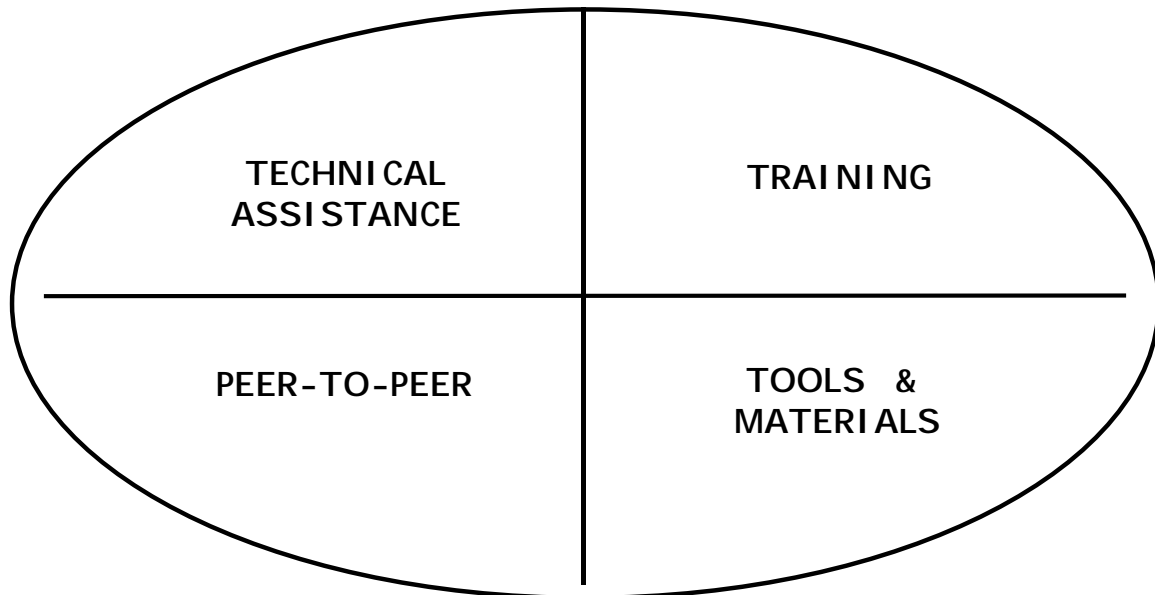
## Technical Support Manuals

These step-by-step, technical support modules can build the capacity of your local program to:

- Define family support and family resource centers (Module 1);
- Understand the basic principles and philosophies of family support (Module 1);
- Differentiate between traditional service strategies and family support strategies (Module 1);
- Know the history, influences and underpinnings of family support (Module 1);
- Undertake a community assessment process (Module 2);
- Determine the specific community concerns best addressed through a family support program or center (Module 2);
- Determine the mission or purpose of a program or center (Module 3);
- Design a core set of services and staffing pattern (Module 3);
- Build an administrative and board structure for family resource centers (Module 3);
- Design effective information and referral strategies (Module 4); and
- Use Nebraska models to design your family resource center and/or family support programs (Module 5).

## Supplemental Resources

Based on your experiences, knowledge, and expertise, you will undoubtedly determine other areas that require technical assistance, supplemental tools and materials, intensive training sessions, or peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities with established family resource centers.



Please contact the Family Resource Center Coalition of Nebraska, Inc. (FRCCN) to discuss your need for supplemental information. Our extensive resource library and services network can provide helpful contacts. FRCCN is also open to developing new forms of technical assistance to help communities meet existing service gaps.

# The Community Assessment Process

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# Planning Through A Culturally Competent Lens

Family resource centers work in many different ways to assist families in preparing their children to grow up in a society that is increasingly diverse in terms of ethnic backgrounds, cultures and languages. Children need to develop a positive sense of identity and the ability to appreciate and respect people who are different from themselves. **Families are the primary vehicles through which traditions, values and language are passed from generation to generation.** (Guidelines, 1996)

As professionals begin to plan, implement and govern family resource centers, the diversity of the community must be integrated into the planning process. The need for culturally competent liaisons and communications facilitators is increasing as America's population becomes more diverse in every way. Even between people who share a common language and culture, communications can be difficult, so the problem can be magnified when program planners of a different race, class and culture come into a community to plan *for* that community.

What needs to be stressed is that increasing one's own understanding about communicating across cultures is a process. It takes training, exposure, meaningful interaction, time and a willingness to learn how to negotiate and respond to barriers. (Rodriguez, 1995) Cultural competence is not something that can be mastered and understood in a day-long training.

