

Managing the Community Assessment Process

The following tips will help you implement each of the five steps of community assessment.

1. Plan and Organize



Get Help: It may be helpful to review a completed community assessment report. Your Regional Office may be able to provide you with samples and offer additional support as you design your community assessment process.

Plan the Process: The community assessment is an important part of the Head Start planning process. The community assessment and its annual update, along with ongoing monitoring and self-assessment, provide data to support your program's continuous quality improvement efforts. An annual planning calendar, coordinated with your funding timeline, is helpful for ensuring that these activities happen in a timely fashion.

Spread the Word: A well-publicized community assessment is more likely to generate enthusiasm from staff and stakeholders. You'll need this buy-in to build engagement. Spread the news widely via social media, public service announcements, and newsletters, and in meetings with staff and partners. Keep stakeholders up to date on the process and share the results.

2. Design the Work



Determine Your Data Needs: It's important to identify what data you need and your internal and external data sources. Work with community partners and review existing community assessments, both those that your program may have produced and those produced by other social service providers or public sector entities in your community. Be sure to identify what, in addition to the required data, you want to collect.

Identify Gaps: Describing community resources helps you identify where important gaps in services exist. Consider the following:

- Are there agencies with long waiting lists or a complete lack of services for a particular area of need?
- What barriers exist for families, and are those barriers different or unique for certain cultural or ethnic groups?
- Are other community service providers aware of the challenges and barriers unique to Head Start families?
- What are the potential partnerships that could alleviate gaps and barriers?

3. Gather Data !



You will be gathering a significant amount of data from various sources. Some of the data will be from secondary sources, such as your municipal or state government, advocacy groups, or other local service providers. Some will be primary data that your program itself collects. There are many ways to gather this primary data, including surveying stakeholders and conducting focus groups, large-group discussions, and interviews with individuals. Your program may use several different methods.

4. Analyze and Make Decisions



Analyze the Data: Establish focus questions. Ask yourself what you are most interested in finding out, and look at your data with those questions in mind. When you identify significant issues, look at them from every angle to learn as much as you can about why the issues exist and how they have evolved over time.

- Examine data from a variety of sources to thoroughly understand each issue.
- Be prepared to address additional questions that come up as part of your analysis.
- Develop your team's capacity to effectively analyze data, as needed, by providing mini-trainings based on [Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center \(ECLKC\)](#) resources.

5. Communicate and Incorporate



Communicate Data, Findings, and Recommendations: Share information with program leadership, staff, and stakeholders throughout the community assessment process. Frequent communication with these groups is important to build the buy-in you will need to support the recommendations and goals that result from the community assessment. Programmatic changes based on data are also more likely to be supported. Changes that are supported are more likely to be successful.

Create Goals: The information you uncover in your community assessment will help you formulate goals for your program. These goals will have a direct impact on children, families, and the community. Analyzing data, identifying gaps in community services, and discovering changes to community demographics all support the development of these goals. [Foundations for Excellence: A Guide for Five-Year Planning and Continuous Improvement, 2nd Edition](#), provides an excellent overview of planning in the Head Start five-year project period and includes detailed guidance for developing broad goals and smart objectives.

