

Conducting a Community Needs Assessment

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Happy Spring!

This month's article is on the importance and the how-to's of conducting a Community Needs Assessment. We are recommending that local municipalities consider conducting a Community Needs Assessment because it will provide them with valuable information that could be used in a variety of ways such as justifying grants, designing new local programs, promoting collaboration among local agencies and businesses, and supporting funders in decision making.

The results of a Community Needs Assessment can provide your municipality with good information about what services are needed in the community; how the citizens of your community view present services; what their recommendations are for improvements; and, identifying any new needs that the community may need to address.

Steps to Conducting a Community Needs Assessment:

1. Appoint a task force/committee to oversee the project and determine the timeline, the focus of the assessment, the tools and how the outcomes will be reported.
2. The task force/committee will identify the stakeholders who will be part of the assessment. These stakeholders can come from the following:
 - Local elected officials
 - Paid municipal staff
 - Community volunteers
 - Community members
 - Educational organizations
 - Social/cultural/recreational organizations
 - Business groups
 - Environmental groups
 - Senior groups
 - Churches/Synagogues
 - Other
3. Once the stakeholders have been identified the next decision will be deciding upon the focus of your Community Needs Assessment. Is it going to be a general assessment versus specific (e.g. general would be any concerns of the citizenship - specific would be individual topics such as crime, safety, housing, etc.)?

4. Next, you will need to develop the questionnaire/survey and decide what forum will be used to capture the information (i.e. public meetings, focus groups, questionnaires, telephone surveys, mass mailings, and/or interviewing key community representatives).

The following links are good examples:

Links to **tools** on how to conduct a Community Needs Assessment:

Utah State University Extension

<http://extension.usu.edu/files/SGuide.pdf>

Port Jervis New York

<http://www.portjervisny.org/mainstreetprogram.htm>

Links to **completed reports** as a result of Community Needs Assessments:

Oxford County, Southwestern Ontario

www.ocl.net/needs/four.html

Essex County, Ontario

<http://www.essexcs.on.ca/Data/Needs/Needs%20Assessment%202002.pdf>

5. Next steps:

- Implement the plan with a timeline
- Generate a final report with recommendations
- Leverage the final report for future growth of the municipality
- WOW** your future funders!

If you have any questions regarding conducting a Community Needs Assessment in your municipality, please feel free to contact Bohse & Associates, Inc. at 732-291-8038, or email Pat Boshe, president of Bohse & Associates, Inc. at pbohse@bohse.com.