## *What Isn't Cultural Competence*

*Because the notion of a pluralistic society and world is confronting us so quickly and so tangibly, many are converging to classes, in-services and special services to learn all there is to know about "other cultures." There is a tendency to approach culture learning and related issues with the notion that in a few sessions, you can achieve cross-cultural "competence" or knowledge. Being culturally competent or aware does not mean knowing everything about every culture. It is, instead, respect for difference, eagerness to learn and a willingness to accept that there are many ways of viewing the world.*

*Culture is not:*

- *mere artifacts and materials used by people*
- *a laundry list of behaviors, values and facts*
- *stereotypic depictions of groups as seen in television, movies, newspapers, and other media*
- *objects to be bought, sold and distributed*

*Consequently, cultural competence or awareness is not becoming a member of another culture by a superficial, wholesale adoption of elements, customs, language, dress or*

*behavior. Such shallow identification could be manipulative and patronizing. Abandoning one's own cultural identity and substituting another is not a form of respect, but rather a statement that culture can be easily shed. Additionally, cultural competence or awareness recognizes that individuals cannot be categorized into totally discrete groups and that much variability within cultural groups exist. (Rodriguez, 1995)*

The intent of family resource centers should be to affirm participants' cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and racial identity; promoting cross-cultural understanding and respect for differences; and help families navigate the dominant U.S. society and culture.

**Programs can begin to build capacity by undertaking a variety of actions including:**

1. Encourage practitioners to learn about the cultures of the families and communities with which they interact via:
  - ◇ reading widely, including articles by and for persons of culture (professional & fiction);
  - ◇ attending cultural events and meetings of leaders from within the culture;
  - ◇ learning how to ask questions in sensitive ways.
2. Develop program policies that are culturally competent and inclusive of program participants.
  - ◇ Families and programs collaborate on planning celebrations and special events to ensure that the events accurately reflect families' values and cultures.
  - ◇ Translate materials into languages used by program participants.
  - ◇ Hire staff that reflects the participants' culture and background.
  - ◇ Provide ongoing staff development opportunities in group facilitation.
  - ◇ Encourage families to talk to staff if they feel they do not understand the practices of the program or feel that the practices are inconsistent with their beliefs.
  - ◇ Review program policies with all staff and families.
3. Create opportunities for family and community members to rediscover, reclaim and recreate traditions, beliefs, languages and family history.
4. Create safe space where families of similar culture and background can gather together and find community, support and cultural and emotional sustenance.

Ultimately, the community assessment process must include the families who are to participate in the services and activities. The difficulty in recruiting families to be a part of the decision-making process stems from the perception by the families that ultimately, they have **no real say** when decisions are made. Families **must have** a "***stake***" in the center and feel as if they own the activities. Affirming one's culture and sharing the decision-making responsibilities are crucial to the success of family resource centers.

# Getting Started—What to do Beforehand

To be effective, a community-based strategic planning effort must begin by assessing the community's needs. Community assessment is the systematic process of identifying the challenges and resources of people in a specific geographic area. From the beginning, the assessment process should be conducted with an eye toward three strategic goals:

1. Understanding the **current** condition of all families in the community;
2. Evaluating the **current** service system's capacity or incapacity to support their health, growth and development;
3. Building community support for and ownership of a new intervention. Involving community leaders, service providers and—most importantly—residents in gathering data will ensure that the new service intervention will be responsive to community-specific needs, thus establishing a trusting relationship between the community and the new service provider.

## Community Assessment Components:

1. Establishing a Community Planning Team
2. Defining Community Boundaries
3. Developing a Community Profile
4. Engaging Consumers
5. Resource Mapping
6. Priority Setting

