National Association for State Community Services Programs

A Community Action Guide to Comprehensive Community Needs Assessments

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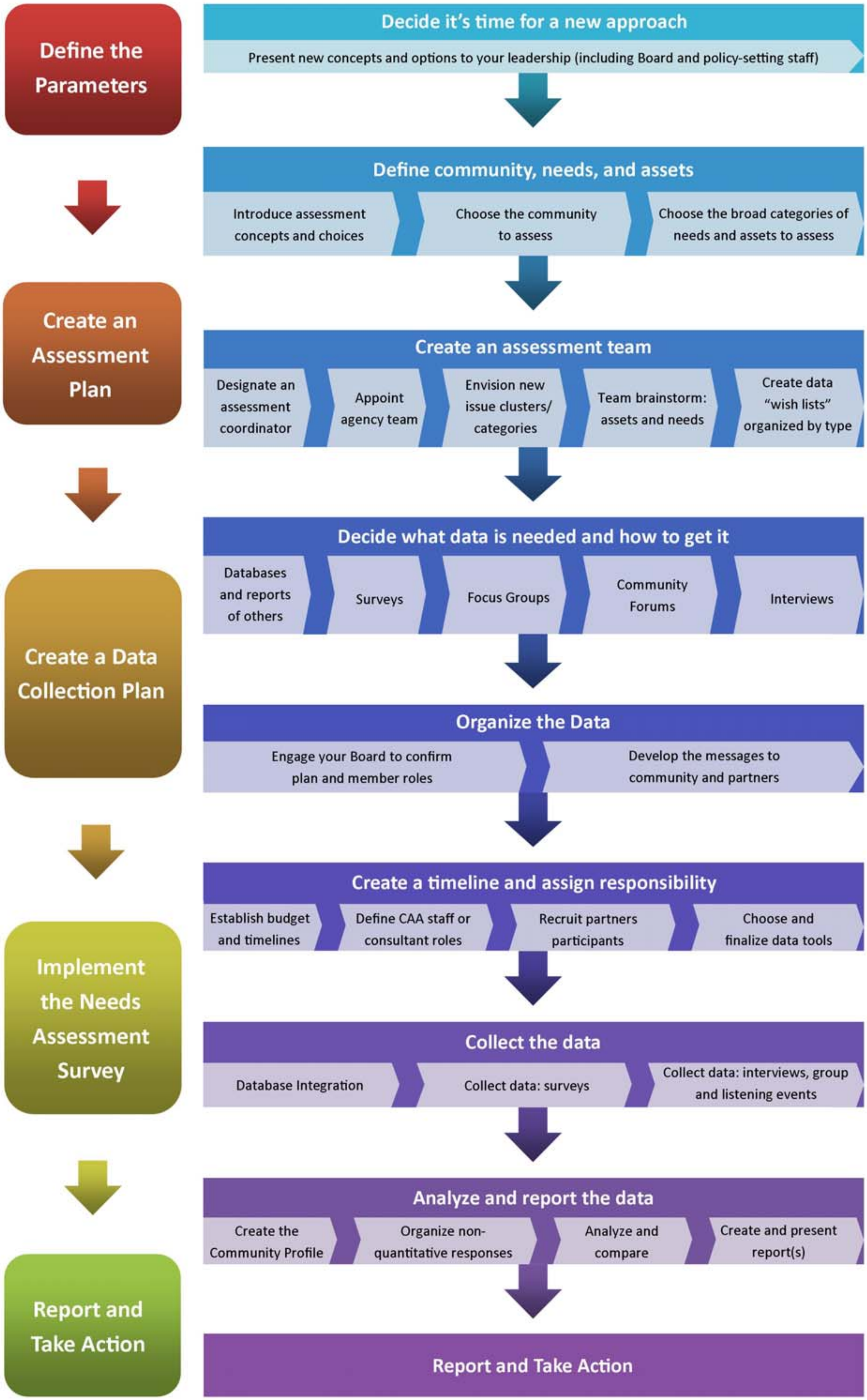
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A COMMUNITY ACTION GUIDE TO COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

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Introduction: A Broad Framework for Community Needs Assessments

Just what is a Community Needs Assessment? The question is being asked by Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) state offices, local CSBG-eligible entities (hereafter referred to as Community Action Agencies or CAAs) and policy-makers at many levels. Community Needs Assessments have greater importance today because of the increased focus of funders on identifying, tracking, and reporting on results of program investments. CAAs are now expected to choose strategic goals and follow a clear plan to achieve desired results. It is essential to explain how the priorities in an agency's strategic plan meet the proven needs in the community. For many CAAs, this will require a new way of thinking about and doing Community Needs Assessments.

Community Needs Assessments involve one of two levels of effort. The difference depends on whether or not it is time for a new multi-year strategic plan. The two types of activity are:

> <u>Level 1</u>: A comprehensive community assessment that contains all the information a CAA will need to prepare a new multi-year strategic plan.
>
> <u>Level 2</u>: An update of the information that the CAA gathered in an assessment conducted within the past two years, if an up-to-date multi-year strategic plan is in place.

This guide covers Level 1, the comprehensive assessment, which serves a very specific purpose for CAAs. It is the basis for considering whether a CAA's current programs and plans are effectively achieving its strategic goals. This type of assessment will allow CAA leaders to:

- ❖ Understand the scope of both emerging and ongoing needs of economically insecure residents in the community.
- ❖ Choose the role the organization will play in meeting some of those needs.
- ❖ Identify economic resources, social resources, and partnership opportunities in the community that can help meet the needs.
- ❖ Identify significant public policy issues.
- ❖ Educate community residents and leaders about the identified needs and provide input on policies and strategies.
- ❖ Explain to the community the rationale behind decisions to prioritize needs and allocate resources.

The CAA's assessment is unique within its community and state. It offers a focus on local conditions, analyzing the economic opportunities and barriers for all residents who are at risk of remaining or becoming economically insecure. It identifies existing and potential resources to expand opportunities. It prepares the CAA leadership to plan a multi-year strategy.

For most CAAs, the comprehensive assessment described here will mean a change. It will require thinking about needs and resources in a more comprehensive framework. It will mean connecting the closely-related causes of poverty by collecting more data. It cannot be achieved by a survey of CAA customers' satisfaction with the services they now receive, or by asking customers what services they need. It cannot be achieved by only updating economic and social data that are part of the CAA statistical profile. These approaches only assess a narrow "market," not a whole "community." As a result, they fail to identify all available assets and resources. A comprehensive assessment requires analyzing and synthesizing many kinds of information. Fortunately, this significant investment of time and effort is required only every few years.

How This Guide Will Help

This guide supports planning and implementing the comprehensive Community Needs Assessment. It lays out design choices, planning steps, implementation practices, analysis, and presentation options. It is intended to help individual CAAs choose and implement effective community assessment practices; it also includes options that groups of agencies can implement together in partnership with state CSBG offices. The primary users will be CAA Executive Directors and the management staff that supports the CAA's strategic plans and information management.

The Guide is organized as follows: **Part I** makes the case for more comprehensive and asset-oriented needs assessments than those traditionally employed by CAAs and offers tools for the CAA to use to decide on the scope of its next assessment. **Part II** covers organization and development of an agency Assessment Team and how to define its shared vision. **Part III** offers a roadmap to the Assessment Plan and includes examples of approaches to information-gathering for the kinds of things CAAs may choose to analyze. It focuses on more information than would appear in a study based primarily on the agency's current agenda and the CSBG service categories. It offers detail about *what* data to collect, *where* to get it and *how* to gather it. It also includes tools currently used in the CSBG Network that can be adapted to an agency's own goals and community conditions. **Part IV** covers the implementation steps to collecting the many types of information that will be used in the CAA's multi-dimensional analysis. **Part V** covers methods and resources available for analyzing and presenting the information. Agencies are free to pick and choose the suggestions they find useful.

This guide is also intended to spark local and state discussions about methods for conducting assessments. It is intended to stimulate CAAs and their partners to look at many options for capturing and using information. It equips CAA leaders to adopt a broad vision of the community's future and to plan the CAA's role in bringing it about. A number of examples, online resources, and tools, including some from recent CAA assessments, are provided in a **Resources Appendix** for each of the following five sections.[1]

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, all the materials referenced can also be found online at www.virtualcap.org.

Part I: Define the Assessment's Scope: *Is It Time for a New Approach?*

Decide it's time for a new approach

Present new concepts and options to your leadership (including Board and policy-setting staff)

CAA Community Needs Assessments should contain all the factual and opinion-based input leaders will need to complete the next strategic planning process. That plan will rely on its findings.

THREE REASONS FOR A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

1. It's the law: The CAA is required to do so by the CSBG authorizing statute.

> ***From the CSBG Act – Section 676(b)(11):***
>
> "an assurance that the State will secure from each eligible entity in the State… *a community action plan … that includes a community-needs assessment for the community served,* which may be coordinated with community-needs assessments conducted for other programs…"

The language is clear: the subject of the assessment is the community's needs. It does not refer to the needs of individuals in poverty nor to specific kinds of needs. While CAAs have wide discretion in choosing the priorities for their Community Action Plan, they are directed to base that plan on a complete analysis of the community-wide conditions in order to address verified and urgent local needs.

2. Information-based strategic plans have been a foundation of the Community Action approach since the program's earliest days. They are increasingly important in these tight economic times to support accountable and sound management practices.

