Community Assessment Field Notes

"A Tool for Getting to Know Your Community's Children and Their Families"

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California's Healthy Start

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Acknowledgments

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Preface

These field notes are designed as an introduction to a process for conducting a community assessment in your local community. They are particularly useful in the context of the development of local initiatives like California's Healthy Start or After School.

The field notes are not a complete authority on everything you must know to carry out your own community assessment. There are frequent references to other resources, most of which are readily available in libraries and in on-line resources.

The notes are divided into three parts:

- An introduction to the process
- Details about the process
- Resources and Tools

Much effort has gone into devising a process for community assessment that will have broad application. You can use this process in urban, rural, and suburban communities. The most fundamental idea behind this community assessment process is that it makes extensive use of existing information about each community while it builds opportunities for all residents to participate in designing the future for their community.

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Part One: Purpose and Definition

Our objective in preparing these field notes is to aid you as you plan your community assessment work. These field notes are an attempt to provide clarity and specificity to your work. A lack of clarity can and will make the work of a community assessment harder and may render the end result less than useful or even useless.

Definition

A community assessment is a process of describing and understanding a small geographic area in useful detail.

A community assessment is done to understand the community well enough that appropriate outcomes can be chosen and appropriate programs can be designed and implemented.

Unlike a needs assessment a community assessment includes and pays particular attention to a community's assets.

Purpose

Why are community assessments done?

Community assessments help you invest resources to change those community characteristics that most need attention and that you can best affect.

Origins of the Community Assessment Process

Where did the ideas in the field notes come from?

Community development is a relatively new activity in human history. Focused community development work began after World War II. In the United States, community development efforts started in the 1960s.

Throughout the early efforts to initiate community change, a significant challenge was to develop initiatives that met local community needs and provided the means and opportunities for local residents to participate in the planning of development efforts. In these early approaches many programs and activities relied heavily on census data, health indicators, educational statistics, and so on. The difficulty was that the programs that emerged from the analyses of such data did not fit the perceptions of local residents.

Later efforts in community development work relied on local community surveys, on focus groups and town hall meetings. There were two problems with these approaches. First, the people conducting the surveys were not well

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equipped to involve the whole community in the survey process. As a result the survey results tended to be inadequate; not representing the community any better than the data collection approaches.

A balance was needed between these two different approaches to understand the community.

In the 1960s a group of people in the Southern San Joaquin Valley convened a group of local citizens to carry out a comprehensive community assessment. The group collected data, analyzed the data, questioned what they found, interviewed people, and held a massive town hall meeting. This group spent ten months identifying an area of focus for their efforts for the coming years: health care services for agricultural workers. [The group eventually incorporated and called themselves the KCLM Health Committee. The KCLM was the first local community-based organization to receive a grant from the Public Health Service to operate a Migrant Health Clinic. That clinic operates to this date.]

KCLM's initial study took in census data, health indicators, educational statistics, crime and violence, and family economics data. The results of their community assessment had two main features:

1. The development plans that emerged were based on data that no one disputed. Public officials, policy planners, political leaders, community residents and the business community agreed that the community assessment was complete and accurate and, ultimately, useful.
2. The development plans took into account the resources already available in the community and how those resources and programs would fit with the new community development plans and activities.

KCLM's process has been used over the past 35 years by community groups throughout the country. The community change initiatives that have resulted from the process cover the range from health care clinics to community centers, from wide-reaching local initiatives to narrowly-focused activities, from economic development planning to urban renewal planning. Versions of the process have been adapted to the work of the Peace Corps overseas and by Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) here in the United States.

The process has been refined as well. In recent years our work at the Healthy Start Field Office has renewed an interest in how to carry out a useful and effective community assessment. We have received numerous calls over the years from Healthy Start sites trying to carry out their own community assessments. We have observed their efforts and noted what has worked and not worked.

This process is specifically designed to provide local communities with the means to make use of what is already known about the community while providing opportunities for the community to think critically about what might be done.

General Information on Community Assessments

Planning Packet (1998) HSFO Clearinghouse,[#0032], UC Davis, School of Education.

Preventing Problems or Promoting Development: Competing Priorities or Inseparable Goals? (1995) K. Pittman & M. Cahill, [#0036] HSFO Clearinghouse, UC Davis, School of Education.

Thinking About Outcomes (1994) Rachel Lodge & Beth Hart, HSFO, [#1018], UC Davis, School of Education.

The Community Development Process; The Rediscovery of Local Initiative, Biddle, William W., New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965

Training For Community Development: A Critical Study of Method. Batten, T. R.. London, Oxford University Press, 1962

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The Dimensions of a Community Assessment

There are two dimensions to a community assessment: motive and information.

Motive

A common problem in any community assessment is one of motive. Sometimes participants in the community assessment work have an agenda. It doesn't always matter to these people what community needs might be; they are seeking a justification for something they went to do and to have happened..

People with their own agenda can provide sound and reasonable rationalizations. But these rationalizations cannot take the place of what the real needs and strengths or assets of the community are and the choices local community residents might make.

A significant challenge in any community assessment is to steer around those participants that would ignore an authentic community assessment.

The Motive Dimension

The motive dimension is a continuum that stretches between two extremes, discovery and justification.

A community assessment that is motivated by discovery is:

1. Better prepared to address the unexpected in a community.
2. Driven by a desire to understand the community, not to pre-label or pre-judge the community.
3. Likely to engage more of the community's stakeholders because there is no hidden agenda and the community assessment is specifically seeking appropriate outcomes for the community.

On the other hand, a community assessment that is driven by a justification of some pre-designed program or solution will:

1. Not fit the real needs of the community.
2. Produce programs and services that are not responsive to those issues that most challenge the community.
3. Generate frustration, distrust, and even anger among the local residents.

It is typically problematic to use a community assessment to justify a pre-designed program or model. The most useful approach to a community assessment will be found in the path that

starts at a discovery approach. In the end you will have the evidence you need to justify the outcomes you have chosen for your community.

Warning Signs of Justification

The warning signs of justification are numerous. Here are just a few.

Those who seek to justify a predetermined program or group of activities:

- Cannot identify a problem but can readily identify a program; and/or
- Claim their program offers a solution for many or all community needs and issues; and/or
- Already know the community needs. The assessment process or at least part of it, they will assert, is unnecessary; and/or
- Some elements of a comprehensive community assessment may be left out because they address issues that "cannot be tackled."

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The Information Dimension

Community assessments have tended towards two approaches - one focued on data and the other on people. The figure on the following page shows these two extremes with data at one end and people at the other.

As recently as a few decades ago, it was common practice to rely solely on demographic information as the basis of local change efforts. This approach has been soundly criticized more recently for failing to take into account the values, opinions, perceptions, and needs of local residents.

More recent practice has entailed holding focus groups, carrying out neighborhood surveys and sending questionnaires home with school children. The survey of the parents of school-age children is the most commonly cited method of conducting a community assessment in the first nine years of the history of California's Healthy Start.

Both of these approaches, used alone, have shortcomings. The approach we support starts with what is already known about the community from census and school and other information. It then carries on a conversation with the local community about what this information means in terms of local needs.

Unlike the motive dimension, a useful community assessment stretches across the information dimension. It starts with the information that is already known and available about the community and ends with a meaningful conversation with the local stakeholders about which issues are foremost in terms of priorities for change.

For purposes of clarification, in these field notes we tend to refer to information instead of data. The difference is that data makes up the descriptions that are the information. Data may be in the form of a complex database or an extended table of numbers that compare community characteristics.

We also do this because raw data tends to turn people off. It is not easy to read and/or communicate raw data. Also, data tends to lack analysis and a community assessment needs analysis. Finally it is because data is what goes into the "stuff" that informs us.

Data makes the information. Data is essential, even critical, to understand the community. We analyze data to create a presentation of the information that the audience, mostly the community, can relate to.

The community portrait or snapshot you will create in your community assessment process is the information. These

Soc Sci 4%	Sat Soc	SAT Year	Grade in	SAT Scho	SAT Read	SAT Read	SAT Mat	SAT Mat	SAT Lang	SAT Lang	SAT Sci
0	0	1998	8	101	22	33.7	22	33.7	18	30.7	2
0	0	1998	8	101	67	59.3	25	35.8	51	50.5	8
0	0	1998	6	55	13	26.3	10	23	11	24.2	1
0	0	1998	7	101	47	48.4	42	45.7			
0	0	1998	8	101	40	44.7	31	39.6			
0	0	1998	8	101	12	25.3	17	29.9			
0	0	1998	7	101	3	10.4	23	34.4			
0	0	1998	7	101	10	23	12	25.3			
0	0	1998	6	101	20	32.3	28	37.7			
0	0	1998	8	101	5	15.4	8	20.4			
0	0	1998	8	101	5	15.4	5	15.4			
0	0	1998	7	101	21	33	9	21.8			
0	0	1998	8	101	4	13.1	15	28.2			
0	0	1998	7	101	4	13.1	6	17.3			
0	0	1998	7	101	0	•	15	28.2	0	0	
0	0	1998	7	101	1	1	5	15.4	4	13.1	
0	0	1998	6	101	0	•	8	20.4	7	18.9	
0	0	1998	7	101	5	15.4	11	24.2	11	24.2	
0	0	1998	7	101	17	29.9	23	34.4	31	39.6	

portraits or snapshots inform all of us about what the community looks like and how it works.