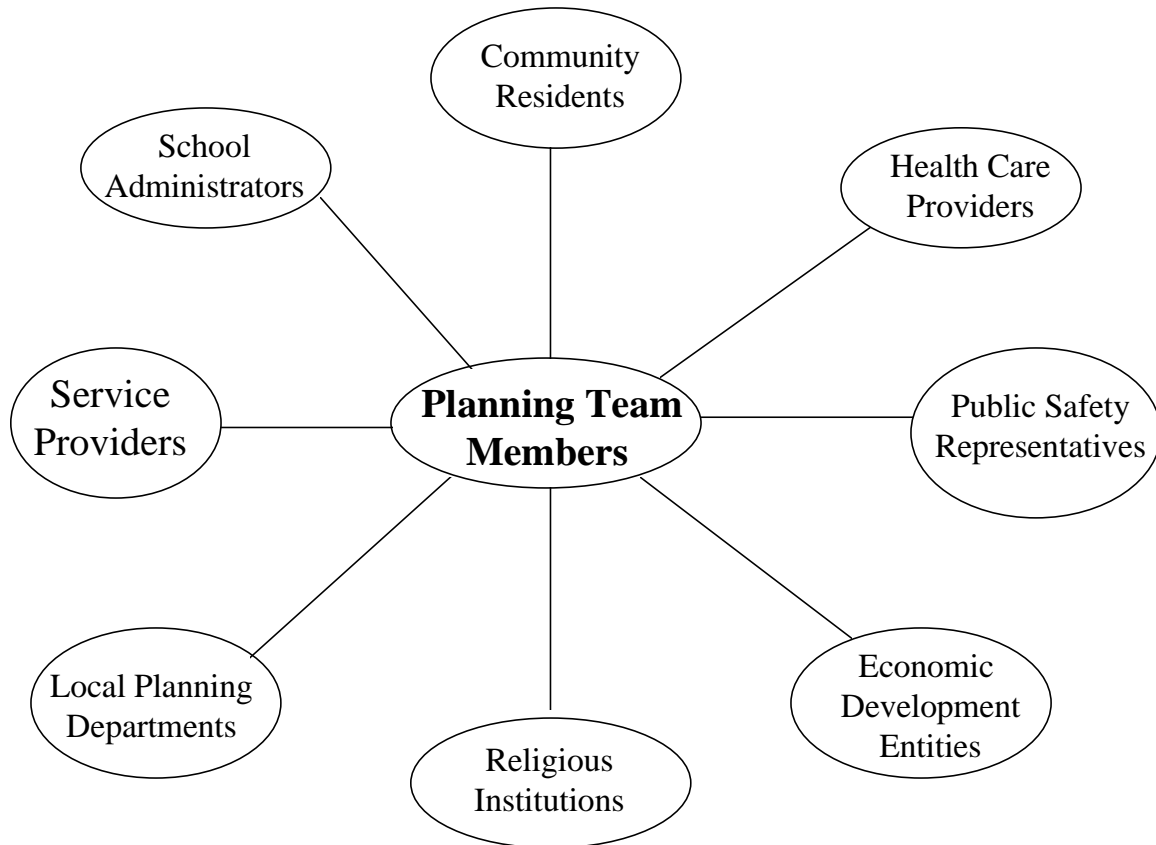
This initial step of assessing needs is important because it lays the foundation upon which programs or services, as well as organizational structure, will be built. The potential size of a proposed program, the working styles of its organizers and the resources and support available to them all influence the needs assessment process. It is critical that this process be carefully executed to ensure the highest quality result. However, due to limited resources, the needs assessment process will not be and need not be so all encompassing that every strategy be taken to its ultimate completion with every member of the community. Time and money will be the most apparent constrained resources, but as the process gets underway it will become apparent that planning members run the risk of overload, if they spread themselves too thin. The suggested time frame for the needs assessment to occur is generally six to nine months.

## 1. Establishing a Community Planning Team.

A community planning team representing residents, service providers, and key public and private decision makers should be formed at the very beginning of the planning process. Health, social service, and school professionals can help the planning team understand the nature of the challenges confronting community residents. Involving public and private

decision makers who have the power to change the existing service system can ensure they recognize and understand the need for such change.

Community residents are essential as they, more than anyone else, know what challenges they face from day to day. It is this area, recruiting community residents, that many planning teams find difficult. *Getting community residents to participate requires creativity and stamina on the part of professionals, but it is one of the most important aspects of the assessment process.*



Resident representation on the planning committee is crucial to the short—and long-term success of the planning effort. Ideally, community residents should represent at least 50% of the planning team. The following are important benefits of community involvement:

- ⇒ The greater the participation of residents and local institutions in the assessment process, the more likely it is that it will accurately reflect their needs and concerns.
- ⇒ The greater the participation, the greater the sense of ownership, which can translate into a greater determination to see that the assessment is fully utilized.
- ⇒ The greater the participation, the harder it is for others, such as public officials, to ignore assessment results.

Securing residential participation on planning committees is not easy and should not be taken for granted. Too often, planners assume that because their goals are to improve the health and well-being of families, residents will want to participate. Usually, this is not the case. There are four or five common reasons why residents hesitate to participate in planning projects:

1. They don't understand how their families or neighbors will benefit from the project.
2. They don't feel equipped to make a meaningful contribution.
3. Because of experience with past projects, they have developed a healthy distrust of philanthropists from the outside who "ride in on their white horses".
4. They are intimidated by the professionals involved in the planning process, who all speak the same language and have already defined their complete agenda.
5. They don't perceive a well defined role for residents in the decision-making process.