> ***Office of Economic Opportunity Instruction (1970):***
>
> "CAA(s) must develop both a long-range strategy and specific, short-range plans for using potential resources…In developing its strategy and plans, the CAA shall take into account the areas of greatest community need, the availability of resources, and its own strengths and limitations."

The foundational OEO rule above defines the subject of the assessment as not only the community's needs but also its resources or assets. Further, it demands an assessment both of the CAA's strengths (assets) and of its organizational limitations (needs). Finally, it affirms that the Community Needs Assessment is to be used to develop the CAA's long range strategy as well as its shorter-term activities.

3. Today, CSBG's Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) approach includes specific expectations regarding information-based planning, promulgated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in 2001.

Information Memorandum 49, Office of Community Services, US DHHS

1. The entity and its Board complete regular assessments of the entity's overall mission, desired impact(s) and program structure, taking into account:
    a. the needs of the community and its residents;
    b. the relationship, or context, of the activities supported by the entity to other anti-poverty, [and] community development services in the community; and
    c. the extent to which the entity's activities contribute to the accomplishment of one or more of the six ROMA national goals.
2. Based upon the periodic assessments described above, the entity and its Board has identified yearly (or multi-annually) specific improvements, or results, it plans to help achieve in the lives of individuals, families, and/or the community as a whole;
3. The entity organizes and operates all its programs, services, and activities toward accomplishing these improvements, or outcomes, including linking with other agencies in the community when services beyond the scope of the entity are required. All staff is helped by the entity to understand the direct or indirect relationship of their efforts to achieving specific client or community outcomes…

Remember, the assessment's data and analyses do not dictate the CAA's strategic plan. The comprehensive assessment will *inform* strategic choices. It may support not only the CAA's decisions but possibly those of other organizations. Without properly analyzed, comprehensive information, the CAA's strategic choices for the future will be limited. However, the assessment alone is neither the agency's strategic plan nor the annual CAA plan.

Some Frequently-Asked Questions about Assessments:

Q *Can't we have a national assessment template with standard data items so we can "fill in the blanks" and be sure all agencies are gathering the same information?*

A While it may be helpful to have a consistent set of data elements across a set of agencies in a state, or in all states, such a tool will only provide the raw data for the community statistical profile. That is an essential part of a full assessment, but it will need to be analyzed together with other information. It will not provide information that identifies unique features of the community and the community's assets, or key indicators of its economic potential.

Q *I already have a comprehensive assessment process that I like using. Do I have to change it?*

A Not necessarily. This guide will offer a yardstick for comparing the CAA's current assessment system to some sound ideas on analyzing comprehensive information to support periodic strategic planning. The comprehensive re-assessment should always precede a strategic planning phase; in between plans, updating or expanding the data using current processes may be more appropriate.

Consider whether the CAA's last assessment was comprehensive and strategic. Did it cover and organize all the information that the CAA leaders needed to write a broad strategic plan? To recognize and develop new options for action and investment? To select strategically among those options?

Not sure whether the last community assessment meets a "Comprehensive and Strategic" standard?

Take the quiz in the Resources Appendix for Part I, **"Your Last Community Assessment."** If "no" is the response to more than three of the questions in the quiz, the previous needs assessment probably lacked some important information.

The CAA Community and the Scope of Community Needs and Issues

The choices about what to assess and how to undertake the assessment process must engage *all* key CAA decision-makers who will be a part of the agency's strategic planning. These stakeholders will be the primary users of the information and analysis. Be sure to include the Board of Directors and management staff. They must commit to the scope and issues addressed in the comprehensive needs assessment and should be recruited to represent the agency and to recruit participation during the information-gathering and reporting phases. The Board should commit a substantial period of time to a planning meeting that is devoted to discussing and agreeing on the scope, content, and cost of the comprehensive assessment.

- Begin with a presentation about the need to expand the strategic planning process to include more information, such as assessments of community assets and challenges and agency options and priorities.[2]
- Explain the rationale for an inclusive approach to assessing needs in order to plan effectively.
- Explain how the assessment can measure more than just individual, family, and social service needs. In the Resources Appendix for Part I, there is an agenda and materials for this leadership planning exercise entitled **"Board Exercise: Defining the Scope of the Community Assessment."**

Before determining the information needed to gather, the CAA must clearly define how the information will be used and who the audience will be. For example, will the CAA use it in future strategic planning? Will it be used to create different kinds of public reports to further define the agency's identity and its role in the community? The *process* of reaching out to the public and to the current or potential partners to solicit their input will be as important as the resulting reports in building the CAA's image and impact.

[2] For a guide to the Strategic Planning Process that explains how Mission, Vision, Analysis and Plans are connected, see "Planning for Results" developed for the Community Action Association of Pennsylvania. Available from the author, Dr. Barbara Mooney, Barbara@thecaap.org.

Build on The CAA's Base

Q *Isn't the current strategic plan the best source of data for a new plan?*

A Using indicators related to strategies in the current plan is one way for an agency to learn how effective the strategic approach was and remains at present. However, a new assessment may be necessary to provide information that allows the leadership to consider new approaches.

The leadership's role is to set the general parameters of the assessment and to approve a process that will bring them a final design to review. This planning exercise should help an agency arrive at agreement and direction on:

- ❖ What "community" will be assessed,
- ❖ What categories of issues will be studied, including needs; and
- ❖ Which indicators will best capture strengths and assets. Please note, some assets may be intangible like ethics, values, personal character, support networks and history,

The issues will reflect the range of questions that the Board wants answered as preparation for the next strategic plan.

DEFINING THE TARGET COMMUNITY

Once the board agrees on a comprehensive needs assessment process, they have a basis for defining the places and sectors to be assessed. There may well be different perceptions of the CAA's service area. An assessment plan begins with knowing and understanding the entire community, including those sub-sections of the population with specific needs and interests. As the designated anti-poverty agency in a given geographic area, each local CAA must be able to describe the entire area broadly. However, CAA leadership also needs to identify where they plan to target their assessment and to articulate why that target was selected. Ensure that leaders consider boundaries that include essential resources, supporters, individuals and families affected by CAA activities. For example:

- ❖ Is the CAA target assessment area a community of place?

  A **community of place** is defined by distinct geographic boundaries; it can be a political jurisdiction, but neighborhoods or social systems also qualify. The CAA's service area is a community of place; so is the greater metropolitan area or areas that employ its residents; so are the neighborhoods or towns whose residents use the community's amenities and buy its products or services, whether or not they are in the agency's service territory. All the jurisdictions that overlap local government boundaries with the CAA's service area are also part of its political community – such as the watershed management district, health facilities, planning organization, and regional transportation council, among others.

While considering assets and needs, it's important not to overlook the communities that intersect with or border on the service territory. These areas are relevant because resources and needs often permeate arbitrary service boundaries. The assessment should also include information on specific communities of interest. A **community of interest** is defined by shared common interests, goals, or knowledge. So, will the assessment study only the people who qualify for the programs? Will it include those who may qualify soon because of economic conditions or individual circumstances?

- How will the CAA engage other local social service providers and community developers, including government agencies that are part of the CAA's community of interest? Should volunteers and former participants be included? Employers or service providers outside the community who employ or serve the residents of the service area? Potential funders and donors?

See the tool: **"Community and Boundary Decisions"** in the Resources Appendix for Part I for some examples of situations that call for either assessing data from outside the CAA service area or for concentrating on information about specific communities of interest.

Choosing the Framework

The planning meeting should result in agreement on the broader questions which will define the categories of issues to assess. This is a brainstorming exercise, and those involved should feel empowered to ask questions without specifying data sources, indicator details or survey questions. Those details are the job of an Assessment Team. Encourage the group to expand on the items in the last assessment, to ask for information that could come from statistical sources, agency-designed surveys and small and large group meetings. Be sure that the CAA's leadership agrees that "assets" – local resources and positive trends - will be included in the research along with needs and problems to provide strategic planners with realistic information about options.

An issues framework is a set of categories or topics under which the assessment information and conclusions for analysis will be grouped. Choosing the issues framework should focus the data selection and assessment process on no more than a half-dozen issues or questions to create the general structure for analysis.

This guide will refer to a group of related issues as a *domain*. The article, "**Expansive Issue Frameworks"** is one tool to help leaders choose a few domains for the issues framework; it is in the Resources Appendix for Part I. It includes arguments for and against each of the following most common CAA frameworks:

- *CSBG Service Categories*
  CAA needs assessments are often organized around the CSBG Information System Survey Service Categories of employment, education, housing, nutrition, and other current CAA services such as asset development, health services and transportation.[3]
- *ROMA Goals*
  Some CAAs organize assessment data to align with CSBG ROMA goals. Because the goals are broad (example: "low income people become self-sufficient"), this approach includes multiple service categories grouped around specific results-oriented topics.
- *Agency-Designed Categories*
  Some assessments are organized around broad, systematic community needs and concerns such as physical and economic health, or lifelong learning.[4]

The next step is the planning process, outlined in Part II. In this stage clarify the definitions of each issue domain selected and include the statistical analysis needed for the issues framework. Let leaders know that a detailed assessment plan and budget will be provided for them to validate before implementing a plan.

But, We LIKE Our Past Assessments!

Q *Our Board has decided our CAA is purely a social services provider and its mission doesn't extend to housing, education, or economic development, because other organizations cover those areas. Does this guide suggest we're a weak CAA because of our narrow mission? Why should our assessment include data on the subjects that are not within our work scope?*

The CAA is not weak if the mission is based on a thorough, recent assessment of all the unmet needs of residents of the low-income community served and the resources already available. If it is determined through a strategic process that the primary unmet need is for social services, then the agency should feel confident that it are meeting community needs in the best way possible. However, if there hasn't been a recent, truly comprehensive community assessment then it is probably time to carry out a full inquiry about conditions

[3] Examples include the statewide templates for Indiana and Missouri found at www.virtualcap.org.