As we have tried to point out, the community assessment must address several challenges. These challenges can be overcome. Much of the success of Healthy Start depends upon the quality of the community assessment, the kinds of outcomes chosen for the community and the assets and resources identified to help build stronger communities and more resilient children and families.

Community Assessment and the Context of Healthy Start

We have tried to make the community assessment process engaging in ways that will help to build and strengthen your local collaborative. The process will ultimately do several things for your local collaborative.

- It will allow you to better understand your community.
- It will provide the basis for the outcomes your community chooses.
- It will help you identify the assets of the community that can be brought to bear in making community changes.
- It will provide the benchmark against which you can measure community change.
- It will strengthen the justification for what changes you will seek for your community.
- It will provide the basis for wise decisions about future efforts to improve your community.
- It will provide persuasive evidence for needed services.

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Doing a community assessment is part of the fundamental ***strategies for collective success*** developed over the past nine years. (See the Healthy Start Strategy for Collective Success on the following page.) It is an essential means to developing an effective local school-community partnership. Without a useful and authentic community assessment, the basis of further action is ungrounded, unfocused, and will lead to frustration and possible resentment on the part of service providers and community residents.

In the context of Healthy Start, the community assessment is vital and critical to the selection of outcomes for the community. The strength of the collaborative, the viability of the partnership and the sustainability of the entire effort is built on the community assessment.

Scope of the Assessment

If your community has not had a comprehensive community assessment within the past five or ten years, the scale of the inquiry should, then, be broad and comprehensive. This means that all factors in the community must be examined. A broad and comprehensive community assessment will cover:

Family economics and income,

Educational attainment,

Health and well being,

Housing and the physical neighborhood,

Employment and job training,

Family, school and community safety,

Community resources and assets,

and so on.

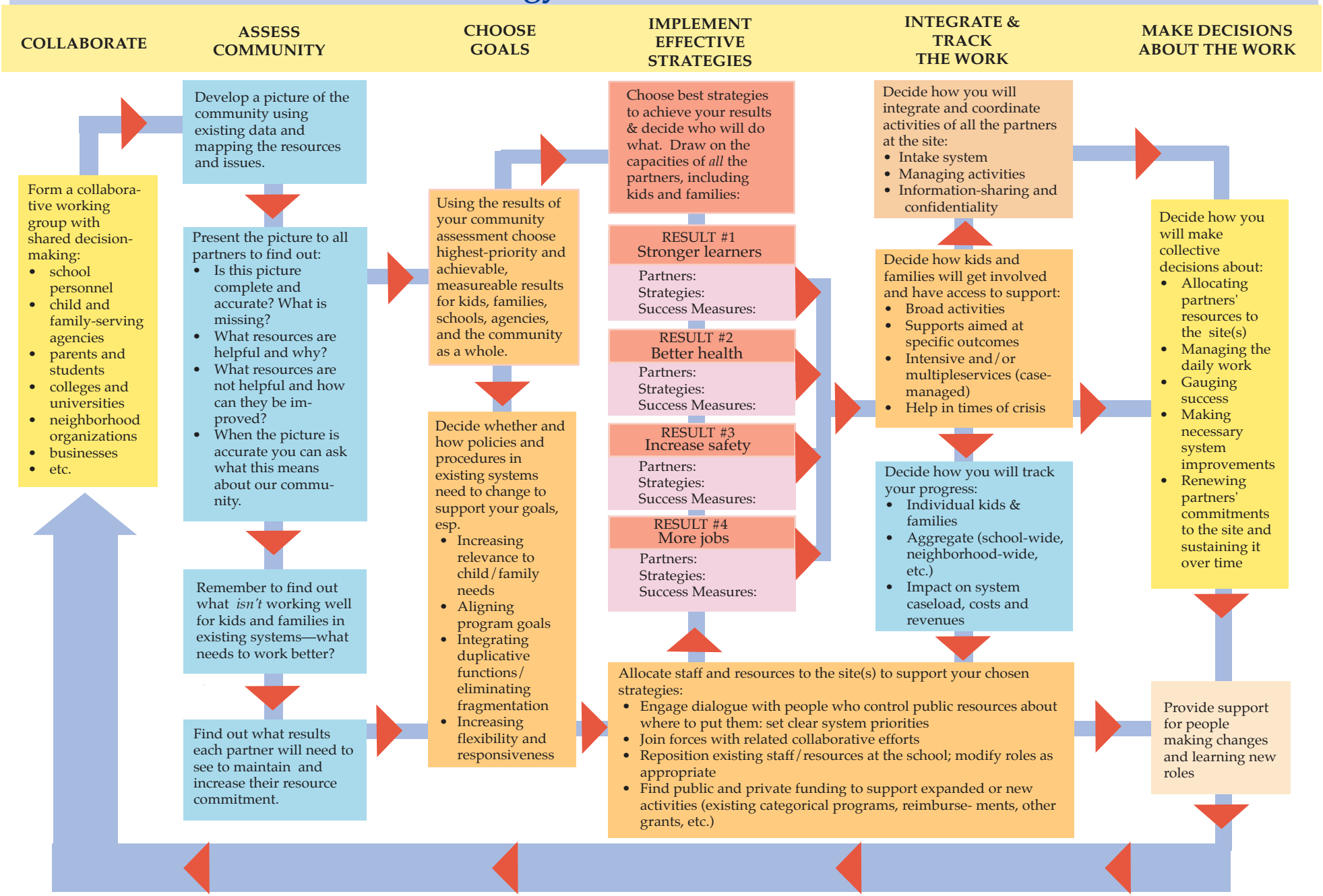
If a recent community assessment has been done, then you may be able to focus on the elements of your community where there is not adequate information.

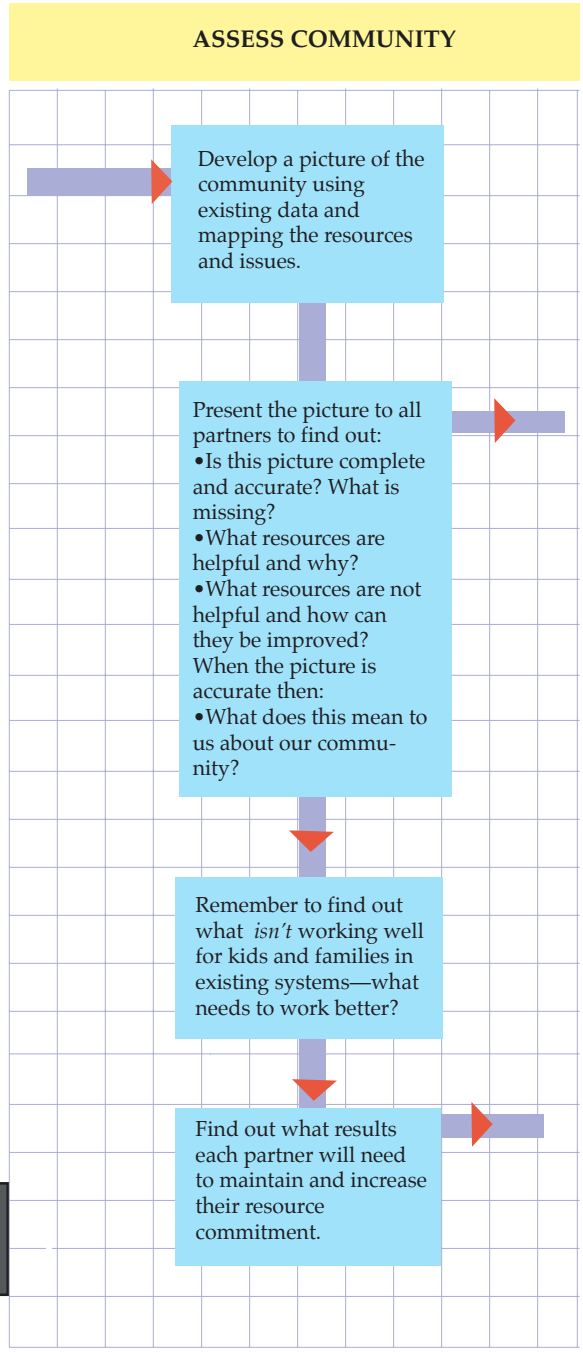
The final result of the community assessment process is to incorporate the desires and perceptions of residents in order to choose appropriate outcomes for the community.

Community Assessment Scale = Time + Energy

A well-done community assessment can take up to a year to complete. It should be done well. Consider what is at stake.

California's Healthy Start
Strategy for Collective Success





To the left is the portion of the *strategies for collective success* with which this guidebook deals. On the next page is a simplification of the steps in this community assessment process.

Overview of the process

The community assessment method promoted in our field notes consists of several sequential steps.

1. Form the Community Assessment Team

Draw together a group of people whose interest in the community and knowledge of the community will guide the community assessment process (see page 12).

2. Collect Information

This is the reality check. It involves using existing information about the community to explore, discover and carefully examine what is already known and observed.

3. Assemble the Community Profile

What is there in the community? What does it mean? This phase involves compiling what is known about the community—its education, health, safety, family economics—and framing a profile of the community, one that shows the challenges and highlights the assets of the community.

