Needs assessment: A tool for program planning and community building
8 May 2019 | Paul Harkin, Jessica Smart

Comments

Is there a template or list of issues to prioritise for such action in formulating a plan?

Raewyn | 17 May 2019

The list of issues will come from the data and the community, but there is a list of sample criteria that could be used to assess and prioritise needs in the practice resource (table 2, page 10). I would recommend working with your decision-making group to adapt this list so it suits your context.

Jessica Smart | 17 May 2019

Needs assessment can be a good tool for community engagement and co-design with the community. How about a very vulnerable group who is not used to stand up for themselves (e.g. homeless group, prisoner etc)?

Eddie | 17 May 2019

As you’ve noted, there are some groups and individuals who have greater or lesser degrees of experience with being involved in this type of initiative. With needs assessment, as with all community development work, the challenge is to meet people where they are at, so ensure that your methods of engagement are appropriate for the people you are seeking to work with. You may need to start with relationship and trust building before you can do a more formal needs assessment.

Jessica Smart | 17 May 2019

How to avoid raising expectation that cannot be realized given the community/organizational constraint?

Eddie | 17 May 2019

This is a great point. I believe 100% in transparency and openness - it is very important to be clear with all stakeholders, especially community members at the beginning of a process about the community/organisational constraints that exist. I would not recommend beginning a needs assessment process unless you have scope to undertake some actions in response to the needs that are identified.

Jessica Smart | 17 May 2019
“Would you be able to provide further references on the strengths-based approach to map the assets of a community?

Priscilla | 17 May 2019

They are in the references in the slides or check our website and the expert panel page for more resources. You can look at asset based community development (ABCD), this is a key focus of this discipline, so there will be resources available. There are also a few links to community asset mapping in the body of the needs assessment practice resource.

Jessica Smart & CFCA | 17 May 2019

“What is the role of social media in community development work - connecting the community?

Pamela | 21 June 2019

I think there’s a whole unit of study in this one, although in many ways we’re still working it out. We definitely use it as a way of connecting with people – telling them what we’re doing, learning what others are doing, hearing what people think, etc. Social media allows us to engage with people in ways we couldn’t before without literally walking the streets. But the referral and recommendation element of social media makes that so much more impactful. It’s also a space to advocate and organise. It’s a space to share learning and have debate – to support the pedagogy and awareness raising that should be part of all good CD. But social media is also a space in which the challenges in society play out – discrimination, bullying, isolation, etc. CD work should attempt to deal with that, I’m just not sure we know how to do that online. Then we need to consider that not everyone is online, not everyone trusts what they see online anymore, and most of the people we work with use their phones, and so how we use social media should reflect that platform.

Paul Harkin | 21 June 2019

“Hi, I am curious to know if BENSOC thinks DEX is a good source of data, understanding needs and measuring outcomes?

Pamela | 21 Jun 2019

It’s been a few years since I’ve personally used DEX, however with the information it is gathering and the systems that support it, in theory it should be a good source of data. I’m unclear if the data is as accessible yet as we would want it to be, and of course, the more people that are using it the better source of data it will be. So it has potential, just not sure we’ve fully realised it yet.

Paul Harkin | 21 June 2019