**Securing residential participation on planning committees is not easy and should not be taken for granted.**

Although getting and maintaining resident participation may be difficult, at best, it is worth the effort. Assist residents in overcoming obstacles that may prevent them from being involved, like transportation, child care and language barriers. Another major obstacle to high resident participation is the meeting schedule. While professionals are generally paid to attend community meetings, residents are not. It may mean changing meeting times, or meeting with an employer to explain why it is in that employer's best interest to collaborate.

As important as resident participation is, there are other entities that are needed to create a viable planning team. The following is a list of professionals that should be included in the process:

Health Care Providers

Birth and death rates and marriage and divorce rates can be found in state and local health departments. They also may have statistics on infant mortality and low birth weight and child and adolescent mortality, which are often categorized by cause (accidents, disease, suicide, and homicide). Immunization rates may also be available through health departments. Many states require the collection of other morbidity and mortality information for special populations (cancer, or immunizable communicable diseases such as measles, polio, and AIDS).

Public Safety Representatives

Local police and fire departments and 911 lines keep information on the incidences of crime and crisis. These entities sometimes map this data to identify patterns of troubled

areas. These agencies may also have building inspection data that can provide useful information on housing and the age and safety of local facilities.

### *Economic Development Entities*

The local department of economic development and/or Chamber of Commerce both have a plethora of strength-based data. Since one of their primary functions is to market the local community to outside businesses, they are a useful source for positive indicators of community well-being. Working through the Chamber of Commerce may open up large amounts of privately collected data that is currently used by banks, insurance companies, marketing firms, and other local businesses.

### *Religious Institutions*

The potential impact of religious institutions on their communities is enormous. Not only are they a resource for volunteers, monetary assistance and community meeting space, but their spiritual and philosophical beliefs somewhat coincide with the beliefs espoused by the providers of support to children and families. Religious institutions are a valuable resource as a partner in community initiatives or perhaps as a provider of services themselves. Many are already a provider of services and may have useful data to contribute.

### *State & Local Planning Departments*

Planning departments have access to a plethora of census information on the number of children (organized by age categories), composition of families (listed by head of household), poverty status of families and children, employment status of adults, housing conditions (stock and value), adult educational attainment, earnings, family structure and ethnicity patterns in the community. This information is in table form, organized by block, block group, census tract, as well as city and county wide aggregates. These entities are also a potential source of funds and support for family and community initiatives.

### *School Administrators*

Local schools keep and collect data that can help programs gauge the well-being of children within the community. Schools maintain information on educational attainment, health, immunizations and screenings required for school entry, and the number of students who experience educational and developmental difficulties. Additionally, schools may keep information on parent participation in parent-teacher conferences, PTA meetings, and other targeted, school-based activities.

### *Service Providers*

In every community, nonprofit organizations provide an array of services to families. Organizations that provide prevention services, positive youth development and intervention services and services to senior citizens must be identified and contacted. Many of these

service providers already possess an understanding of the challenges and concerns facing families. In assembling a planning team, it is important to know what roles these providers play in the community, whom they serve and how they serve their target population.

### Others . . . Associations

The basic community organization for empowering individuals and mobilizing their capacities is the association. An association is a group of citizens working together for a common mission. An association is an amplifier of the gifts, talents and skills of individual community members. Associations may be very formal with elected officers and paid members or they may be informal with no officers or formal memberships.

## **2. Community Boundaries**

Before beginning a community assessment, it is important to recognize community boundaries. Too often, professionals impose their own “service areas” on communities and pay little attention to the historical, cultural and economic boundaries defined by the residents themselves. Additionally, they fail to recognize the informal social structure of the community, creating inappropriate or under-utilized services.

Residents must be included in designing the “service area map” to ensure that the boundaries correspond to the “*living community*.” This “living community” may not always correspond to school attendance areas, census tracts or political wards or boroughs. A preliminary map drawn to define boundaries within the community should be validated by residents from throughout the area to ensure that the boundaries correspond to those that residents themselves might draw. These boundaries will help identify where services might best be established, where other services need to be developed and where outreach activities will be necessary to increase residents’ use of services.

The planning team must be aware of the effects of these boundaries and the internal social networks that exist within each “living community.” For example, the community planning team wishes to designate sites for family centers. The community’s elementary school attendance area includes several neighborhoods, which are separated by rigid cultural divisions. Families in a predominantly Mexican-American neighborhood, a predominantly African-American neighborhood, and a predominantly Irish-American neighborhood all send their children to the same school but have separate networks, groups, and community leaders. It may or may not be possible for a single family center to serve all three of these ethnic groups. The only way community planners will foresee this, however, is if they recognize at the outset that there may be different groups within the community and nurture contact with and identify representatives from each.