4. Present the Profile to the Community

This step involves taking the profile to the larger community—residents, businesses, community organizations, churches—to show what is known and has been discovered about the community. This is a community education phase that leads to...

5. Get Community Input to Set Priorities

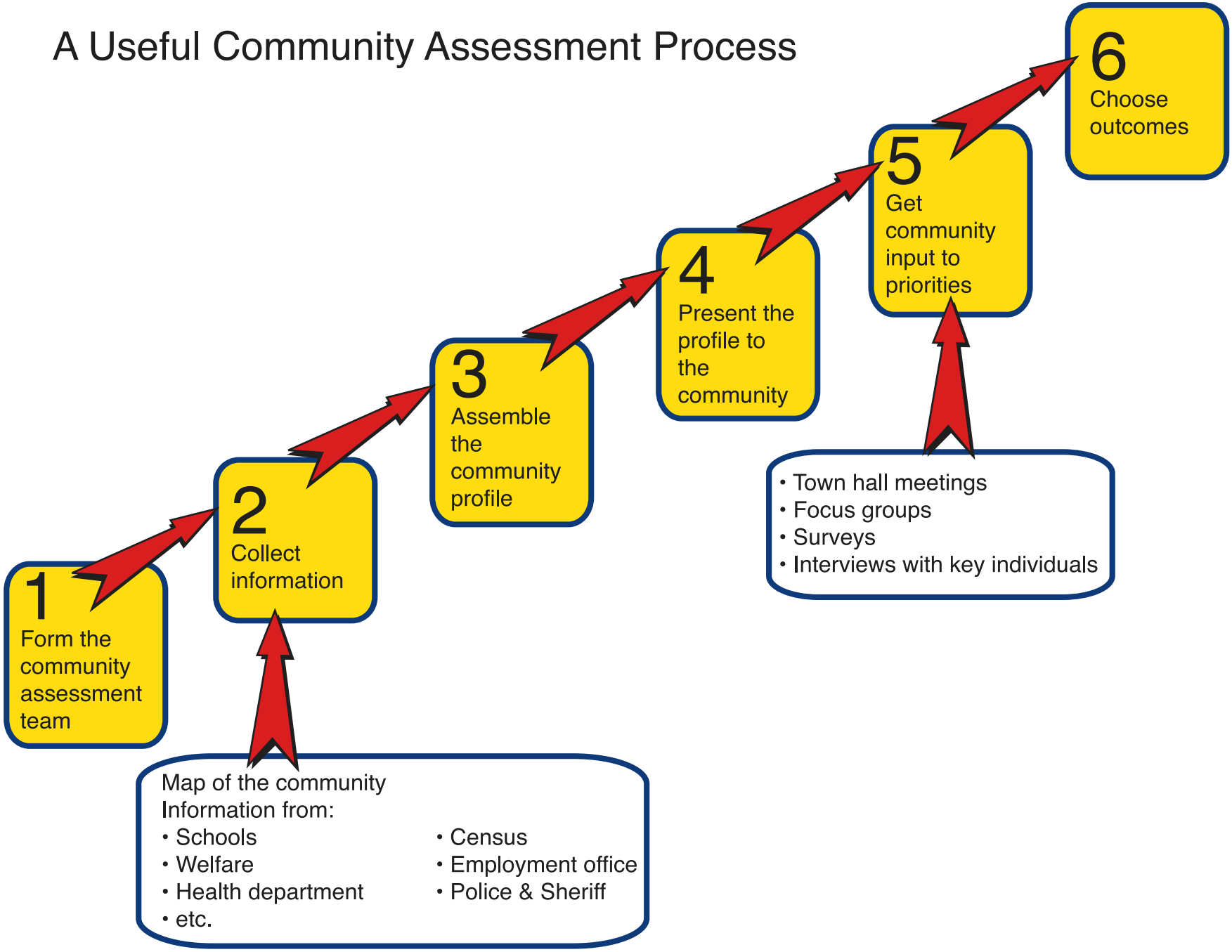
The purpose of this phase is to listen to the community, to take in its response to the profile, to lead to the setting of the first and second year's priorities. From this phase the community assessment team will...

6. Community Chooses Outcomes

This is the final phase of the assessment and involves setting out specific, clear and measurable outcomes for the community. These outcomes must connect the information gathered, the profile and the response of the community.

These outcomes are the basis on which the community will assess its progress toward stronger and more resilient children, families and community.

A Useful Community Assessment Process



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Advantages of the Process

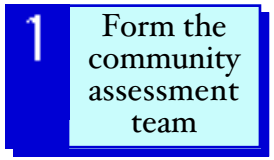
This approach to community assessment has several distinct and important advantages over other methods.

This method:

- relies on existing information about the community—information that is easy to get;
- brings the community together to engage in a discourse about the realities of the community—the needs as well as assets—in order to focus the discourse on the priorities for change; and
- reduces or avoids the use of methods—principally surveys—which are prone to error and take enormous resources and time to do well.

Part Two: Process

STEP ONE
Forming the Community Assessment Team



The community assessment team's job is to carry out the rest of the process steps shown on page 11.

You cannot do the work of a useful community assessment alone. The work requires an investment of several people's time and benefits from ongoing conversation about what is discovered and what the assessment means.

Who is involved

The team should consist of a range of people whose stake in the community is already established. On the next page some of the typical participants on a community assessment team are listed. Some of these people may already serve on your collaborative.

Adjusting your Community Assessment Team Membership

You may discover areas where you need to gather information, but there are no members of your team that have access to that information. In many of these

instances simply getting the information from a third party will not adequately help you to understand the dimensions of the issue or need.

An example of this is the area of employment, unemployment and underemployment. This complex area requires a knowledgeable person to help the community assessment team understand the dynamics of employment in a community, the relationship to language proficiency, job skills, transportation, affordable child-care and other related issues.

This becomes the time to adjust your membership. You will want to find the one person whose knowledge of the field is most suitable to your team's information needs. This person will have some important characteristics. He or she will:

- Be interested in what you are doing.
- Be willing to learn and discover along with the other members of the team.
- Have time to spend working with the team.
- Be willing to take what is discovered in the community assessment process back to his or her agency.

Team Members

- Community residents & parents
- School administration, faculty and staff
- City/county agency representatives
- School-age children
- Community-based organizations, including the faith communities
- Local businesses

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Team Documentation Project

It will be important to keep accurate and up-to-date information about who participates on your team, what assignments they have taken on, the progress they are making, the time they are spending and the results of their work.

It is helpful in any team effort to collect as much information as is appropriate about the team members and to document and share this information with other team members.

Make up a team roster for all team members. This roster should include:

- Name (first, middle initial, last)
- Title (job title)
- Agency that employs this member
- Office address (complete with street address, city, ZIP code)
- Office phone number (don't forget the area code)
- Office FAX number
- e-Mail address (the whole address)

STEP TWO: Collect Information

Mapping

2 Collect information

In order to collect useful information about your community you must first be able to define your community, neighborhood, and its boundaries.

A first step is to map your community so that you can be clear about where it is and what is in it.

Typical Healthy Start neighborhoods are defined by:

- A school attendance area or the attendance area for a cluster of schools.
- An entire community, especially true in very small towns in rural areas.
- A ZIP code area (a typical ZIP code area may include a population of some 40,000+ people).
- Several census tracts.
- A combination of these.

Mapping is a fundamental activity to facilitate collecting information about a community in a community assessment.

Two Types of Maps

We are all familiar with street and road maps. These will be useful as you start your community assessment. Some of the better maps are available from the local Chamber of Commerce or the automobile club. There are also maps on the Internet, but these have small scales and may be difficult to use.

Some of the best maps are called platt maps or property maps. With these you can color in the areas where community assets are located and color code various factors like housing, businesses and government. These maps can be obtained from the city or county planning department for your community.

Examples of the uses of these maps are found in the Tools Section of the field notes.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Another kind of maps to use are those that come out of computer-based geographic information systems or GIS. These allow you to code areas of a map for special values. For example:

- There are maps showing the blocks where crime rates are lowest; the safest parts of a community.
- There are maps that show census tracts color-coded by the number or percent of welfare recipients. These maps are used to plan public transportation routes.
- There are maps like the ones in the front of your telephone book that show where public service offices (community assets) are located.

There are very few elements of the human condition that cannot be placed on a map. Where the rich and poor live, where crimes take place, where resources are found and so on are the subjects of maps we can use to fully understand our communities.

Map of the community
School
Census
Welfare
Employment development department
Health department
Police department
etc.

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Team Exercise

At a meeting of the community assessment team, do the following:

On a map of the larger area in which your community falls, have the team draw the boundaries of the area you consider to be your community. As a topic of discussion, consider the extent to which these boundaries coincide with census tracts, ZIP code areas, school attendance boundaries and political boundaries (city limits).

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GIS systems can be expensive because they involve software and computers. But such an expense may not be necessary if there is a department doing GIS work in the local government or at a nearby college or university.

GIS is coming into common use in many city and county government offices throughout the state for a variety of planning purposes. Inviting a member from one of these departments to assist and serve on your local community assessment team may be an extremely valuable endeavor.