[4] CAA of So.Central Michigan analyzed Physical and Emotional Health and Financial Health among its issue domains; Central Missouri CAA collected indicators of Lifelong Learning resources and of a broadly inclusive Economic Assets domain. See them at www.virtualcap.org.

that threaten economic security. The CAA will want to find out what trends and resources are available to make those conditions better, and to strategize on partnerships to ensure an integrated effort is underway with multiple organizations coordinating their efforts.

Be sure the Board knows that a CAA is expected and empowered to be the anti-poverty expert in the community and to use that expertise, part of which comes from strong assessments, to coordinate all the other community resources to most effectively address economic security.

Part II: Getting Ready: Create the Plan to Implement the Community Assessment

The CAA leadership defined the community of place and the relevant communities of interest that will be the focus of study. Its key members "bought into" a comprehensive effort to collect information on opportunities and assets as well as family, community, and agency deficits or needs.

An Assessment Plan is essential to avoid being overwhelmed with data in the process of collecting and analyzing information. Planning and preparing for data collection and analysis will take up a substantial share of the overall time that the agency will invest in the process.

The plan lays out *how* the assessment will be conducted and *who* should be involved *when*. It must cover the sources of data as well as the methods and tools the CAA will use at each stage and with each source. It will also determine *when*, and in what order, the assessment team will take each step. The plan should include analysis and assessment of the results as well.

The sections that follow describe the steps in the process of planning a comprehensive Community Needs Assessment. Where available, tools used in other localities or states are referenced. None of the tools will fit all needs exactly, but they can help to get started and to customize the assessment.

Planning Step 1: Create The Assessment Team

DESIGNATE AN ASSESSMENT COORDINATOR

A key staff member should be given access to information about all aspects of the CAA in order to plan and conduct the assessment. The Assessment Coordinator and Assessment Team will define the assessment plan details.

APPOINT THE ASSESSMENT TEAM

Appoint a team that will have responsibility for making specific decisions about *what* data will be needed, *who* the sources of data will be and *how* data will be collected. Try to include team members with different skills and experience. Ideally, the team's members will accept an ongoing responsibility in the process and be deeply involved in the analysis of the data. See more **"Team Selection"** tips in the Resources Appendix for Part II.

PLANNING STEP 2: ENVISION THE BROAD ISSUES FRAMEWORK

Provide the Assessment Team with the results of the leadership's decisions about the scope and direction of the assessment. Make sure the planners understand the reasons for those choices, as well as the choice to go with a comprehensive assessment approach. The final plan must answer these essential questions:

WHAT? Determine the specific information the CAA will collect regarding needs and assets.

- What individual and family needs are to be assessed?
- Which organizations' needs are to be assessed?
- What needs, specific to the community, are to be addressed?
- What community assets and resources need to be identified?
- What data and indicators are needed?
- Whose opinions will be included?
- How will the above information be gathered? (from the community statistical profile, interviews, other data the CAA collects, etc.)?

WHY? Explain the reasons for choosing to assess information on the selected topics and, conversely, reasons for choosing not to include certain topics.

WHO? Identify the individuals and groups who will be the sources of information. Define the key informants to contact in each "community."

HOW? Acquire the best tools available to gather and quantify that information.

- How will the CAA adapt tools for the assessment?
- How will the CAA measure the effectiveness of the tools at producing the information needed?
- How will the tools be administered?

This guidance on discussing and choosing the information to seek is organized into four broad categories:

1. The community profile;
2. Individual and family needs and assets indicators;
3. Community organizations' needs and assets, including the CAA's; and
4. Community economic and civic data.

THE COMMUNITY PROFILE

The typical CAA needs assessment contains a statistical profile of the community that the CAA serves or is likely to serve for the duration of the strategic plan. It includes the target population and its characteristics and similar indicators of need. Most include area unemployment rates, industry profiles, crime rates, housing data, and education figures.

However, besides these basics, a *comprehensive* community assessment requires additional statistical data on economic and social conditions. As discussed earlier, it's important to include figures showing the situation of those who don't currently qualify for agency services but who may in the near future, such as those whose incomes are higher than the Federal Poverty Guideline (FPG). This would include those eligible for affordable housing programs and LIHEAP. Low-wage workers and retirees who are economically vulnerable and at high risk of experiencing periods of crisis and poverty may also be affected by economic development strategies. Information about them will be important as well. The **"Sources for Community Profile Data"** tool in the Resources Appendix for Part II gives samples of important statistics and sources for obtaining them, as well as links to examples of CAA community profiles.

ASSESS ADDITIONAL DATA NEEDS

The CAA will need extra data if the assessment plan redefined or expanded the community of interest. If the definition of the community extends beyond the political jurisdiction that exactly coincides with the assigned service area, the CAA will need to collect some additional information. Data will be needed about the social and economic conditions of these additional locations and an explanation of why they're relevant to the needs in the service area. An example of how to gather all the relevant data and make the necessary connections to the community can be found in the Resources Appendix for Part II **"Community Connectedness Indicators"** matrix.

The next steps involve choosing the issues that are agency-specific and need more explanation than the numbers provided in the statistical profile. To organize records of the team's discussion, a recording tool like the matrix below could be used.[5] There is space to include the personal, community and agency data to be collected on each subject. A **"Blank Data Matrix"** template can be found in the Resources Appendix for Part II.

BRAINSTORM ABOUT THE TYPES OF INFORMATION TO COLLECT

Brainstorm about the cause of issues affecting each of the three categories: individual, agency and community. Be sure the team understands that broader, systemic issues must also be considered in order to get a complete picture of all the conditions that can cause poverty. Include all of the relevant questions to be asked and data to be collected; trim the list in the next step. Tips on how to collect information on both needs and asset appear in each example.

The examples in this Guide are organized into four issue domains. Together, they make up the four parts of the issues framework. Each domain relates to conditions and information about several CSBG goals and poverty conditions. The domains will differ to fit the overall issue framework that the CAA leadership selected. However, each domain contains information that fits in the CAA's CSBG service categories. The examples below define issues in terms of specific outcomes to be achieved. Data may be found in more than one issue domain. Make an unduplicated list of information and indicators needed at the end of the exercise and, in the phase discussed in Part III, plan how and when to obtain each data point.

[5] Format inspired by the "Planning for Results" (P4R) manual of the Community Action Association of Pennsylvania.

FAMILY INDICATORS AND INDIVIDUAL INDICATORS

Examples of individual and family issue frameworks:

- Improving family and individual economic security, and;
- Improving family and child well-being.

Part of the data planning matrix for the first indicator is below; it offers a way of organizing data choices that will allow a full analysis of broad questions like: *What are the employment assets and needs of our low-wage workers and jobseekers, including job supports? What jobs are now available and what industries are likely to be seeking a workforce in the near future? What employers might become interested in our workforce? What are today's barriers to developing the skills and assets every individual will need to gain and keep family-supporting jobs and develop assets? What community social and economic resources can be mobilized to remove those barriers and expand opportunity*?

Completed data planning matrices, including **"Family and Individual Economic Security"** and **"Family and Child Well-Being"** are in the Resources Appendix for Part II.

	IMPROVING INDIVIDUAL ECONOMIC SECURITY		
Level	**What Data?**	**Who or What Has It?**	**How Is It Collected?**
Individual	• Data profile of the county residents: age, income, employment status, health status, family structure, education level • Income support program participation	• Census, American Community Survey • State Census data center from land grant university • State Public Health Department • State Education Department • State Human Services • CAA database	• Extracts of databases for the area delivered in electronic formats the analyst can use. Be sure to request any local analysis the data providers and partners have already undertaken. • Analysis of the agency client database statistics • Interviews to determine trends for former participants
	• Perceived economic insecurity of the general public • Perceived economic insecurity of CAA customer	• Individuals, organizational leadership • Public officials	• Survey • Interviews with elected officials, partner organizations

	IMPROVING FAMILY ECONOMIC SECURITY		
Level	What Data?	Who or What Has It?	How Is It Collected?
Family	• Insecurity indicators: evictions, housing mobility, utility disconnects, domestic violence • Poor housing quality • Health insurance • Job benefits • Food insecurity • Substance abuse	• Sheriff, law enforcement & courts, FBI, health providers • Association of Rental Agents • Utility or regulatory commissions • Housing departments including inspectors • Partner organizations	• Reports on local conditions • Interviews and surveys of partner organizations • Interviews with local government enforcement officials • Housing Census, mortgage crisis mapping – U.S. Treasury records
	• Location in community, mobility and public services	• Zip code & census tract level data- matching with transit data, car ownership • Key resources (libraries, schools, recreation, supermarkets) • Government plans for infrastructure and development • Survey of mobility indicators	• Local directories • Partner organization interviews • Public officials /service providers' info • General public and customer surveys • Planning bodies' reports • Staff knowledge of mobility/access issues

See the Resources Appendix for Part II for the full version of this table, including more family variables, and community and agency variables.

COMMUNITY NEEDS AND ASSETS

A community domain example is:

❖ Economic Vitality and Opportunity

This indicator describes the availability of, or potential for expansion of, opportunities that can overcome the identified current poverty conditions. The sample data planning matrix for **"Community Economic Vitality and Opportunity"** is in the Resources Appendix for Part II.