# Creating a Community Profile

One important step in the community needs assessment process is to develop a comprehensive community profile describing the well-being of the community's children and families, as well as of the community as a whole. The community profile:

- ◆ acts as a snapshot for program planners and community members, to show them the community's current conditions;
- ◆ provides empirical data to support and validate the needs and priorities of the community;
- ◆ covers a variety of dimensions of well-being—medical, social, psychological, educational and developmental;
- ◆ has indicators that are designed to serve as “markers” toward success in larger areas of well-being that should not be seen as ends themselves; and
- ◆ creates baseline data to gauge the effects of subsequent services.

To compile a community profile, planners should answer the following questions:

- ◆ Which members of the community planning committee should collect the key data?
- ◆ What additional individuals or agencies should join the collection efforts?
- ◆ Where should they start to collect the key data?
- ◆ Has any of the needed information been collected already? By whom?
- ◆ Are there specific documents that contain this information?
- ◆ What agencies would have access to the information?
- ◆ Can state, county and local government or the United Way facilitate the collection of information?
- ◆ Who should review existing documents for key indicators?

Once the data is collected, a profile analysis should be done to provide the facts and figures, statistics and data that accurately describes the well-being of all families in the community. This analysis is also expected to identify empirical evidence that demonstrates the community's significant strengths or weakness, relative to other communities or parts of the state. Appendix A provides a list of commonly recognized indicators of community conditions.

# Analyzing the Data

Again, the community profile should paint a general picture of the well-being of the community and its families. **The information gathered should be factual: empirical data that stands independently, without value judgments.** These facts do not come to represent community problems until they are judged by community members to be indicative of negative or harmful conditions.

The first step in this process is to compare data collected in the community profile with recognized standards. Having collected the core set of data indicators described in appendix A, the data subcommittee will need to do an initial analysis of which indicators are strengths and which are weaknesses. A normative standard is one that has been previously established by tradition, authority, or general consensus, and to which the community-specific indicator can be compared. The federal government's poverty line, for example, is a normative standard to which a family's income can be compared to help determine that family's socioeconomic well-being. During the first quarter of 2001, the official poverty line was \$11,610 for a family of two; \$14,630 for a family of three; and \$17,650 for a family of four. ([www.100percentcampaign.org](http://www.100percentcampaign.org)).

Many indicators, including some of those suggested in Appendix A, do not have normative standards. For that reason, relative standards are often used to make decisions. There are two ways to use relative standards:

1. An indicator in one community can be compared with the same one in another community. For instance, a community profile might show that the teen pregnancy rate is 13%; however, since there is no useable normative standard, it is difficult to determine whether that teen pregnancy rate is a positive or negative figure for that community. If, after further research, the community finds that a similarly situated community has a teen pregnancy rate of 17%, or that the state's average is 22%, then it is in a better position to reach a consensus on whether teen pregnancy is a problem in *relative* terms.
2. Measure the change in an indicator within one community over a period of time. For instance, in 1987, five million children under age six lived in poverty, while in 1992, six million children under age six lived in poverty. These figures demonstrate that the number of children living in poverty increased by one million in just five years. This is a good example of data that should "jump out" at the people responsible for completing the community profile. Those analyzing data such as this, which deviates significantly from the average, should be sure to report it to the larger planning team.

While no formula dictates the use of normative versus relative standards, using a combination of both can help community members identify issues that a new or revised service or program should address or community assets that can be built upon.

The data subcommittee should report to the larger planning team by presenting:

1. A core set of information that captures the overall well-being of families in the community.
2. Any data that indicates significant strengths in relative or normative terms.

3. Any data that indicates significant weaknesses in relative or normative terms.
4. Any trends that may come to represent strengths or weaknesses in the near future, even if they do not do so currently.

It is crucial that the data subcommittee review all indicators and document them thoroughly for presentation to the larger planning team. This thorough examination is likely to verify or dispel generally held beliefs about the well-being of families in the community.

## Engagement Analysis

### Engaging Community Residents Through Focus Groups, Interview and Surveys.

The engagement process is directed at obtaining the perspective of residents about the well-being of the community and its families. The process is used to obtain specific information about community assets and concerns, services most commonly utilized by residents, barriers to services and the roles that residents wish to play in improving their community. There are three recommended methods for obtaining a community-wide perspective on the challenges facing families:

1. focus-group meetings
2. interviews with key informants
3. resident surveys

Using a combination of these strategies facilitates collecting the information from different groups of people in a community. It is not necessary to use *all* three methods to reach *every* member of the community. Furthermore, limits on time, money and individual and collective energies make trying to do so impractical.