Have your community assessment team investigate:

- The types and quality of maps showing as much detail about your community as possible; and
- The availability of GIS services in or around your community.

When you have assembled your available map resources, have the whole community assessment team discuss the various uses of the maps and which maps are more appropriate to use.

On one of the maps, draw the boundary of the area you consider to be your community. In this process you must bring together people from the various sectors of your community and carry out a discussion about the definition of the community, the boundaries. This will be one of the first group meetings you may hold with the community. Be sure to include parents, students, business owners, teachers, and representatives from social service agencies.

Determine the extent to which this boundary contains:

- Census tracts—which ones
- ZIP code areas
- Other areas for which indicator data may be available.

Team Exercise

Print a large format map of the community showing property boundaries. During group meetaings invide the group participants to mark where they live on the map. this graphic display shows the portion of the community whose participation is represented.

Information Gathering

You have assembled your team. You have gathered your map resources. You have defined the physical community and its boundaries. Now comes the task of gathering the information that will construct your community profile.

What is Known

There are a lot of information pieces already available that will allow you to understand your county in comparison to the state of California.

The simplest and most complete source of information is the Children Now *County Data Book*. This publication is updated every two years. You can download the entire document from the Children Now web site:

http://www.childrennow.org/

Be careful you do not conclude that this county-level information represents your community. The needs and strengths of your community are likely to be very different from the county-wide indicators.

Four pages out of this book will allow you to construct a simple spreadsheet that shows comparisons of the state of California to your county and provide you with sources of information to seek out the indicators for your particular community. On pages 18–19 you will see an example of the kinds of information available for the state of California.

Team Assignment

This is the process of constructing the information that makes up your community profile, a detailed snapshot of your community that compares your community to your county and to the state.

Have your team divide up the elements of the information to be gathered.

Have one team gather information about the school's students.

Have another team gather census information about your community.

One team should look to the local health department for health indicators.

Another team will examine the information about employment and unemployment—the labor market for the community.

Still another team will begin to identify and catalog the assets and resources in and around the community.

School Information

Every school collects and maintains information about its students. Your school information team will want to

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SAMPLE OF INFORMATION FROM *CHILDREN NOW COUNTY DATA BOOK*

Demographics

ETHNICITIES (1998)	Total population	Children pop. (0-17)	Young child pop. (0-5)	Young child eth. diversity
All	33,506,406	9,426,168	3,363,312	100%
African-American	2,309,152	702,441	235,540	7%
Asian	3,716,953	1,056,688	370,593	11%
Latino	10,022,551	3,847,685	1,562,203	46%
Native American	199,747	50,286	16,067	<1%
White	17,258,003	3,769,068	1,178,909	35%

TOTAL NUMBER OF BIRTHS (1997) 524,174

Family Economics

CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY (1995)	Children Ages 0-17	Children Ages 0-4
Percent	24.3%	28.6%

CHILDREN RECEIVING TANF (1998)	Percent Ages 0-17	Percent Ages 0-5
All	15.2%	16.3%
African-American	39.5%	45.9%
Asian	16.4%	12.3%
Latino	16.3%	17%
Native American	17.6%	19.3%
White	9.1%	10.6%

CHILDREN RECEIVING WIC ASSISTANCE (1997— Ages 0-4)	
Number of participants	942,858
Percent of all eligible	68.4%

FAIR MARKET RENT (1998)	
Two bedroom	NA
As percent of minimum wage	NA

BABIES BORN TO MOTHERS WITH <12 YRS. OF EDUCATION (1997)	Number	Percent
All	166,525	31.8%
African-American	7,027	19.5%
Asian	7,979	14.1%
Latino	134,255	54.0%
Native American	755	29.2%
White	16,378	9.2%

CHILD CARE	1996	1997	1998
Cost/month—infant	$585	NA	$651
Cost/month—preschool	$407	NA	$467
Child care centers: % spaces for infants	4%	NA	4%

CHILD SUPPORT	1996	1997	1998
Percent cases with orders	48%	59%	64%
Money collected mo./ case with order	$78	$91	$95

California

Family Economics

- Thirteen counties have young child poverty rates of 30% or higher, with young children living in the Central Valley among the most likely to be poor.
- Seven of the eight most unaffordable metropolitan areas in the nation are in California. In these regions, at least 67% of renters pay more than half their income on rent.

Health

- California's infant mortality rate has dropped, from 6.3 deaths per 1,000 births in 1995 to 5.9 per 1,000 births in 1997. However, the mortality rate for African-American infants remains twice that of white infants.
- Statewide teen birth rates continue to improve, falling from 67.2 per 1,000 female teens ages 15 to 19. However, significant differences remain among various ethnic groups.

Education

- Among the thirteen counties where four-fifths of the state's children reside, at least 40% of children eligible for Head Start (a federally funded comprehensive preschool program for low-income children) are not enrolled.
- California's class size reduction efforts for the early grades have resulted in a decline in average K-12 class sizes, from 29.1 to 27.2 students between 1995 and 1997.

Safety

- The rate of children ages 0-17 in foster care increased between 1995 and 1997, from 10.1 to 11.3 per 1,000 children. The rate of children under age six in foster care also increased from 9.6 to 10.3 per 1,000 children.
- Motor vehicle accidents claimed the lives of 408 California children in 1998, 88 of whom were under age six. In the same year, 48,788 children were injured, with 7,389 of these children under age six. Auto accidents are a leading cause of death for young children.

Education

CLASSROOMS	1995	1996	1997
% eligible in Head Start	NA	NA	NA
Average class size	29.1	27.4	27.2
Per pupil expenditure	$4,287	$4,570	$4,938

STUDENT PROFICIENCY	1997	1998	1999
Students with limited English Proficiency	25.0%	25.0%	NA
% of 3rd graders reading at or above national avg.		47.0%	53.0%
% of 3rd graders scoring (math) at or above national avg.		46.0%	56.0%

PUBLIC LIBRARIES (1998)	
Monthly hours open (per 100 young children)	5.0
Preschool programs (per 100 young children)	1.4

Safety

FOSTER CARE RATES (1997–per 1,000)	Ages 0-17	Ages 0-5
All	11.3	10.3
African-American	53.7	47.6
Asian	1.6	1.5
Latino	7.9	6.9
Native American	24.2	26.7
White	9.1	9.6

CHILD ABUSE (1996)	
Number of reports	706,918
Rate (per 1,000)	78.2

GUN INJURIES & DEATHS (1997)	Ages 0-17	Ages 0-5
Injuries	909	38
Deaths	337	19

MOTOR VEHICLE INJURIES & DEATHS (1998)	Ages 0-17	Ages 0-5
Injuries	48,788	7,389
Deaths	408	88

Health

LATE/NO PRENATAL CARE	1995	1996	1997
All	4.6%	3.8%	3.7%
African-American	5.1%	4.2%	4.5%
Asian	3.2%	2.8%	2.9%
Latino	5.8%	4.9%	4.6%
Native American	9.8%	7.5%	7.2%
White	3.2%	2.4%	2.4%

PERCENT LOW BIRTHWEIGHT INFANTS	1995	1996	1997
All	6.1%	6.1%	6.1%
African-American	12.1%	11.9%	12.1%
Asian	6.4%	6.8%	6.8%
Latino	5.5%	5.4%	5.6%
Native American	6.8%	6.1%	5.7%
White	5.6%	5.5%	5.5%

INFANY MORTALITY RATES (per 1,000)	1995	1996	1998
All	6.3	5.9	5.9
African-American	14.1	14.0	13.2
Asian	4.4	4.0	4.0
Latino	5.8	5.4	5.6
Native American	7.3	4.5	3.9
White	6.0	5.6	5.5

TEEN BIRTH RATES (per 1,000)	1995	1996	1997
All	67.2	61.6	56.7
African-American	87.7	78.1	74.6
Asian	26.1	23.1	21.6
Latino	120.5	112.9	103.5
Native American	76.5	65.4	69.1
White	33.1	29.5	26.2

MOTHERS WHO INITIATE EXCLUSIVE BREASTFEEDING	1997
Percent	43%

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contact whomever in your school or district is responsible for collecting and maintaining this information.

The team will want to request a file that contains the academic performance, attendance, demographic and other program information about all of the students.

What you will ask for is known as disaggregate information. You want a file that contains the following types of information for each student. This list is not exhaustive or complete. You will need to work with the school and district personnel responsible for student information systems to see what is available. Some of the data elements will be:

- ethnicity
- age
- home language
- grade in school
- LEP or ELL status
- migrant status
- free and reduced price lunch classification
- grade point average
- standardized test scores
- attendance
- and so on...

NOTE: Some schools and districts may be reluctant to share such information because it may contain information about students that should be confidential. But you don't need (at this point) any information that will identify the students themselves. You don't want the student's name, address, phone number, student identification number, or any other information that identifies the student individually.

The school information team will use this information to construct the first part of the community profile as a snapshot-in-time of the students academic performance.

The information on the students may look something like the figure displayed on page twelve when placed in a spreadsheet or statistical analysis program. (See Part Three of these field notes for more information on computer software.)

At this point the team can construct some simple graphs that show the characteristics of the students. An example of this kind of graph is shown on the next page.