AGENCY NEEDS AND ASSETS

An agency domain example is:

❖ Capacity to Support Growth and New Directions

The sample data planning matrix for **"Agency Capacity to Support Growth"** is also in the Resources Appendix for Part II. Data already in the agency's possession includes the results of current activities, the opinions of customers and the status of strategic plan goals. Surveys, focus groups and local leadership interviews can indicate community attitudes and hopes about the CAA's work.

Identifying All the Key Indicators

Before moving on to the next step, make sure the data to be collected cover all of the many of contributing factors involved in the issue. Just as the causes of poverty are complex, the indicators the CAA will collect to measure their impact must be multi-layered and comprehensive.

Don't be satisfied with broad, generalized poverty indicators of the conditions that the CAA is assessing. For example, "transportation" may be the general cause of a poverty-related condition, such as lack of a job but it doesn't capture the specific issues involved in getting to work. More information is needed to find out exactly what the transportation need is. Is there limited or no public transportation or are individuals unable to secure and maintain private transportation? The strategies that resolve a transportation problem might involve a reliable car, a customized transportation service or a public transit solution. To address a complex problem, all the contributing factors need to be clearly identified. This will require collecting different kinds of data. Methods of collection might include public transit statistics or survey questions on car ownership.

Planning Step 3: Double-Check the Preliminary Lists

This is a good point at which to bring in more experts and partners to help review your questions. Several CAAs have strengthened their assessment by investing significant time consulting with partners and staff experts at this stage of deciding what to ask and also how to ask it (the subject of Part III). One description from Massachusetts, **"Peer Experts Supporting Assessment Design,"** is in the Resources Appendix for Part II.

For every issue domain that your assessment is addressing, are data also being collected about the broader, deeper causes of poverty conditions and also about assets and opportunities that might help change the conditions?

WILL YOUR REPORT BE A SNAPSHOT OR A 'VIDEO?'

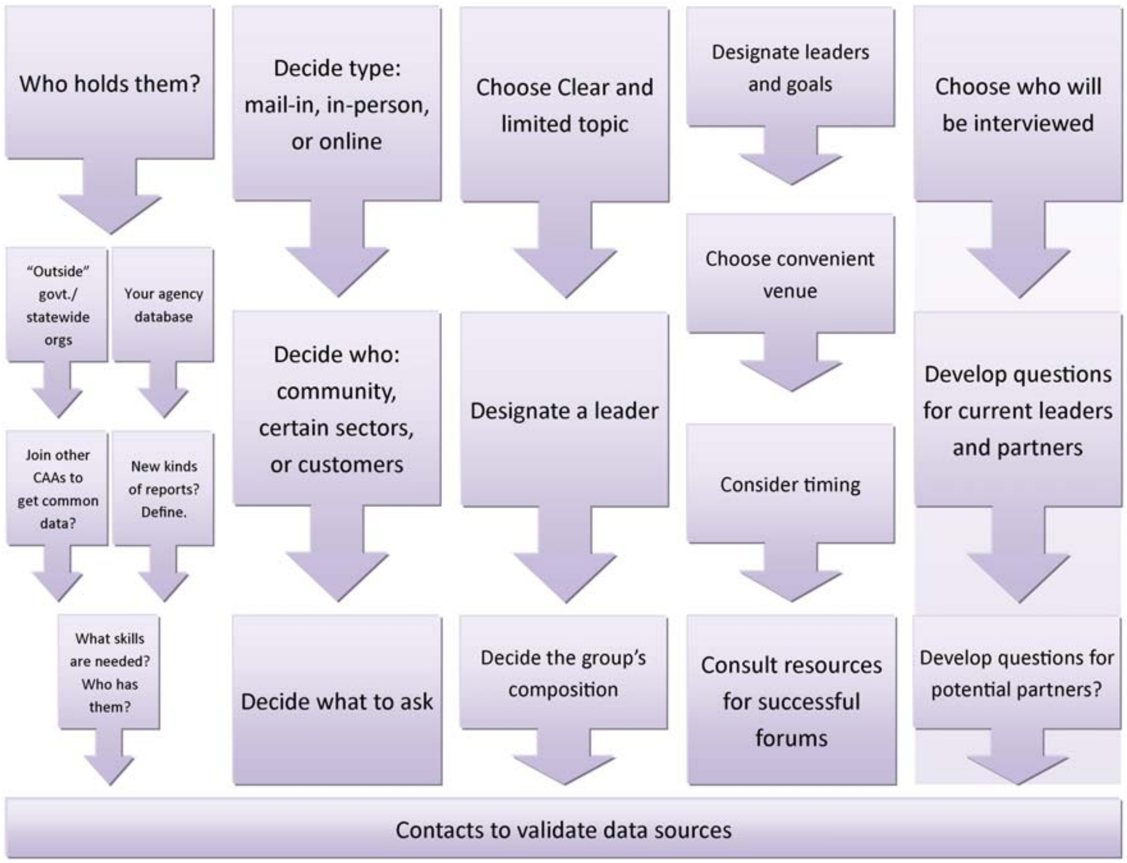
Review the lists for each domain and consider whether changes in recent years can be reported. Plan to ask for updated information for all the standardized data reports from Census, state agency reports, and other third party sources of demographic and economic data, as they become available. Consider asking survey respondents whether their needs are changing and whether assets or opportunities are different than in the past.

Are there other assessment requirements for the CAA's programs that mean data should be collected that isn't listed above, such as those of Head Start or Continuum of Care programs? Include all required indicators and their sources during this planning phase.

PLANNING STEP 4: CHOOSE THE PRIORITIES FOR THE DATA COLLECTION

The Assessment Team should now prioritize the questions and identify key partners and sources of information. Many data items will pertain to multiple issues; they can be sorted at this point using lists organized by the source, like the four general sources in the chart below. A resource to help the team rank priorities can be found in the Missouri CAA Association Higher Ground Toolkit at www.communityaction.org. The next steps will create the action plan for collecting the key information.

Part III: The Information Chosen and How to Get It



In this section, data collection methods and tools are considered. It is intended to help the Assessment Team choose data that produces the material needed for the analysis and reports. It will also point to tools and strategies that other CAAs have used that may be helpful in making these choices.

By the end of Part III, the CAA will have a comprehensive plan for the data collection tools to be used in the assessment. This will enable the CAA to budget for the project, request the CAA leadership's final buy-in and recruit the data sources and assessment team.

What Skills Are Needed?

Are outside specialists needed now? Decide which skills will be needed for collecting and analyzing statistics from studies and databases, for designing survey and focus group tools. Examples of academic collaborative partnerships and other CAA resources include Tennessee, Arizona, Kansas and Missouri where the state CSBG office enlisted university resources.

Consider partnering with a state or local university and utilizing graduate students in the social sciences to help analyze, create surveys, or design survey samples. This could form the basis of an ongoing mutually beneficial relationship and provide not only good sound academic research but also lend credibility to the results.

ORGANIZE DATA NEEDS BY TYPE AND SOURCE

Use lists of unduplicated, prioritized data items, and list every data source. Use a form like the one below, which can be found in Resources Appendix for Part III under **"Sources of All Data."** Enter each indicator or opinion needed and its source(s). Plan the steps to access each source.

Published Statistics		**Survey Information All Topics/Domains** (Group together data questions that go to the same respondents. Eliminate duplicates.)		**Focus Group or Interviews Information**		**Community Forum Responses**	
What?	Who Has It?	What?	What Group?	What?	Who Has It?	What?	What Group?

GAINING ACCESS TO DATA SOURCES

Create a brief overview of the assessment to send to those who will contribute. Contact the sources of each set of data in the preliminary plan to determine whether it can be accessed.

For data that may be obtainable only by interview or focus group, such as information from leaders in partner organizations and local elected officials, verify in advance that they will be willing to participate.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF DATA = DIFFERENT ISSUES

USING DATABASE RESOURCES

Assess the capacity of the agency to:

- ❖ Enter information and use public databases for the consolidated community profile and analysis.
- ❖ Analyze the various types of data that will be collected for the assessment including surveys, census, client databases, and government data.

If it is determined that the CAA doesn't have the capacity for these tasks due to lack of knowledge, time, or other resources, are there other organizations to partner with? The State CSBG office? Academic institutions? Faith-based and other nonprofit organizations? If so, bring them into the planning process at this stage because who will do the analysis may determine *how* the data are collected.

National Performance Indicators (NPI) information and the CSBG Information Survey (IS) client data are unparalleled sources for client data. The demographics for family and individual indicators collected from other sources for this assessment should match the information in the CAA's customer database and CSBG IS submission. The analysis will then compare the CAA participants' information to the same data points of the wider population to help determine what share and sub-sections of the local population is being served.

Identify trends for the agency. Use databases from multiple years for agency and customer profiles to answer these important questions:

- ❖ Are participants' incomes getting further below the Federal Poverty Guideline (FPG)?
- ❖ Are fewer participants working full time?
- ❖ Is there an increase in demand for certain resources/services, i.e. needs?

Be aware of any changes in data management that may have added new programs to the CSBG system in a particular year; do not identify a data policy change as growth. Think about programs that were added or terminated in the assessment period: how did the client profile change in that year? A change might indicate the termination of an agency program or an increase in information received for a specific agency program, but not a community demographic trend.

Create analyses using information and features in the CAA's CSBG NPI data:

- ❖ Does the intake system involve a full "benefits-checkup" type assessment for all new or returning customers? If so, can the record of those assessments be accessed and the needs and the opportunities for support be reported? Even better – can they be attached to the client file? Does the system note and track referrals to other organizations? Can the CAA report on the needs indicated by those referrals? On the success of some referrals?

