

Community Needs Assessment

# of pages double-spaced	Point Value
8-10	3 points
11-14	4 points
15+	5 points

The profession of social work has an established history of focusing on the identification of community needs and the development of resources to address those needs. Needs can be identified as the gap between what is determined as a necessary level of resources and what resources actually exist. Needs can be felt by an individual, a group, or an entire community. They can be as concrete as the need for food and water or as abstract as the need for community cohesiveness. For example, low-income people in a community need help getting around town but the community has no public transportation. Resources are those things that can be used to address needs. Resources can be anything from people to places to organizations that provide needed community services. For example, community social workers can help locate financial resources through grants and foundations to develop needed public transportation.

The ability to examine needs in a systematic way through a **needs assessment** helps in the identification of what resources are lacking and provides a basis for developing the resources to meet those needs. The United Way of America defines a needs assessment as "...a systematic process of data collection and analysis as inputs into resource allocation with a view to discovering and identifying goods and services the community is lacking in relation to the generally accepted standards and for which there exists some consensus as to the community's responsibility for their provision."

Completion of this Field Assignment requires a double-spaced written paper on identifying a detailed plan of how to conduct a needs assessment regarding a specific issue experienced by people receiving services from the Field Agency. The identification of the specific issue is to be done in collaboration with the Field Instructor and is to reflect an actual need of the clients of the Field Agency. The development of the needs assessment plan is to include the following components.

- Identification of the client community to be served by the needs assessment including the following descriptors of the community:
 - Age range
 - Ethnic and cultural background
 - Religion
 - Socioeconomic status
 - Medical issues
 - Gender
 - Sexual orientation
 - Mental illness and substance abuse issues

- Geographic location and boundaries of the community
 - Social issues experienced by community members
 - Literacy
 - Safety
- Identification of the issue the needs assessment will focus on.
 - Identification of the current level of resources available to provide services for that need.
 - Description of how to determine the resources available to conduct the needs assessment including:
 - Finances (money available to pay for materials and wages of involved staff)
 - People (number of staff and volunteers)
 - Materials (computers, copying machines, paper, et cetera)
 - Office and room space available for meetings and information gathering
 - Identification of who the needs assessment is intending to inform, influence, or persuade (elected and appointed officials, social service agencies, government board, state or federal legislature, philanthropic organizations, business, religious organizations, academic institutions, and community groups).
 - Description of what information is needed to be collected from the assessment.
 - Description of what means will be used to gather the needed information including:
 - Evaluation of existing data including a literature review of existing research.
 - Hand-delivered, mailed, and e-mailed questionnaires.
 - Individual personal interviews with:
 - ✓ Community leaders and key decision makers knowledgeable about the community.
 - ✓ General community members.
 - Telephone surveys.
 - Public forums.
 - Focus group interviews.
 - Identification of potential problems that may be encountered in the process of carrying out the needs assessment.
 - Description of specific ways to respond to those problems that may be encountered.
 - Description of how the information gathered from the needs assessment will be evaluated.
 - Description of how the information will be used to inform, influence, or persuade those persons and organizations who have the power and ability to provide resources for the needs identified in the assessment.

- Description of how the entire needs assessment process will be reviewed for how effective it was in accomplishing what it was intended to do.

References:

University of Kansas: The Community Tool Box (2015) Retrieved from:
<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents>

Child Welfare Information Gateway: Community Needs Assessment (2015) Retrieved from:
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/assessment/community/>

National Association for State Community Services Programs (2011): A Community Action Guide to Comprehensive Needs Assessment: Retrieved from
http://www.nascsp.org/data/files/CSBG_Resources/Train_Tech_Assistance/Needs_Assessment_FINAL_-_8.22_print_to_pdf.pdf