This graph shows the change in grade point average by ethnicity over time. What you can clearly see in this graph is that some groups of students are improving substantially over the several years of their attendance between 8th and 12th grade.

A repeated collection of student information and reexamination of what the student information reveals, can show the change in the characteristics of the student community.

Soc Sci 1%	Sat Soc	SAT Year	Grade in	SAT Scho	SAT Read	SAT Read	SAT Mat	SAT Mat	SAT Lang	SAT Lang	SAT Sci
0	0	1998	8	101	22	33.7	22	33.7	18	30.7	2
0	0	1998	8	101	67	59.3	25	35.8	51	50.5	8
0	0	1998	6	55	13	26.3	10	23	11	24.2	1
0	0	1998	7	101	47	48.4	42	45.7	73	62.9	
0	0	1998	8	101	40	44.7	31	39.6	45	47.4	5
0	0	1998	8	101	12	25.3	17	29.9	20	32.3	
0	0	1998	7	101	3	10.4	23	34.4	14	27.2	
0	0	1998	7	101	10	23	12	25.3	18	30.7	
0	0	1998	6	101	20	32.3	28	37.7	34	41.3	3
0	0	1998	8	101	5	15.4	8	20.4	0	0	
0	0	1998	8	101	5	15.4	5	15.4	3	10.4	
0	0	1998	7	101	21	33	9	21.8	18	30.7	
0	0	1998	8	101	4	13.1	15	28.2	5	15.4	
0	0	1998	7	101	4	13.1	6	17.3	7	18.9	
0	0	1998	7	101	0	•	15	28.2	0	0	
0	0	1998	7	101	1	1	5	15.4	4	13.1	
0	0	1998	6	101	0	•	8	20.4	7	18.9	
0	0	1998	7	101	5	15.4	11	24.2	11	24.2	
0	0	1998	7	101	17	29.9	23	34.4	31	39.6	

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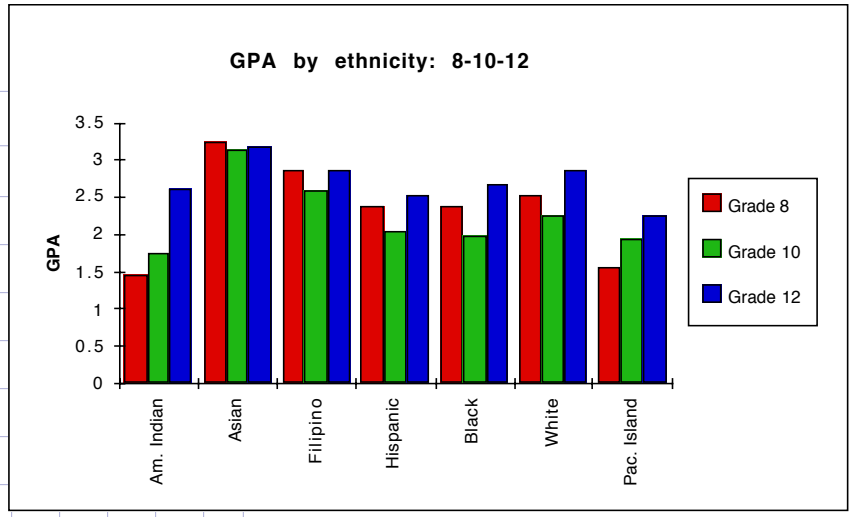

Other Information

In every community there are people responsible for collecting and maintaining information describing that community. Each of the teams will contact these people at the health department, employment offices, library and other places and begin the process of collecting and assembling the information that describes the community in sufficiently useful detail.

In this way you will assemble the information that your local team will use to construct a useful profile of the community.

Community Assets

When you look at a community's assets or strengths you are distinguishing your work from a standard needs assessment. A needs assessment is the deficit approach to examining a community. A community assessment looks at the community's assets as well as its needs.

What are assets? These are the things that can be built upon in revitalizing a community. They take several different forms. For most communities the assets will fall into three categories:

1. Human Assets

These are the characteristics of the population in the community that are the community's strength. Examples of this form of asset are: strong sense of family in a tightly-knit cultural or language community; the presence of large numbers of extended families; families with low mobility and, hence, long-term ties to the community; residents that own and operate neighborhood businesses; residents that are employees at social service agencies, churches, and other community-based organizations.

2. Physical Assets

These are the physical characteristics of the community. The obvious example of this is the community school. Other examples are: parks, transportation systems, other public facilities, and elements that help define the community (freeways, rivers, etc.).

3. Economic Assets

These are the features of the community that make up the economic structure. They are businesses, informal exchange or barter systems, farmer's markets, grants that come to the community in the service of the community, and the local market. To some extent these economic assets may include the services of some social service agencies such a mutual housing assistance office or a food closet.

Mapping Assets

It is relatively easy to map the physical assets and most of the economic assets, but it is also worthwhile to try to identify those portions of the community where there are strong cultural groups. You can ask yourself: What blocks or apartment groups contain the immigrant populations from, say, Cambodia or Laos, or Mexico? These clusters of language and cultural unity are a strength of the whole community.

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STEP THREE: Assemble the Community Profile

3 Assemble the community profile

You have assembled your team; you have collected all the available information about your community; you have collected and made maps that show the community and its resources. Now you will construct your community profile in order to take what you have found back to your community.

An important guiding principle in making such a snapshot is the audience. You probably have people in your community whose reading proficiency is limited, whose language may be other than English, whose mathematics' skills may be limited. So you must prepare a snapshot that communicates to all members of your community and addresses these challenges.

Elements of Your Snapshot

Your snapshot will be unique to your community. A complete snapshot will include, among other things:

- Statistics about your community, especially those that compare your community to the county and to the state. These might take the form of a graph comparing rates (e.g., unemployment rates, 3rd grade reading rates, 7th grade student immunization rates, student dropout rates, cases of domestic violence per 100,000 population, and so on).
- Maps of resources and community assets.
- Comparisons of your community over time, showing trends (Are the indicators getting better or worse year by year?).

Use graphs and charts as often as possible because they are easier to read, and more easily understood by people with limited English language facility.

Remember: you are sharing what you have discovered about your community. Your audience is the community and those with a stake in the future of the community. You must be able to communicate your snapshot to this entire community easily, clearly and effectively. Here are a few simple rules of thumb:

- Use graphs instead of tables where possible.
- When you must use tables of information, use the simplest form of information. For example, don't carry out decimals to more than one place.

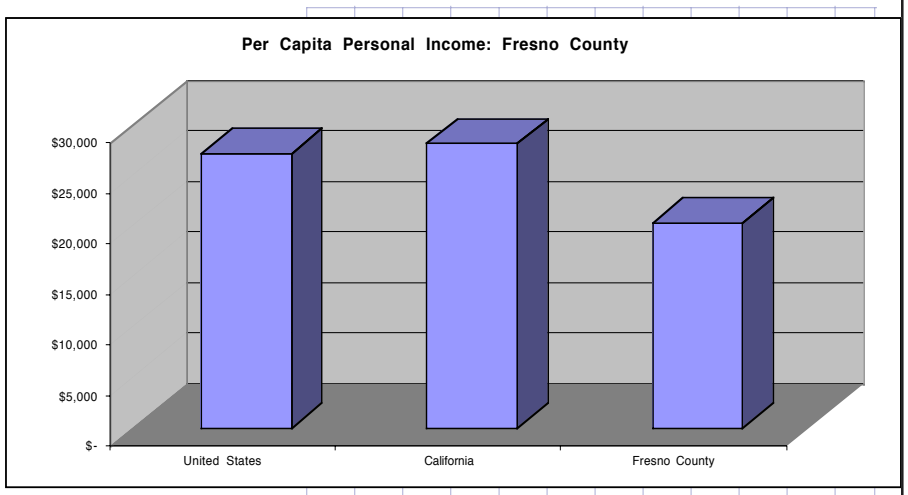
- Write simply and directly. Do not use any technical jargon or specialized language.
- Have your snapshot translated into appropriate languages.

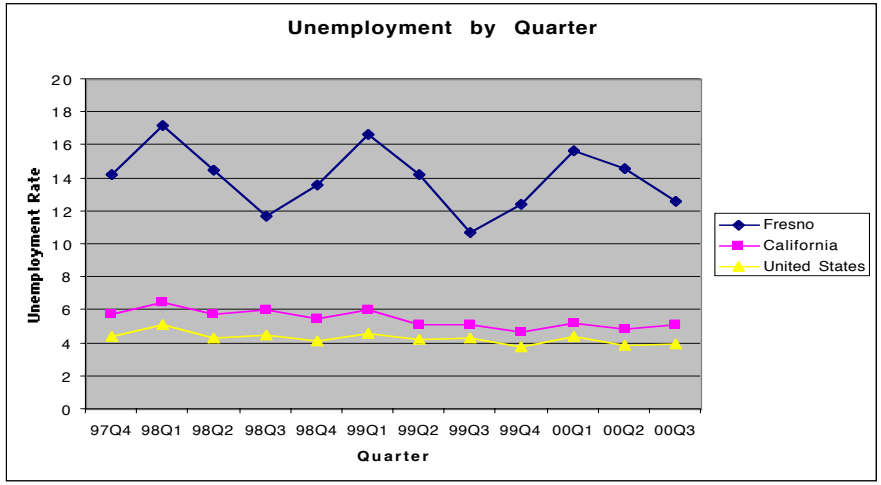
Examples

Refer to Part III: Resources and Tools. Here are some examples of how you might go about presenting your profile to the community. Some of these forms are more useful in communities where the communities language diversity is significant.