- If the data system maintains time series data and/or service data in the client files, the CAA may have the opportunity to report on the patterns of need for continuing or repeated services among customers. Can the system examine the same "needs" for families and individuals at different points in time?

USING SURVEYS

In general, agency community surveys can be costly and may even be ineffective for seeking information related to complex problems. Using a scale (for example, not important = 0 / very important = 5) helps make sense of answers to surveys by telling the significance and intensity of an answer. Many examples of survey questions and survey styles used by CAAs are available, but all have not been equally successful at eliciting community attitudes or goals. A few follow up a general need-related query with questions asking many details about the subject; such formats are longer, but more revealing about whether the identified need is a symptom of a more general need or issue. As mentioned earlier, a transportation need can be due to an individual's lack of reliable transportation or a larger factor such as the lack of accessible public transportation.

The method for administering the survey affects its length. For mail-in surveys, brevity is important for promoting a high return rate. However, this can limit their usefulness. Surveys usually are brief when they do not require in-depth answers. This may mean that they do not provide appropriate guidance for strategic decision making. In-person surveys require a larger time commitment and significant training for those who will be conducting the surveys or interviews.

What to Ask and How to Ask It

CAA staff has expertise in analyzing the needs, especially the unmet needs, of the population served and other significant populations.

- *Engage staff* in meetings to discuss the questions that will be asked; set up groups that cross all department lines but that are small enough to allow everyone to participate in the discussion. Mix supervisors into groups with others who do not normally report to them. The invitation should explain what the Community Needs Assessment is, how staff can contribute and how the agenda of the meetings will work. Use the **"CAA Staff Experts Discussion Tool on Unmet Needs"** in the Resources Appendix for Part III to help draw on the experiential knowledge of the internal experts.

- *Reassure staff* that this community assessment is not an assessment of staff. Emphasize that it is the *Community* Needs Assessment, not the CAA's performance assessment. This assessment is one opportunity to examine the agency capacities and strengths regarding the issue domains to be assessed.
- *Explain* the purpose of each question and be sure it is clear and specific.

For instance, if "transportation" is marked as "very important" by many of the survey respondents, how does the CAA know if everyone is referring to the same aspect of transportation? The survey item must be much more specific for the responses to be meaningful. To be sure the question gets to the *cause* of a condition, apply the exercise in **"Do Your Questions Capture 'The Why's?'"** in the Resources Appendix for Part III.

- *Drop professional jargon.* Look out for words like "client," "self-sufficient," "benefit," "case-management." Test the survey tool on one or two people from outside the agency and the field of social services.
- *Drop or restate controversial or complex concepts that have to be explained.* "Poverty" is one such concept. When Americans hear the word "poverty" they associate it with negative personal qualities. An important exercise, **"Poverty: Does the 'P' Word Belong in Data Collection Tools?"** in the Resources Appendix for Part III, offers some solutions for language that works.
- *Use an "appreciative inquiry" style whenever possible*. To accomplish this, the CAA should design opinion-based and community-related questions with balanced response choices to make sure positive impressions can be recorded among the answers offered. **"Identifying and Measuring Individual, Agency and Community Assets"** in the Resources Appendix for Part III offers more suggestions about an appreciative inquiry approach to the design of survey questions. It also suggests approaches to assess the resources and strengths of individuals, community institutions and economically important organizations.

Missouri's Toolkit includes a database of hundreds of scaled questions about community conditions.[6] Tips for designing survey questions can be found in **"Survey Design Tools"** in the Resources Appendix for Part III. Survey writing is a technical skill. A trained researcher could help formulate a statement about the purpose of each question to shape it appropriately. Wording and topics are critical elements in survey design. Trained researchers can help get the words and format right.

Who Should Be Surveyed?

[6] See it at www.communityaction.org.

What can be learned from responses representing all residents of the community? Certain sectors? Potential low-income customers? Current or recent customers? Partner and leadership groups? Review the reasons for each selection and be sure to ask for information that the respondents can provide. Remember that a very large group of answers is not necessary to ensure the results are statistically significant, but it does reveal if a cross-section of opinions from many different groups was captured.[7]

- ❖ *Community-wide survey questions* can measure awareness of the CAA, its reputation and its potential as a recipient of funds from the private sector. The answers to the questions can identify needs and desires shared by everyone regardless of income, evaluate the sense of community attachment, and assess community support for change. If the leadership has an agenda for the CAA's future direction, a short survey could demonstrate whether there is wide support for it.
- ❖ It may be useful to employ a longer survey on the household economic conditions for *a group of economically vulnerable residents.* The resulting data about opportunity and resource availability will help gather information about unmet needs and the insecurity of those community members who don't qualify for services at this time. That information can make a powerful case for a broad development agenda that helps the entire community.
- ❖ *Customers, current and recent*, can tell about unmet needs that can't be determined from agency data. Staff, especially front-line staff, has personal knowledge about customers' needs and how they are being met (or not).

Collecting the professionals' information and ideas will help in the design of good data collection tools including surveys and interviews.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Customers are a terrific resource for reporting on the realities of life in the low-income community, including community assets and how those improve their situation. The Community Needs Assessment, by contrast, must engage many community residents other than customers and ask many different questions about agency assets. The community assessment is not the best vehicle for collecting customers' reaction to their experience with the CAA.

If the agency has no other tool for monitoring customer satisfaction it may be necessary to collect some baseline data in the assessment. However, every CAA should have a routine and

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[7] A free sample size calculator is found at www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm with some tutorials on statistics for survey administrators.

continuous process for appraising customers' satisfaction, as described in the Community Action Partnership Standards of Excellence, which also contains many tools for this purpose. If the CAA leadership feels such questions must be included, consider designing them as the baseline for the separate customer tracking that the CAA will establish in the future.

MEETINGS: FOCUS GROUPS, COMMUNITY FORUMS AND INTERVIEWS

Different kinds of information result from different kinds of meetings. The kind of data each provides depends on the format and on whether the structure permits in-depth information gathering, focused information-sharing and/or the introduction of loosely-related subjects by the respondent.

Meetings have two very important functions when they are part of the assessment:

1. Providing data on needs, assets and opinions, and;
2. Informing the public about the CAA's process for leading community-wide considerations of economic and social issues.

The process also demonstrates the degree of the CAA's commitment to obtaining and using content from public participation. Remember, the act of soliciting opinions and listening actively is also an important outreach activity for the agency. The CAA leaders must be engaged in many of these meetings.

The summaries here indicate the kind of information to expect and plan for using each type of meeting. Part IV contains considerations about organizing each.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups are not the same as group conversations. They are tools to produce information on specific topics that can be combined with other results, including other focus group reports. Focus groups must follow a formal process in which open-ended conversation is structured into quantifiable and comparable output. When planning the data collection, choose clear and specific topics for the focus group to address.[8]

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[8] A detailed discussion is in the Missouri Toolkit. At least two agencies that conducted innovative, comprehensive assessments invited partner organizations' experts to focus groups that worked on planning the nature and content of

Bear in mind this useful definition from the Missouri Community Needs Assessment Toolkit:[9]

A Focus Group Is Different from a facilitated conversation in Four 'Basic' Ways:

1. The main difference is that it is focused. The group has a specific discussion topic.
2. The group has a trained leader or facilitator. The facilitator's task is to keep the group on topic, and not let them wander all over the place.
3. The group's composition is an important consideration. An effective group includes either a homogeneous gathering of a target group discussing several relevant topics, or it includes representatives from different groups who focus on a specific topic.
4. The group discussion is carefully planned to create a nonthreatening environment, in which people are free to talk openly. Members are actively encouraged to express their own opinions, to respond to other members and to answer questions posed by the leader.

Design the common framework for recording all focus group results as part of the plan for collecting data for each issue domain. A focus group product that is little more than a bulleted list of perceptions and suggestions will not provide information that the team can analyze to support later planning decisions. The facilitator's skills in achieving clarity and categorizing responses will be important.

COMMUNITY FORUMS

Large public discussions can be very helpful, but are not necessarily representative of a community and may not be able to provide an in-depth understanding of all of the issues. Sometimes a very vocal minority can dominate a community forum, and while this provides important input, it may not be helpful in assessing the opinions of the community at large. Other times, the only people who attend the meeting are those who have a vested interest in what is to be discussed. It is important to know who is in the audience at a large community discussion, so the input received can be interpreted.

Consider the value of conducting forums before formal surveying in order to capture emerging concerns so these can be included in the survey, rather than after the surveys are back. This approach might be most useful if the scope of the traditional assessment is changing and

the research for the assessment. See the methodology sections of the Assessment reports from Community Action of Franklin, Hampshire, North Quabbin Region, MA; and Amador–Tuolumne Community Action Agency, CA.

[9] See especially the Missouri Toolkit focus group chapter at http://www.communityaction.org.

broadening the agenda and potential publics. On the other hand, if focus groups meet after surveys are tallied, more attention can be directed to unclear or polarized answers or to new issues that emerged, thereby collecting diverse and more complex reactions.

INTERVIEWS

Who are the candidates for personal interviews?