After compiling a community profile, the planning team must learn from residents what are their most pressing challenges, needs and concerns. The challenges facing children cannot be seen as separate from those facing their families and those confronting the larger community. Community planning efforts that do not take the time to understand the interconnectedness between children, family and community are likely to fail because it is exactly this interconnectedness that comprises community. For this reason, the engaging of consumers should focus primarily on understanding the *nature* of challenges confronting residents.

***Remember to include the residents on your planning committee in the process of engaging other community residents.***

### What are Focus Groups?

Focus groups are meetings of a manageable number of selected community members to obtain their views and perspectives; groups of five to ten works best. The purpose of focus groups is to gain the community's perspective on the priority problems and needs confronting families in the community.

Individuals who function well in group discussion should be sought for participation

in focus groups. Parents, youth, teen mothers and teachers typically fall into this category. Invitations from someone within the community whom the family knows, a “peer host”, is a particularly effective way to insure participation. Having a peer of the group’s members assist in organizing and hosting the focus group could help give the attendees a sense of empowerment. They have someone with whom to identify—the peer host, resulting in a sense of equity.

Community organizations often can help planners structure focus group meetings so that people will attend. They can also identify families to be invited. Providing child care, as well as food and transportation, is often critical to getting families with children to attend meetings.

Focus group meetings are most helpful when people are relaxed and are encouraged to build on others’ comments. Leaders of focus groups must be respectful and must encourage families to offer critical, as well as positive feedback. In order to secure full participation, residents must understand that their input is valuable and what they say is important. Informing them of the questions before the focus groups meet may encourage participation.

Successful focus groups make the meeting attractive, so that residents will attend; structure the meeting so that residents will be comfortable and will speak freely about their views and assure that the focus groups are representative of residents.

Each focus group should have a designated discussion leader and an information recorder. Focus group leaders should seek to draw out all participants and to explore the full nature of the problems confronting the community, rather than stopping at the identification of the problem or need itself.

## **Getting the Most Out of Your Focus Groups**

Before you actually sit down and host the focus groups, there are some questions that need to be answered. These questions will assist you in getting the most out of your focus group interaction.

1. What groups should be targeted for focus groups? How many focus groups will be conducted? (A recommended range for the number of focus groups held is eight to ten)
2. Who will develop the list of participants for each targeted group of residents?
3. Who should act as “peer host” for each focus group?
4. Who will develop the script for conducting outreach to focus group participants?
5. Who will contact and invite residents to each focus group?
6. In what settings or locations should focus groups be held? At what time should each focus group be held?
7. What steps should be taken to provide child care, food, or transportation to focus group participants?
8. What list of questions will be asked in all focus groups?
9. Who will lead focus group discussions? Who will record focus group discussions?
10. Who will summarize the findings?

## **Key Information Interviews**

Key information interviews are best suited for two types of individuals in the community; those who have a tendency to dominate group discussions or those who are uncomfortable participating in group discussions. In many cases, the very residents who are regularly confronted by community problems are the most reluctant to participate in focus groups. Because key informant interviews can be more flexible and less threatening than groups, they are an effective tool for seeking the input and advise of these people.

The key informant interview subcommittee should develop a list of 25 to 30 potential interviewees. This list must include people who represent the diversity of the community in terms of income, political and religious beliefs, racial and cultural origin. Key informant interviews should also include people in the community who, because they hold certain public positions or have certain professional associations, have developed an intimate understanding of the needs of community residents.

A script for the interviews should be developed to explain the purpose of the community assessment effort. This script should provide a background of the effort, identify who is participating in the planning, and explain the role of the interviews in the community needs assessment and how the information from the interview will be used by the planning committee. Questions should be developed well in advance to allow for pilot-testing. The pilot-testing process does not have to be elaborate. The purpose is to “practice” by posing the questions to other people to make sure they are clear and the accurate message is getting across. It is often effective to fax or mail the list of questions to interviewees before their appointments so that they can prepare for the interview.

As a final step, the interviewers should thoroughly discuss all of the questions on the survey to insure that everyone is “on the same page” and understands the intent of each question.

The following issues need to be addressed before the interviews can begin:

- \* Which individuals should be targeted for key informant interviews? How many interviews will be conducted? Is the list of interviewees representative of the community.
- \* What list of questions will be asked in all interviews?
- \* Who will develop the script for conducting outreach to interview participants?
- \* Who will conduct the interviews?
- \* What outreach efforts will be necessary to interview “hard-to-reach” individuals?
- \* Who will summarize the findings?

## **Resident Surveys**

Written surveys to solicit families’ perspective on their needs may be used to complement focus groups and key informant interviews. When carefully designed and conducted, surveys are the most accurate method of gathering information about a community. Surveying residents can help build a program’s constituency within a community. However, careful attention should be given to selecting, training and deploying staff to disseminate the surveys so that they are culturally competent and appropriate for the neighborhoods they will canvass. Community residents are frequently well-suited for this work.