For example the simple graph below shows the highly seasonal unemployment rate in Fresno County and compares it to the state of California and the United States between the fourth quarter of 1997 and the third quarter of 2000.

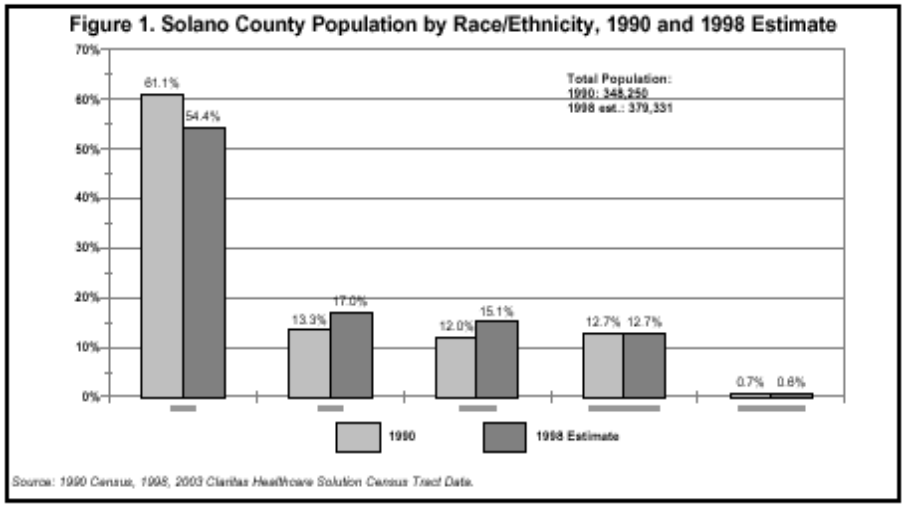
This information is available for all counties and many municipalities at a variety of federal and university web sites. Search for key words like employment and statistics.





Race/Ethnicity

Solano County has become an increasingly ethnically diverse county in the 1990's. According to 1998 population estimates, 54.4% of Solano County residents are white, compared to 61.1% in 1990. Latinos now make up 17% of the population (a 40% increase since 1990) and Asian/Pacific Islanders account for 15.1% (a 37% increase since 1990). The proportion of African American (12.7%) and American Indian (<1%)) residents stayed the same from 1990 to 1998 (Figure 1).



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STEP FOUR: Presenting the Profile to the Community

4 Present the profile to the community

Remember, the goal of this process is to choose results and outcomes appropriate to your community. If you carry out your community assessment with broad participation, you will assure yourself that the implementation of your chosen activities will have broad acceptance and support. These people will become your educators for their community neighbors. The common expression of this is "buy-in."

You must take your snapshot out to the community to find out what the community wants to see changed. Outreach is important. Doing everything possible to include all segments of the community is very important.

The process from here on is to educate the community about what your team has discovered and to carry out an open, public discussion about the next steps, the outcomes to be sought and, the programs to be implemented.

You will want to make sure that all of what you present to the community is understandable to the audience. The examples provided in Step Three may provide some guidance for you.

Outreach takes many forms. The most effective outreach to the community goes well beyond simply putting the information out to people. It assures people that their participation and input are valuable. In your outreach efforts:

- Give participants feedback on their contribution. Do this often.
- Show participants that their participation and input is leading to real changes in the community.
- Celebrate the participation by making public acknowledgment of the work and the contributions of the participants.
- Pay particular attention to the children and young people participating in the process.
- Allow participants to become leaders and spokespersons for the process.

STEP FIVE: Getting Community Input to the Priorities

5 Get community input to priorities

We have identified several ways of taking this profile out to the community to get the reaction, appraisal, input, and to elicit its sense of what the priorities should be.

Each of the methods described in the next several pages is a variation on one essential idea: providing an opportunity for the community to comment on the work of the community assessment team as it appears in the community profile. Each method has strengths and weaknesses, but all provide opportunities to connect the community profile to the community.

The best community assessment process will employ two or more of these methods in order to assure the best coverage and the most appropriate choice of community outcomes. For example: you might start with a town hall meeting and conclude with a community survey. Or you might start with focus groups and proceed to a community survey.

There are a few sequences you should use and a few you should avoid. For example, it would generally be unwise to end this step with focus groups. The purpose and process of focus groups is in bringing clarity to the several important topics identified in the community snapshot.

Each of these methods require more than just holding meetings, sending out survey questionnaires or interviewing a group of people. There are methods and procedures that are known to produce the best results. While this document only introduces these methods, it will be important for the success of your community assessment process to seek out and employ the appropriate tools to make your efforts a success.

The essential thing to consider when selecting the methods you will use is this: what is the best way to include as much of the community as possible in the process and arrive at appropriate and useful outcomes for your community.

Each of these methods, if not employed appropriately, may produce results that can (and sometimes will) be called into question by those who will oppose your change efforts or by those seeking to advance their own solutions for the community.

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Methods to Get Community Input

- Town Hall meetings
- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Interviews with key individuals

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Focus Group Meetings

In some communities a series of focus groups may be more appropriate than a town hall meeting. This is particularly true when:

1. The number of issues to be discussed are numerous you can hold several focus group meetings on different topics; or
2. The geographic area of the community is large, as in rural communities where there may be more than one center of civic activity.

A Focus Group Defined

A focus group is a structured group process, conducted for the purpose of obtaining detailed information about a particular topic or issue. Focus groups are useful both to gather data and to make choices from among a variety of ideas.

Care must be taken, therefore, to select and recruit the right people for each focus group. You will want to choose people whose knowledge of the topic is well regarded but who are willing to listen to the perspectives of others. You will want to include different perspectives on the topic at hand. One common result of focus groups is that most of the participants learn something or discover something from the process.

Focus groups are prone to produce errors in many of the same ways surveys are. In some instances these errors in method have been a reason for people to discredit their use.

Advantages

- Allows focus on specific issues and solutions.
- Narrow in focus.
- Open to all stakeholders.
- Encourages in-depth examination of focus issue.

Disadvantages

- Difficult to bring together consensus from different focus groups.
- Intense outreach and publicity required for full participation.
- Requires good consensus-building skills and good facilitating skills.
- Errors result from not hearing the right people.

An Overview of the Process

The moderator essentially steers the focus group meeting through an agenda that focuses on one or two of the major topics identified in the community snapshot. Most focus groups record the proceedings and then produce transcripts for analysis. The focus group process involves the following:

- A presentation of one or several aspects of the community snapshot.
- Facilitating a discussion about the meaning of the chosen elements of the snapshot.
- Guiding the discussion of the participants around issues related to the topic of the focus group.
- Bringing the group to consensus about the relative importance of the particular topic(s) as matters to be addressed in the local Healthy Start initiative.
- Summing up the meeting.
- Providing an unbiased and systematic analysis of the discussion that took place at the focus group (this may involve making transcripts of the meetings and doing some content analysis of the discussions).
- Reporting back to the community-at large the results of the focus group meeting(s).

At this point the community assessment team can convene a final focus group meeting addressing the outcomes chosen and discussing the resources to be brought to the community initiative.

Finally, as with the town hall meeting, it will be important to publicize the results of the entire process.

Role of the Moderator

Like the town hall meeting the moderator in a focus group is the key to facilitating the flow of information and maintaining a fair, just and open exchange of information and ideas.

Difference from Town Hall Meetings

A question you might ask here is: How is a focus group different from a town hall meeting? The difference is the focus. A series of town hall meetings will follow the same agenda and cover the same topics. A focus group will only address one or two or, maybe, three of the general topics of the community snapshot. The results of the town hall meetings are summarized where the

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results of the focus group meetings are compared. Both kinds of groups require careful analysis and reporting.

Size of Focus Groups, Participants

Focus groups are typically made up of 8–10 people. The participants in such groups do not make up a sample of the community but, rather, represent a particular perspective on the topic(s). So if housing is an issue it would be wise to include someone from the local housing authority, someone from the housing real estate industry, someone from a mutual housing group, the leader of a tenant organization, someone from a housing advocacy group, and someone involved in housing finance. Each group will be made up of a rather homogenous list of participants.

Using Focus Groups with Other Methods

Because focus groups typically do not include a large representation from local residents, it is important to use focus groups in conjunction with another method.

Focus group meetings have been used to provide more clarity to the community snapshot in preparation for a town hall meeting or a survey of the residents of the community.

Multiple Topics

In small communities where a small number of focus groups mean more than one topic must be covered, it is important to make clear breaks in the presentation and discussion between topics and to not confuse the discussion or let it wander between topics. The principal result of a focus group meeting is just that: focus.

Focus groups can be accomplished in a matter of an hour if the discussion is continually directed to the topic and the topic is clear. Occasionally a focus group on a particular single topic may take two hours. If a focus group must address more than a single topic then it is wise to schedule one hour per topic for up to three topics. Use breaks between topics to get refreshments and to clearly set a boundary between the topics.