Local Leaders

Perhaps a team member or contractor can interview the agency leadership, elected officials, close partners, and the leaders of a potential future partner. In fact, many CAAs have used surveys to collect opinions from leadership groups.[10]

Several CAA assessments report that leaders they interviewed or surveyed emphasized the importance of the CAA advocacy role in the past and the need for the CAA to keep advocating. Design interviews that are open-ended enough to allow for the interviewee to say something like, "*This is a critical problem and our organization is not able to make the public case ("at all" or "alone") so we count on the CAA to speak out and to show up at the City Council meeting."*

Structured conversations that address the same open-ended questions may be most appropriate for those in civic leadership positions and for current partners. Interviewers should be skilled in active listening techniques. Private sector leaders' hopes and goals for the future may require some additional probing; they manage assets that can contribute to reducing poverty, but they may be cautious about questions that suggest re-directing the way they use those assets now. Outlines of probing open-ended questions for such interviews are in the "Assessment" chapter of the Missouri Toolkit at www.communityaction.org.

The Board

Surveys or interviews? Many CAAs have used surveys to capture their Board members' views. If they only provide input by filling in forms, Board members can feel disengaged from the assessment

[10] Examples are in the Mohawk Valley CAA, NY report.

process. Equally important, much information they have accumulated because of their commitment to the CAA's mission and their intimate knowledge of the agency and the community they represent may be missed.

Consider giving the Board members the same survey given to the general public. Keep the Board survey answers until all the results are in, and offer a comparison along with the consolidated report on all members' interviews. Conducting individual interviews with Board members to probe their attitudes and opinions about the key topics, the agency, and the community's future is likely to yield rich material to use for the assessment report.

New Groups and Potential Partners

Outreach to new, unfamiliar entities and their leaders is a matter that requires leadership attention. Any contact with the CAA that solicits their interests and resources indicates to them that their answers may contribute to future partnerships. A brief face-to-face meeting with a senior staff member explaining the questions of interest may be a good preliminary step to a full interview. Timing is flexible; perhaps the interview will be most fruitful after there are some results from the data collection or even a statistical profile to share.

FINALIZING THE DATA COLLECTION DESIGN

MAKE CHOICES

Make final choices about the content and length of surveys, focus groups, and community listening sessions. The number and length of staff discussion groups and partners' leadership interviews can be flexible elements of the plan. Decide on the number of indicators to collect from databases and interviews and the general topics of meetings and interviews.

The process of defining and limiting data collection is also a determining factor in which questions will be assessed in the final report. This means the right moment to outline the assessment report is before final input data are chosen. Of course, the assessment will generally follow the issues framework chosen by the Board, but outlining the structure of the assessment will also help with a final endorsement of the plan. It may be helpful to look at the reporting suggestions in Part V.

The last stage of the process of defining the “what” and “how” of the information that will be collected is approaching.

LEADERSHIP CONFIRMATION

Before finalizing a budget, implementing data collection and following the road map to conducting the assessment activities that have been planned, the Assessment Team must re-engage the Board. At this stage, the Board must review the scope and nature of the data collection plan and its cost. Because the community assessment is the basis for the strategic plans for which the Board is responsible, its members must agree to and also “own” the specific content and approach of the assessment now that a clear plan and format are available.

Questions for Board consideration include the content, format and use of the final assessment, the role(s) Board members will play in the data gathering and review process, as well as the estimated budget. A sample agenda for a **“Board Validation Meeting”** is in the Resources Appendix for Part III.

Before this meeting, create a list of the final products of the assessment activities. The major products are the agency’s internal assessment report and the public report from the assessment. Sketch out the major components of each report.

THE COMMUNITY IMPACT OF THE ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

The leadership must directly decide on the CAA’s public communication about the assessment process, choice of surveys and meetings, and the potential uses of the outreach and exposure generated by the process and results.

In fact, there are many future assessment tasks in which Board involvement is essential, from leadership interviews – where they may need to open doors or participate in meetings – to participation in public events. Before they commit to the time necessary to help the project, they must understand how it will work.

Part IV: Implementation: Manage the Information Collection

SET A TIMELINE AND DETAILED BUDGET

At this point in the process, the CAA leaders have helped define the focus and scope of the assessment activities. There is an unduplicated wish list of data items and their sources. The CAA knows whether they can be easily accessed, or if resources will need to be devoted to securing them.

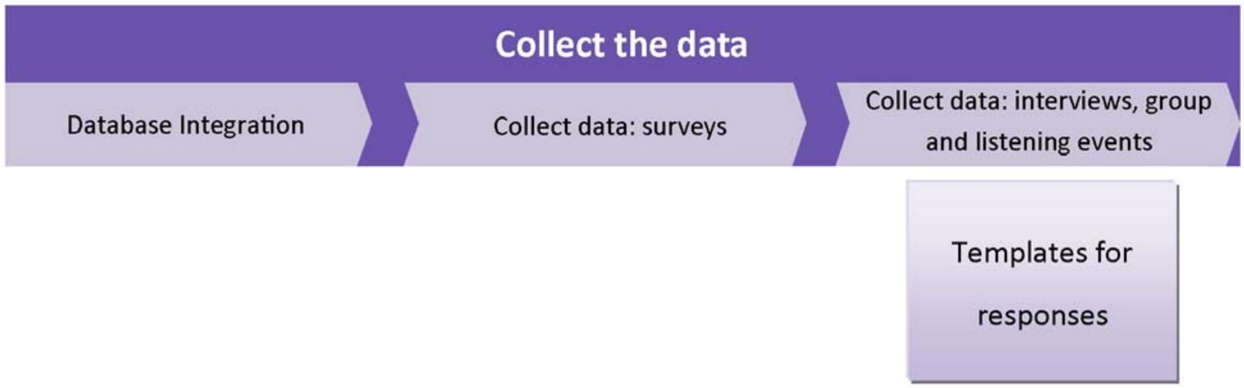
STAFFING THE ASSESSMENT

It’s been decided whether “expert” help for data analysis and/or survey design is needed and who can provide it. Now a detailed budget and timeline to carry out the information collection must be set. Some of the management considerations to implementing these steps are outlined in this section.

The budget will depend in part on the choices to make in implementing the information collection process.

- ❖ How will surveys be distributed to the general community? How much staff time, mailing costs, and advertising will be needed?
- ❖ How many focus groups and interviews will be conducted? What are the issues that need in-depth discussion? Who are the right people to focus on those issues? Will facilitators need to be hired or public meeting space and audio/visual equipment need to be rented?
- ❖ How much volunteer or paid staff time is available from key participants, and how is it distributed over time?

Many CAAs report they have cut costs by using AmeriCorps staff and Summer Youth Program participants for many tasks. Consider the interests and talents that the skilled CAA volunteers could provide. Are there, for example, any statisticians, graphic artists or copy editors in the group? Can Board members volunteer expertise from their organizations?



COMBINING AND INTEGRATING SIMILAR DATA

While very different tools record statistics, survey responses and meeting information, all should be organized according to the specific indicator they are assessing and each indicator should be categorized according to the issue domain or domains to which it contributes information.

THE COMMUNITY STATISTICAL PROFILE

It is important to integrate all of the information collected from statistics developed by other sources, like the Census, the Regional Development Council, or a state "Kids Count" summary, with those collected from the CAA databases.

Data items will differ slightly in their definition or in the time at which they were measured, therefore a single database cannot be created. However, analysts can create a matrix that groups similar indicators in similar tables so that the many dimensions of a single issue can be seen together. When plans for data collection were organized into issue domains, this created the list of items to record in complementary formats.

Where other profile statistics exactly match agency statistics, the data can be entered with rows for the statistics (for example age, education level, employed, family employment, SSI income and family structure) and columns for the source (CAA, county, metro area). Where statistics are related but not the same, they can be recorded in parallel parts of a single format. For example, numeric indicators for youth ages 11-17 (size of the population, number above or below FPG or median income, in two-parent families, with juvenile offense records, in school, etc.) can be listed for the CAA and the entire area or its school districts, and then data on the after-school program placements, recreation facilities and their use, scouting programs, camps, school expenditures per child, and health conditions can be grouped by the same geography.

COLLECTING THE SURVEY DATA

Decide how to collect survey data. These decisions affect the quantity and quality of the resulting data. Here are a few issues to consider:

- ❖ *Mailing to the CAA's community of interest*: Former and current clients/customers are a primary source of information for the assessments. Because of their relationship to the CAA, the client group may be most likely to respond to a survey, especially if a personalized letter is included or other personal contact is made.
- ❖ *On-site distribution:* Typically, surveys are provided on paper at agency facilities. Most such surveys are anonymous. In addition, many CAAs ask partner service organizations and social or civic groups to hand out and "market" the survey to other low- and moderate-income community residents. CAAs find both approaches to be a low-cost solution to securing input from their low-income community. However, as noted in Part III, these respondents cannot be the only source to measure unmet needs or agency recognition. They represent the narrow market of residents who currently access community organizations.
- ❖ *Other residents of the low-income community*: Some CAAs reach out to community households who are not associated with the CAA by investing in large mailings to low-income census tracts and/or housing developments. It might be useful to enlist neighborhood and civic organizations, including faith organizations, to distribute to their clients or members.
- ❖ *Individuals in the community at-large:* As noted in Part III, information from those who are not low-income allows for comparison of opinions and helps gauge community support for particular solutions. It also builds the CAA's reputation and may attract new volunteers and supporters. Mailing services can send communications to all residents in certain zip code areas using the CAA's nonprofit bulk rate.
- ❖ *Online surveys:* CAAs have achieved substantial response rates by putting the survey on the Internet, using online tools such as Survey Monkey or Google Surveys. Computers at the agency and other community sites are especially useful to attract broader participation from many neighborhoods, income groups and sectors. Consider how to publicize the survey and generate greater participation in this opportunity for input.