Surveying residents involves designing a questionnaire, pilot-testing the questionnaire, distributing the questionnaire, collecting data and analyzing the data. The following issues need to be considered:

- \* Who will design the resident survey?
- \* What questions should be asked in the survey?
- \* How many residents should receive the survey?
- \* What groups or areas should be targeted for resident surveys?
- \* How will the survey be pilot-tested?
- \* How will the survey be distributed and returned?
- \* What follow-up efforts will be made to ensure the return of surveys?
- \* Who will analyze survey data?

If surveys of families are the primary means for obtaining community residents' perspectives and thus, are disseminated in large numbers, families should be selected randomly to reduce the likelihood that segments of the population will be left out.

If surveys are to complement focus groups and interviews, and are therefore disseminated in small numbers, random sampling is usually not a concern. Often, as few as 50 to 100 well-administered surveys can provide a great deal of insight as to what is on families' minds; if they are completed by a representative sample.

## Resource Analysis

Once the planning team has gathered the needs assessment data, the next step is to begin mapping the resources available in the community. The purpose of resource mapping is to identify community strengths and assets. The focus of the mapping process should be to collect a critical mass of information about what formal and informal sources of support are available to families in the community. The resource mapping process is an explicit effort to overcome the traditional deficit-oriented approach to community assessment.

The resource mapping activities are expected to identify what services are in place to contribute to the optimal development of children and their families; what services are in place to prevent the development of problems; and what community needs or problems are being addressed by the current system.

The resource assessment process identifies the intellectual, physical, material, and financial capital available in the community, and determines whether the current service system is using all available resources to meet the needs of all children and families in the community. A planning team should seek to determine whether or not the existing service system is:

1. Addressing the problems identified in the problem analysis;
2. Preventing the development of problems;
3. Contributing to the optimal development of children and their families.

Planners should also evaluate the extent to which the system is functioning at full capacity, and whether it is duplicating services.

The formal service delivery system includes public institutions and services, such as

primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, libraries, parks, hospitals and other health care facilities and police, as well as nonprofit organizations that serve children and families. In addition to these formal support networks, families also need informal support systems and ready access to a variety of goods and services.

The informal service delivery system includes churches, citizens' groups, cultural groups, family day-care providers, block clubs, performance groups and volunteer groups. Identifying the informal support systems is critical to understanding the environment in which families live and develop. These informal networks are resources—strengths upon which any new or reconfigured service should be built.

It is very important for communities to recognize not only what services they have, but also the extent to which these services can reach all the families that might need them and the extent to which additional resources are required. To begin to assess the strengths and resources of the community, the planning committee can answer these questions:

1. How should the planning committee identify all formal and informal community resources?
2. Does a community resource directory exist?
3. Can the United Way or state, county and local governments provide a list of contracted agencies?
4. What outreach efforts will be used to engage residents in the process of identifying resources?
5. Who will design the resource assessment survey to be completed by providers of services and support?
6. How will the survey be distributed?
7. Who will follow up on the distribution of surveys to encourage providers to complete and return them?
8. Who will log the data from the surveys?
9. What categories of resources should be established?

# Priority Setting

Because there are always finite resources—dollars to invest, time to spend, organizations and individuals to participate—once service gaps and the resources to fill gaps have been identified, it will be necessary to prioritize. Issues related to this prioritization will be:

- Which gaps most need to be filled?
- For which populations?
- Which programs can be developed from components that are already in place within the community?
- Which program components will need to be developed from scratch?
- Which programs should be developed after other programs are in place?

Prioritization should not just be about getting facts and figures, but also deciding where the initiative's efforts should focus. Prioritization is essential to determining issues of scale, target, scope and timing—the basic dimensions that define the breadth and focus of any initiative. The process of priority setting should be taken to the broader community through public forums.

Throughout the planning process, the planning team will divide into smaller subcommittees to collect important information. By virtue of their differing missions, each subcommittee will provide a slightly different picture of the needs, challenges and opportunities in the community than the others.

## Profile Analysis

The profile analysis subcommittee locates the facts, figures, statistics and data that accurately describe the well-being of all families in the community. This subcommittee also identifies empirical evidence that demonstrates the community's significant strengths or weaknesses, relative to other communities or parts of the state.

## Community Analysis

Through interviews and surveys, the community engagement analysis subcommittee locates information about specific community assets and concerns, services most commonly utilized by residents, barriers to services and the roles that residents wish to play in improving their community.