Building Consensus

In a focus group it is not necessarily the goal to arrive at a consensus about the topic. The principal goal is to develop a better understanding about the dynamics of the topic.

For example: If the focus group is addressing issues of underemployment and unemployment, it will be important to know what approaches have been

tried. The participants bring such knowledge to the discussion. Further, what kinds of approaches seem to work better than others in the community and would benefit from expanding or enhancing the approach.

Town Hall Meetings

Town hall meetings are appropriate forums to discuss the community snapshot and begin selecting community outcomes when two things are true:

1. The community is small enough that a large percent of the community can attend a town hall meeting. These are most appropriate in rural areas or in urban settings where a neighborhood of about 25 city blocks is the area of the community assessment.
2. Outreach to the community effectively draws from all segments of the community: students, parents of students, other adults, older people, local business owners, staff and representatives of community-based organizations.

It is wise, therefore, at any town hall meeting, to collect information about who participates in order to determine the effectiveness of the outreach efforts.

In your Community

If your community meets the conditions set out above and you elect to use this method, you will need to:

Advantages

- Opportunity for community wide dialog about community issues.
- Inclusive of the entire community.
- Broad consensus-building process.
- Highly public and visible.

Disadvantages

- Requires extensive outreach and publicity.
- Requires a skilled moderator/facilitator.
- Needs large politically neutral space.
- Difficult to get shy people to speak out publicly
- Requires collecting information on participants and subgroups.

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- assure that you have at hand the skills and talents among your town hall team,
- organize: reach out to the community often and through different methods,
- carry out the town hall meeting, and
- report back to the community assessment team on the results of the town hall meeting(s).

An Overview of the Process

The process at the town hall meeting is simply this:

- Present the purposes of the town hall meeting.
- Introduce the community assessment team.
- Present the community snapshot.
- Engage the participants in a discussion about the findings of the community assessment as presented in the snapshot.
- Ask the participants to assist the community assessment team in setting priorities for the community, choosing outcomes. Community priorities are set through a consensus-building process.
- Conclude with a summary report of the outcomes that the participants have chosen.
- Write up a report of the meeting and publisize outcomes.
- Summarize the community's chosen outcomes on a poster for the Healthy Start office.

Through this town hall process you have chosen outcomes for the community. It is important to reach out to the community with information about the plan ahead, including programs and services the process has set out as a goal.

It is through this outreach that the community continues to be included in what is planned and what is going on.

Role of the Moderator

In the town hall meeting the moderator is the key to facilitating the flow of information and maintaining a fair, just and open exchange of information and ideas.

The moderator of the meeting must have the trust of the participants; they must not appear to have an agenda other than to fairly advance the work of the community assessment team.

Sub-Groups

As mentioned earlier, the first significant challenge is the outreach to the community. This outreach effort must seek all segments of the community and the town hall meeting must allow all segments of the community to be heard. In this document the different distinct groups of people will be called subgroups.

A town hall meeting is not just a gathering of a bunch of people from the community to talk about what should be done to improve the community.

If your community is made up of several groups then you must reach out to each and all of them. So if your community is made up of several large groups whose home language is not English, you may wish to hold several town hall meetings, one in each of the language groups.

One way to identify sup-groups is to talk to the school administration. Find out the language and cultural groups of the children in the school. Another method is to look at the most recent census to see the percent of population in different cultural groups.

Other sub-groups you will want to reach out to may include immigrant populations, the unemployed, and business groups.

The cues that you might want to hold more than one town hall meeting are:

- Your community is large.

It is easy to hold a town hall meeting for a community of 1,000 to 3,000 people. It is not so easy to arrange for a town hall meeting for a community of 10,000 people.

- Your community is made up of large groups that are diverse in language, culture, or economic status.

If you decide to hold more than a single town hall meeting, be sure to find some means for reporting back to all community groups-the results of all of the meetings. You can do this through a public announcement, press releases, local newsletters and even a final town hall meeting where all sub-groups are invited.

If you plan more than one town hall meeting, be sure to tell all groups that there are other meetings taking place and that the results of all town hall meetings will be made public.

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Bias

It is very important in any public meeting like a town hall gathering or focus groups to not have a bias or agenda. Your goal is to get community input to your community snapshot.

Where you hold your town hall meeting or meetings, therefore, will be important. You should find a location that is large enough to allow lots of people to attend and participate. This could be a community center, the school cafeteria, or some other location that is easily accessible.

In some communities a local church may be thought of as a neutral area. The best method for picking your location is to talk to several people that live in the neighborhood. Do not let a small group of three or four people pick the location because they may not be aware of the feelings and perceptions of the local community.

Surveys

Many Healthy Start communities have used surveys to conduct their community assessment. Many of these surveys listed a group of programs or services and asked the survey respondent to indicate how important the service or program was for them or the community. Furthermore, most of these surveys were sent out to the parents of school children and were not offered to the remainder of the community.

There are at least two things wrong with this survey approach. The first is that it assumes the programs and goals are universally understood and that such programs and goals are appropriate to the general conditions of the community. The second is that using such a survey makes a follow-up community assessment to measure community change virtually impossible.

In the approach to community assessment outlined here, we have tried to discourage people from employing surveys in their community assessments. The reasons are:

1. A well designed survey is not an easy thing to do.
2. Most people wildly underestimate the amount of time, energy and resourse it takes to do a good survey.
3. Using community perceptions solely as the basis of a community assessment is known to be the source of programs that do not meet community needs.
4. It is exceedingly difficult to control the sources of error in

surveys and to get really good coverage of the whole community.

5. If not done well a survey's methodology and results may be discredited by those decision makers who are not inclined to respond to community-designed initiatives.

Additional reasons have to do with the problems related to doing reliable and valid surveys. When not done well, they produce questionable results.

Too many community development efforts have relied on surveys like those described at the opening of this section—surveys that were not well designed or executed.

Some surveys seek only to have the community identify the programs and

Team Assignment

For your community, think of a survey designed to do three things.

1. It reports on what the community assessment team discovered about the community.
2. It shows comparisons to the larger geographic areas to educate the community about where the local community stands in relation to other areas.
3. It asks the survey respondent to make choices, not by voting yes or no, but by setting priorities.

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Can be broad-based.	• Extremely time consuming.
• Input to community assessment snapshot can take a variety of forms.	• Difficult, even for professional survey takers, to do well.
• Allows for a diversity of input in choosing outcomes.	• Many sources of survey error—sampling error, unsurveyed population, no-response rates.

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services needed. The results have been that those services were under-used by the community.

Other surveys have been used to justify an array of services and programs that were already designed for the community. The results are similar.

Never-the-less surveys are one method that can be used to find out which issues from the community snapshot are important to the community.

The survey fills a unique role in this design for a community assessment. The survey does not ask respondents to report on their behavior or needs, it asks respondents to consider the summary of the community profile and to select from among the various issues identified in this profile, the most important ones to address.

Useful Surveys in this Community Assessment Process

To be clear: a survey, a town hall meeting and focus groups are all essentially the same thing. They are an attempt to use a small group of people to represent the ideas, the desires, and the needs of the larger community. As in town hall meetings, it is important to get the broadest possible community participation and to collect sufficient information to verify the participation of all segments of the community.

In this community assessment design, the survey is done to determine the outcomes desired for the community. The form and content of the survey, therefore, are different than you might expect.

Instead of asking people what they want or need, you are showing people the snapshot of the community and asking what should be changed or improved.

Instead of asking people to report on their behaviors, you are reporting on observed behaviors and asking people to choose which behaviors or conditions they wish to have changed.

Instead of asking about individual needs, you are reporting on what is known about individual needs and asking the community to choose which needs are important to address.

Surveying the Whole Community

Many sites try to survey the community by surveying the parents of students in the school. This is usually only about one-third of the households in a neighborhood.

Think of ways of surveying as much of the community as possible.

In one community, the survey sent home with students was also administered by the student to the two houses next door to the home of the student. If a student lived next door, the student skipped that house (or worked with the neighboring student in planning the survey strategy) and went to the next house. In this way the students covered almost 90% of the community residents.

Be sure to survey local businesses and social service agencies as well as the people attending local churches, mosques, temples and synagogues. You may need to design a parallel survey for these groups of people. Be sure to ask the same kinds of questions, and direct the respondent to refer to the community you have defined.

Tricks and Techniques of the Survey Masters

There is a lot of research on how to get good response rates from surveys (see the Resource Section on surveys).

The wisdom that underlies this research is called Exchange Theory. This has to do with how people think they will benefit from spending the time to complete a survey. You must think of the motives of survey respondents: the people in your community.

One thing is clear: good intentions alone are not motive enough to complete a survey.

First, there is the simple use of a raffle. In this instance when individuals fill out a survey and include their address or name and address, they are automatically entered in a raffle for school supplies or some other appropriate reward. In some communities, this has been known to increase survey return rates to nearly 50% of the parents of students.

Next, plan on numerous follow-up inquiries. These take time but they do increase the return rates.

Finally, and this is a really effective way of getting high return rates, engage the students as researchers in the community assessment survey. This works particularly in the upper elementary and middle school grades. This gives students a role and a responsibility. They often end up doing more than being the courier of the survey; they can become engaged in looking at the survey data and studying what it means for them and their school-community.