COMMUNITY AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS' DATA AND OPINIONS

Most needs assessments refer to surveys sent to other organizations as either a "community survey," or "partner survey." Usually responses are anonymous. The questions are about both needs of individuals and families and about the resources and assets the responding organization has or lacks; some ask about perceptions of the CAA. Consider using anonymous opinion surveys to ask questions about the CAA's performance. It is recommended to keep a record of respondents that share their concerns and may have mutually useful resources, in order to follow up on developing partnerships with the respondents.

Additional survey management ideas can be found in **"Survey Management Tips"** in Resources Appendix for Part IV.

Managing Meetings

Partner and Leadership Interviews

Partners and community leaders have specific interests in common with the CAA and are of particular importance to the success of the next CAA strategic plan. The information and opinions they can provide about the needs of the community should be assessed in depth. The questions in a community survey are probably too general and rudimentary to provide an understanding of the information and opinions these key groups hold regarding community needs and possibilities. However, capturing the views of partners and leaders is critical to a comprehensive assessment.

Additional reasons for leadership interviews include:

- Re-introducing the agency's mission as well as its programs;
- Explaining the assessment and planning process;
- Explaining the domains to be assessed and the relationship between them and the expertise of the interviewee. (Example: "We are looking at many issues related to people's ability to find well-paying jobs in the future. We call the general subject 'family and community economic security'. That's why we want to talk to you and other major employers/small business owners/lenders/health facility executives in town about your views on the local workforce today and the workforce you will need in the future."), and;
- Establishing new or deeper links. Suggest broad areas to pursue together in the future to keep the "welcome mat" out for the future.

Focus Group Considerations

As noted earlier, it is a good idea to find a focus group leader with some training in the specific techniques of eliciting focused, in-depth information to make the most of the opportunity. Typically, focus groups are recorded on video, and the input is analyzed later. Make sure the facilitator knows the purpose of the focus group input in the Assessment Plan, and explain the unique information hoped to be acquired through this method. Choose group members based on their views on the subject. Some topics will require expert participation; others may call for a cross section of general community opinion.

Whatever the subject, generally the group input will include a mix of:

- ❖ Issue definitions and the current situation regarding the issue (have the facilitator offer the agency interpretation of the issues to be discussed and the nature of the input that is desired from the group.);
- ❖ Problem size/scope;
- ❖ Basic causes and contributing factors;
- ❖ Available resources;
- ❖ Untapped resources/assets, and;
- ❖ New approaches and ideas.

COMMUNITY FORUM STRATEGIES

Consider which communities of interest would be beneficial to mobilize to attend public forums and then focus the outreach efforts on those communities. Plan to make an investment in providing outreach to attract the desired participants. Mix the meeting formats; some can focus on issues (e.g. children's wellbeing) while others can focus on a specific geographic area.

Select the meeting sites carefully; different locations may yield different sets of concerns and priorities. Make the meetings accessible and convenient to the desired audiences. The perceived safety of the meeting location is also important.

Published resources to support successful community/town hall events are widely available. Two that are related to needs assessment are the Toolkits developed in Missouri and at the University of Kansas (available at www.virtualcap.org). The latter defines public forums as: *gatherings where citizens discuss important issues at a well-publicized location and time. They give people of diverse backgrounds a chance to express their views, and are also a first step toward understanding the community's needs and resources. A good public forum informs the group of where the community is and where the members would like to go.*

Structure and publicize the agenda topics and questions. This allows the facilitators to produce a definition of each subject, categorize concerns raised and draw up a list of recommended solutions and resources.

THE CAA AS FORUM LEADER

Determine the role of agency representatives at community forums. Determine in advance who represents the agency as a listener or as a messenger. Consider and decide on which partners, elected officials or Board members should be on the dais at public events.

WHAT IS ON THE FORUM AGENDA?

The agency chose which issue domains to examine and wants to obtain feedback about all of them. *But*, the CAA wants to be sure new issues are allowed to surface. Possible methods include:

- ❖ Hand out a detailed agenda indicating the main issue areas or overarching questions and, early in the meeting, ask for additional concerns and/or ideas that solve different concerns. Add these to a flipchart.
- ❖ Display the issue domains plus "Other," to invite more input.

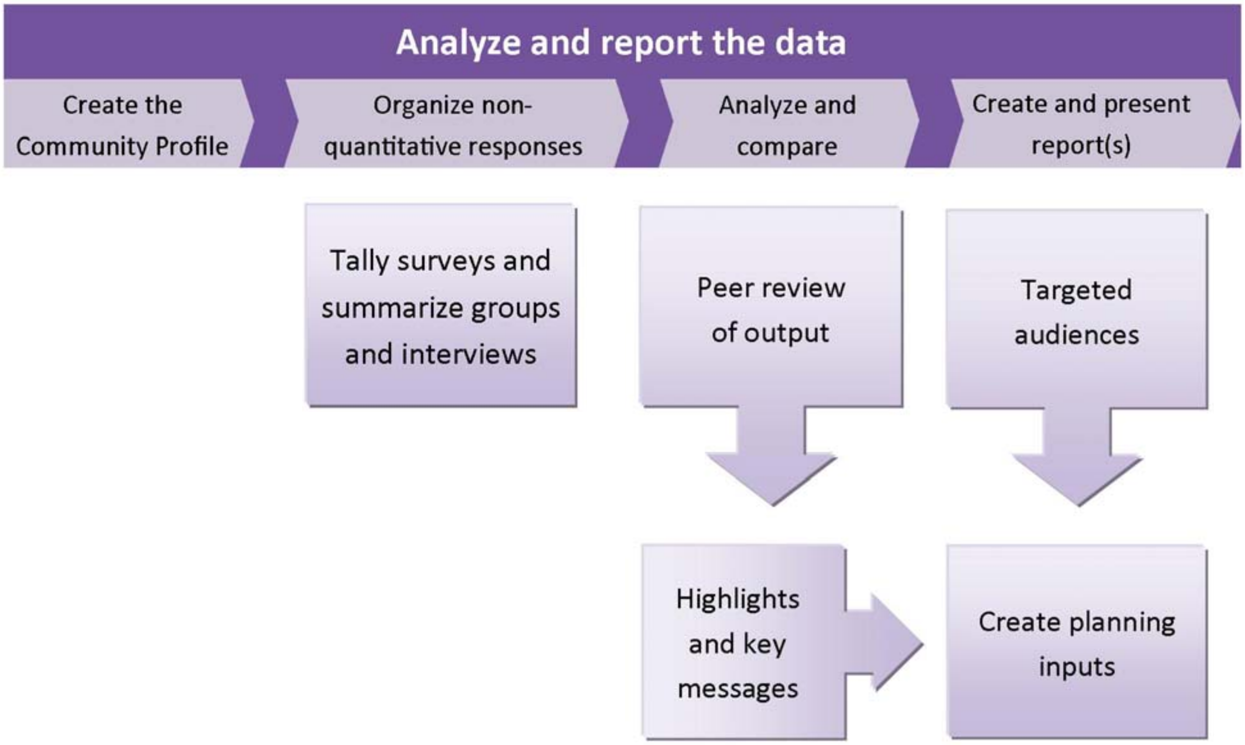
Gathering data at community forums is challenging. Multiple recording processes will need to be in place to capture all the input received and the facilitator will need to use a disciplined inquiry style to evoke useful opinions and recommendations while managing the sometimes emotional environment of a public meeting. After the meeting, the facilitator can help to categorize new issues into the existing issue framework. More ideas about organizing the information that is offered at a forum and focusing on practical recommendations are in the **"Public Forums Input"** in the Resources Appendix for Part IV.

Present a Follow-Up Message

Make sure the results of the interviews are presented to all interviewees. Personal interviews create a special connection; the CAA must decide what activities or messages should be launched to keep these new or renewed connections and who in the CAA should take responsibility.

Make sure the results of the assessment are presented not only to all interviewees but also to participants in any meeting. The assessment created connections through outreach; explore what activities or messages should be launched to maintain these new or renewed connections. Who in the CAA should take responsibility?

Part V: The Assessment Report



ASSESSMENT MEANS *ANALYSIS*, NOT COMPILATION

The final Assessment Report must communicate the agency's judgments about what the data and opinions mean, and focus on choices for the next strategic plan. Pages of data collected should not be presented without being processed. Data are just numbers, not useful information, until they are analyzed. In fact, displaying data without interpreting them can undermine their interpretation by leaving readers free to choose explanations that fit their own preconceptions.

DESCRIPTION: [ONLY] THE FIRST STEP IN THE ASSESSMENT REPORT

Statistics from general data sources, including the profile of local economic trends and conditions and information about community assets, will be combined into a profile of the community. This profile is merely a description until the report highlights important connections revealed through the assessment process.

Refining the descriptive output is essential to giving focus and meaning to the information. Pick key findings to emphasize. Focusing on clusters of important related information is important to the analysis. Analyzing the conditions that are described adds meaning which is important to help the CAA's leaders, partners, and community accept and utilize the assessment.

Begin adding meaning to statistics by comparing data about different times, places and groups that are related to the core issues. A simple set of questions to begin the analysis is in **"From Comparing to Analyzing"** in the Resources Appendix for Part V. Also compare the different issue domains to see which were judged important by various respondents and what community interests are involved in each issue.

FRAMING DATA = ASSESSMENT

When the team designed the issue domains, they created a framework or structure; now the information must be put into the categories of the framework.