## Focus Group Analysis

Although they play a role in the interviews and surveys of the subcommittee described above, the focus group analysis subcommittee provides more in-depth and detailed information concerning community strengths and challenges, connections between

community needs and consumers' awareness of services that address those needs and connections between specific challenges, concerns and potential solutions to each of them.

### Resource Analysis

The resource analysis subcommittee identifies the formal and informal services and support that constitute the community's strengths and assets. The rest of the planning team will look to this subcommittee for recommendations about how to build on the strengths of the community.

Altogether, the *information-gathering* strategies used by these subcommittees result in a large body of information, that the larger planning team will have to assess and prioritize, prior to going further with strategic planning.

# Appendix A

## Indicators of Community Conditions

## **Overview of Community**

- Number of individuals
- Number of families
- Number of households
- Number of children, by age groups
- Ethnic make-up of community
- Median per-capita income
- Income distribution
- Percentage of children living below poverty line
- Number of families receiving public assistance
- Numbers of households with various family configurations (single, female-headed, extended family, etc.)
- Number of families in WIC program
- Percentage of individuals in labor force
- Percentage housing units that are owner-occupied
- Median gross rent as a percentage of household income

## **Education**

- Percentage of kindergarten and first-grade students assessed as ready, not ready for school
- Size of Head Start eligible population
- High school graduation rate
- Number and percentage of students identified for special education services
- Educational attainment for persons 18 and over
- Number and percentage of children three and older enrolled in school
- Numbers of children enrolled in various types of school (public, private, etc.)

## **Health**

- Birthrate
- Rate of low birth weight in babies
- Rate of attainment of prenatal care
- Median age of women giving birth
- Infant mortality rate
- Median number of school days missed due to illness
- Number of children with developmental delays at entry into school
- Number of residents eligible for Medicaid
- Number of residents enrolled in Medicaid

## **Child and Family Welfare**

- Percentage of parents who participate in parent-teacher conferences
- Percentages of children who live with one parent, two parents
- Percentages of families in which both parents are in the labor force
- Rate of child abuse and neglect reports
- Rate of confirmed child abuse and neglect cases
- Rate of out-of-home placements of children

# Appendix B

## The Community Assessment Matrix

# The Community Assessment Matrix

The first column (“issue”) is to be a list of the issues being discussed. These are not all of the issue areas identified by the community assessment, only those that, through an analysis of confirmation and conflict, have been determined to be important. If this list is longer than 15, it may be necessary to further restrict the initial planning effort to the top ten issues.

The second column (“Population to be Served”) will be a list of the specific populations that are most affected by the issues listed in the previous column. This is not necessarily the single population most affected, but may include multiple populations affected in different ways. Information about each population should include:

- the number of people affected by the issue
- the number of people at risk of being affected
- descriptions of specific groups or populations within the community that are affected.

Much of this information should come from the community analysis, although planners may have to pursue some additional data.

The third column (“Data”) is intended for specific data or information that is relevant to the corresponding issue. Data should answer such questions as:

- How prevalent is the issue?
- How many individuals belong to the at-risk population?
- What are their characteristics?
- What geographic areas, in particular, are affected by the issue?

If the issue is crime, for example, the number of police call-boxes and the incidence of violent crime might be two pieces of data to list.

The fourth column (“Current Capacity”) should include information on the current capacity of organizations that provide programs or services to meet the respective issue identified. This information should come from the resource assessment analysis. Whenever possible, this should include information about the degree to which these services are utilized. Often, the precise number of available slots is difficult or time-consuming to collect. A first step might be to get a rough idea of whether programs are operating under, at or over capacity, in a general sense.

The fifth column (“Gap”) should include an assessment of the current gap between services available and services needed. Are current services sufficient? Is there a need for additional services? Are services sufficient in number, but under-utilized because they are poorly structured or not what community members want? This information should be based on a comparison between the population affected and the community’s current capacity. In some cases, although a population is underserved and services are available, services are still underutilized. This most likely indicates issues involving *how* services are being delivered or offered. Planners may need to gather additional information to determine these issues of outreach, accessibility, cost, hours of operation, delivery method or other structural issues.

Based on the information in these five columns on the community assessment matrix, the planning team should be able to work with the community to prioritize its challenges, concerns and opportunities. Prioritizing does not mean simply ranking the issues on the list,

but rather, it involves grouping them within categories. Suggested categories could include, but need not be limited to:

- issues to be addressed immediately
- issues to address in the short term
- issues to be addressed in the long term
- and issues to be taken off the table for the time being.

The Community Assessment Matrix is designed to be a tool in assisting the planning team in developing strategies to meet the needs outlined through the assessment process. Additional information can be added to the matrix depending on the needs of the planning team.

### Community Assessment Matrix

Need	Population to be Served	Data	Current Capacity	Gap	Priority Level

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