More on Survey Workload

We said this before, and it bears repeating. Many people under estimate the amount of time and energy it takes to

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carry out a good survey.

In one community, a total of 3,500 surveys were sent out to the parents of every student in each of one preschool, three elementary schools, one middle school, one high school and one continuation school. More than 1,700 surveys were returned. This is a return rate of 48%.

Then the survey responses were typed into a computer database for analysis. It took three minutes to enter each survey. This amounts to 85 hours of work.

Once the data were in a computer, it was time to do the analysis. This involved several meetings to frame the kinds of questions the planning committee wanted to answer. For each successive set of questions, it took an additional hour and a half to analyze the data and produce a report that the planning committee could examine, discuss and make decisions about. This query and report cycle continued for several weeks.

And, added to that work, were surveys of teachers and students which also involved substantial work.

Other Survey Issues and Strategies

The questions you ask are important. This includes the wording and the ways the survey respondent can answer.

Open-ended questions provide the widest range of response possibilities, but the work involved in categorizing and coding the open-ended question is substantial.

On the other hand a question that asks how important something is must allow the respondent to choose from a range of values. A simple "important" or "not important" will not suffice.

One technique that has shown promise is to allow respondents to have five "I want to address this problem" votes (which have a value of five points each) and five "I do not want to address this problem" votes (which have a value of -five points each). Each respondent can apply their ten votes (five for and five against) in any way they want. They can even put all five of their "I want to address this problem," votes on a single issue. The scoring of this voting scheme assumes that items that receive no votes for or against are not of primary importance. The items that receive the most "I do not want to address this problem," votes are clearly the lowest on the community priority list.

Interviews with Key Individuals

This is a technique that can be used to lead into town hall meetings, focus groups or surveys. By itself, this

method of getting community input to your community profile has some risks. The typical interview subject will overstate the magnitude of most problems in the community.

However, this technique is often used to fill in or supplement the ideas and opinions of those individuals who cannot attend to the other methods.

The first challenge is to select the right "key individuals." And, of course, there may not be consensus among the rest of the community as to just who these are.

Who are these key individuals? They may include:

- The people who have lived in the community the longest.
- Agreed-upon community leaders.
- Heads of community-based organizations that specifically serve the community.
- Prominent leaders of the adults and children of the community.
- Longtime business owners.
- Elders of churches, synagogues, mosques and temples that serve the community.
- Officials of local governmental agencies that serve the community.

As with surveys, interviews may be time consuming beyond your expectation. Be prepared to spend about five and one-quarter hours of work in transcribing, coding and analyzing the interviews for every hour you spend actually conducting the interviews.

Advantages

- Includes people that cannot attend to other activities.
- Free-flowing; questions can follow a line of responses.
- Easy to do, even with an interview protocol.

Disadvantages

- Risk in selecting appropriate key individuals.
- Time consuming to record and transcribe.
- Difficult to code broad range of responses.

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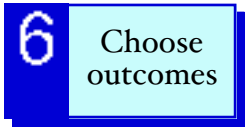
STEP SIX: Choosing Outcomes, Implementing Effective Programs



You have arrived. You have gone through a process that helps make a useful definition and description of your community.

You are now at the point where you take what you have learned and make choices for a new future for children, families and the community. What do these outcomes look like? The criteria for choosing outcomes for your community are:

- The outcomes should be achievable. You should be able (with the evidence of your community assessment) to persuade the appropriate partnership agencies to work with you in integrating their services into your school-community.
- The outcomes should be measurable. Ask yourself how much you can change something like the dropout rate and that measure should be your outcome index.
- The outcomes should be focused.

There are two issues here:

(1) taking on a realistic range of activities; and (2) working on those areas where you can draw on the community assets and resources to affect the changes you want.

There are three factors that come into play when choosing outcomes for your community:

1. Available Assets
2. Political Will
3. Clarity and Specificity of Outcomes (or the means/ends issue).

The community assets (the agencies, organizations and facilities that are available in your community) make up the beginning of your resources for bringing about change. These resources may start with a representative from the county health department and develop into a full-fledged health screening program for all school-age children. They may start with a cooperative food buying club and evolve into a school-community garden project. They may start with unemployed and underemployed young people and move toward the development of local small businesses.

The political will issue may have surfaced earlier in the community assessment process through an assertion that some programs are better than others. In many communities it becomes important to build a constituency through the community assessment process by using the community assessment process as a way of building a unified community vision—a consensus about goals and the paths toward those goals.

It is easy to confuse service outcomes with real community change. An example of an outcome goal is to fully immunize 50% of school children by the 4th grade and 100% of all school children by the 7th grade. Some communities make the mistake of establishing their outcomes as service goals: provide health care screening for 100 elementary school children per year.

By outcomes we mean measurable changes in the community, not service outcomes. The number of people attending an adult literacy class is not an outcome but the increase in the number of adults able to read at a specified grade level is an outcome. The number of people attending a job skills workshop is not an outcome. The number of people obtaining a job and keeping the job for 24 months is an outcome. The number of school-age children being screened for health care needs is not an outcome. An increase of 50% in the number of children receiving the full array of immunizations is an outcome.

Conclusion

The challenge at this point is to choose and implement effective programs. This, too, requires a sense of discovery and investigation. When you implement a program you must know enough about how it works to be able to assess how it is working in your community.

This means that you will want to track your work in sufficient detail to be able to find out how you are doing.

You will want to know several things:

- Are you reaching the intended population with your services?
- If you are not reaching your intended population, why? What will you do about this?
- What are the consequences of your efforts for children and families?
- Are you collecting sufficient information to be able to answer the questions your local partnership agencies will ask about how well you are doing and what cost savings are being made by your new efforts?

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- Have you an evaluation plan for your site, for elements of your new collaborative efforts? Who is responsible for this? Do they have resources sufficient to the challenge?
- And, lastly, have you kept good records about where you got the information that made up your snapshot so that you can revisit the process in a year or two?

Your journey has brought you full circle. You began with a mission of discovery. You sifted through the available information about your community in order to develop a useful and clear profile or snapshot. You reached out to your community to share what you have discovered. Finally you worked with and listened carefully to the community to hear their concerns and to frame these priorities as action plans and measurable outcomes for change.

Now your journey of discovery takes a new form in designing and implementing strategies that are known to be effective in addressing the priorities established in your community assessment process. In this you will discover that your journey of discovery has the power of providing the complete and thorough justification for your plans and goals.

Part Three: Resources and Basic Computer Tools

Useful Resource Guides in print and on-line

There are many resources available at libraries, especially libraries of colleges and universities. Other resources must be obtained directly from the organization that prepared the original document. These guides may be obtained from the publisher we have listed or on-line at the URL cited.

The following is a list of resources categorized by topic.

Surveys

Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method: second edition; Don A. Dillman, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. New York, 2000

Chapters 1–4 are essential reading (pages 3–193) and Chapter 5 is also extremely useful.

How to Collect Survey Data is available at:

http://www.stat.ncsu.edu/info/srms/survpamphlet.html

What is a Survey? is available at:

http://www.stat.ncsu.edu/info/srms/survwhat.html

How to Plan a Survey? is available at:

http://www.stat.ncsu.edu/info/srms/survplan.html

Town Hall Meetings

There are quite a few resources available on this topic. Some are very specific regarding the tasks; others are more general. A really useful on-line document is about the Arizona Indian town hall meeting.

The Navajo Indian Town Hall is available at:

http://www.indianaffairs.state.az.us/townhall/process.html

Arizona Town Hall, Inc. "Key Elements of the Arizona Town Hall Process."

Champagne,Duane. *Social Order and Political Change: Constitutional Governments among the Cherokee, the Choctaw, the Chickasaw, and the Creek*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California. 1992

Focus Groups

The Use and Misuse of Focus Groups by Jakob Nielson, 1997, is available at:

http://www.useit.com/papers/focusgroups.html

Using Focus Groups for Evaluation, by Mary Marczak & Meg Sewell, is available at:

http://ag.arizona.edu/fcr/fs/cyfar/focus.htm

Focus Groups: A How-Not-To Guide, by John FitzGerald, is available at:

http://www.coolth.com/focus.htm

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Basic Computer Tools

Using a computer can make a lot of things go faster, easier, and lighten the workload. This is especially true in collecting and reporting on the information about the community.

The following is a brief list of the kinds of tools you can use to help make the snapshot.

- Excel, the spreadsheet program, is very useful for making tables and graphs.
- FileMaker Pro is a database program that is easy to use and can help make survey tabulations and analysis easier and more error-free.
- Some kinds of statistical analysis programs can take information from Excel and FileMaker Pro and do analyses of the information gathered. These all have the particularly useful ability to create graphs of the information you are analyzing. They are also far more powerful than either spreadsheets or database programs in the analysis of information.
- For the more sophisticated computer user, a GIS or geographic information system can allow you to map your community and its assets.

If you are inclined to try to do sophisticated information management and analysis with a spreadsheet program, be sure to take a look at:

Statistics with Microsoft Excel, by Beverly J. Dretzke & Kenneth A. Heilman, Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ, 1998