The raw community profile data are also used by others, especially professionals leading interest groups, government officials, and interested community leaders, including businesses that routinely study their market. It is the CAA's unique analysis that will add meaning to the numbers and opinions. Data from interviews and surveys may also belong in the community profile.

STRUCTURING THE ASSESSMENT REPORT

INTERPRET

Consider all the information from the agency – collected surveys, interviews, and group discussions. What does it show about issues that are foremost in the mind of residents and leaders? What needs to be changed in, or added to, the original issues framework? Periods of economic upheaval may generate more surprises and challenges than might otherwise be expected, and the framework should be adapted to encompass these new considerations. Review all the results, present the analysis of the issues and organize all relevant indicators within the assessment.

Organize

Organize all the findings into the issues framework selected, and analyze the results related to needs, assets and suggested solutions. The results should *not* include CAA plans for action.

Some CAAs feel they should put every piece of information into the body of the assessment report even if it wasn't significant enough for them to analyze. Some include raw numbers in paragraph after paragraph of data-heavy text instead of into graphs or tables. Do not fall into this trap! Raw data are user-friendly only when it is thoughtfully analyzed and shared within the context of the larger framework.

Material from the analysts should be carefully reviewed by the agency's foremost experts: the CAA staff. A valuable model is described by Central Missouri CAA.[11] Staff catalogue original assumptions; compare the assessment results and consider how assumptions might change.

Caution: If a survey or group meeting result feels "wrong" to experts in the CAA after objective debate, it may not reflect reality. Remember that the survey responses are from a small population, and even a truly random sampling can turn up a non-representative group. Also, the questions may have been understood differently by the respondents than intended by the experts. Plan to do more research to validate results before implementing major changes in CAA strategies, especially if reliable staff disputes the information collected.

If the CAA staff and leaders are surprised about the findings, it may indicate that the CAA participant population whom the staff knows well is not representative of the low-income community as a whole. Does the agency primarily serve families with young children? Only some ethnic groups? Primarily elderly, long-time residents? Mainly English speakers? Unexpected results from the assessment should be brought forward and given special consideration.

CREATE SPECIALIZED PRODUCTS

Different, separate reports should be generated for the public, for key leadership and for partners and communities of interest. The data are certainly rich, and every CAA is responsible for making the general public aware of poverty conditions and economic insecurity and of the resources available to address the problems. Useful formats include:

[11] See the report at www.virtualcap.org.

- A "State of Economic Security in Ourhome Report to the Community," a user-friendly graphic presentation of basic and/or topical data and findings of significant interest to interested members of the public and press and elected officials and their staff.

  This type of report presents both analytic conclusions and well-chosen numbers that illustrate the conclusions and priorities. Good templates for this style are the reports of Mahube Community Council, MN, and Norwescap, WI.[12] Their clear and straightforward layouts should work for many types of organizations. For more examples of clear (and not-so-clear) data presentations, see **"Clear Data Labels"** in the Resource Appendix for Part V.
- A short text report summarizing the approach and the key findings in plain English. See an example from Couleecap, WI.[13]
- Specialized reports for partners or potential funders, which provide a basis for funding new initiatives.

How Does an Assessment Report End?

Readers and contributors will want to know how the information will be used; as they read about the identified needs, they may be thinking, *so what?* Or, *what next?*

The community assessment is primarily intended to inform CAA strategic investment decisions. It should be written to stand alone, ready for the CAA's leadership to act on the information it contains. While this report will be used by the CAA leaders as the basis for future strategic planning, it is not the vehicle for the CAA's suggestions or comments about strategies the agency will initiate or maintain. The needs assessment report should not be a final source of recommendations to the community. Some agencies combine the Community Needs Assessment report with the final Community Action Plan that is based on its results.

Reasons to organize and publish the full needs assessment report before identifying priorities:

- The CAA can describe conditions, deficits, and assets that may be of interest to other partners or investors in order to build shared initiatives or even to "delegate" opportunities to others;
- Elected officials are generalists likely to be interested in all the findings;
- The many people and organizations who provided data can see the way it fits together;
- It forms the "backup" for the short, highly-structured presentations the CAA distributed to the public and the press.

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[12] at www.virtualcap.org

[13] Ibid.

The assessment can appropriately conclude with an explanation of how the CAA will proceed to create its long-term annual strategic plan which will, of course, be based on the Community Needs Assessment, the consumer satisfaction analysis, and an analysis of indicators regarding national, state, and local performance goals.

Report and Take Action

TURNING THE ASSESSMENT INTO ACTION

There will be a "bounce" of interest in the CAA both because the report gets attention and because so many were involved in its development. Plan to spend time to build on the attention it will receive. The assessment process will identify potential new assets, partners, and resources. It will spark interest from some key members of the public or the area governments. Before strategic planners get to work, the agency will want to explore these new possibilities through appropriate follow-up in order to set up options for investing future time and creativity. There are several common tools that CAAs use to help Boards of Directors lead the agency through a comprehensive strategic plan. These materials help leaders choose the results that will be targeted for action.[14] For example, several organizations have created templates for designing new initiatives.[15] The final assessment challenge is to cross-walk assessment results with options for action.

Conclusion

Any reader who has made it this far in this manual now has all the tools needed to conduct a comprehensive community needs assessment. By now it should be clear that an effective needs assessment involves a complex process, requiring leadership buy-in, detailed strategic planning, and skilled analysis. No short-cuts or simple solutions are provided in this guide. There's no

[14] Module 2 of the Pennsylvania Planning for Results Toolkit available from the author, Dr. Barbara Mooney; barbara@thecaap.org.

[15] One is in the Missouri Higher Ground Assessment Toolkit at www.comunityaction.org

template that can be filled in, or a simple survey that can be administered. Rather, the process is the first step in a comprehensive effort to address needs, identify gaps, and create as dynamic and effective a community organization as possible. Approached from this broader perspective, the process itself can shed light on aspects of the community never before identified and pave the way to truly address the needs, resources and environment of the target population. In short, a comprehensive community needs assessment is much more than an onerous legislative requirement; it is the most effective way to ensure that your organization is on-track and addressing the greatest needs in your community. Be sure to review the resources provided in the Appendix of this manual which offer helpful tools that can be customized to fit specific situations. The steps presented here not only provide a clear road-map to guide organizations on their way to better community needs assessments, but also inspires agencies to set new goals and strive for even greater impact in the community.

RESOURCES APPENDIX: PART I

APPENDIX I-A

YOUR LAST COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT: A QUIZ

These are questions about the previous CAA assessment. If your answers include three or more NO's, your next assessment could benefit from a more comprehensive approach.

ASSESSING YOUR LAST ASSESSMENT	Yes	No
1. Did you define your community?		
2. Was the "community" you identified the same as your "service area?" If the answer is "no", what community did you include and why? ____		
3. Did you gather and present demographic data related to the community?		
4. Did you gather and present economic data related to the community?		
5. Did you include information about public infrastructure?		
6. Did you include results from key local institutions (i.e. preventive health, school graduation, etc.)?		
7. Did you define what it means to be "in poverty" or to be "economically insecure" for all respondents?		
8. Did you expand your sample beyond agency clients?		
9. Did you include information about community needs even if the agency had no programs addressing the needs at the time?		
10. Did you examine the capabilities and goals of your current partners in reducing poverty and improving the community?		
11. Did you include input from organizations that have impact on the local economy and culture but are not active partners?		
12. Did you include community assets? If yes, what kind of assets did you identify:		

___Other social service providers ___Civic organizations ___Social centers and programs ___Cultural attractions ___Other		
13. Was the last needs assessment designed in part with active participation of the Board of Directors (i.e. did the Board help identify the data needed)?		
14. Were Board Members active in directing the analysis and interpretation of the data collected?		
15. Did all levels of staff help decide on the information needed?		
16. Did staff conduct its own analysis of the data collected?		
17. Did that assessment use information from a previous assessment to study trends?		
18. Did your leadership (management and Board) learn anything they did not know from the analysis of the assessment data?		

APPENDIX I-B

BOARD EXERCISE: DEFINING THE SCOPE OF THE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

THE PACKET FOR THE MEETING SHOULD INCLUDE:

- Agency Mission Statement;
- The broad goals of the current Strategic Plan [which will be updated using the comprehensive Community Needs Assessment we are starting to plan with you today], and;
- The most recent Community Needs Assessment.

SAMPLE INTRODUCTION

We are meeting to take an important step in the process of gathering comprehensive data about our community as a whole. The community assessment process is the first step in the process of creating the next strategic plan for our agency. The information we gather and assess must be relevant and useful to assist you as a Board to create the new long-term plan. We need your thoughts about the kind of questions you will want answered, questions that are broad enough and also focused enough so that you are confident our next Strategic Plan addresses the most important community needs and includes all the relevant resources and strategies you might want to access to meet those needs.

We even want to re-examine the way that we have approached planning, and preparing the Community Needs Assessment that supports planning. We want to be sure that our practices give you, as our leadership, all the information you may require to establish a plan to make the residents of our community more economically secure.

Setting Expectations for Assessments

Listed below are common features of a *Comprehensive* Community Needs Assessment as described by the national associations of the Community Action network and by the Office of Community Services.

This type of assessment should be comprehensive enough to allow CAA leaders to:

- ❖ Understand the full scope of emerging and constant needs of economically insecure residents of the community it serves;
- ❖ Educate the community and its leaders about the needs;
- ❖ Choose the role the organization will play in meeting some of those needs and in lowering current and future barriers to community residents' economic security;
- ❖ Identify partnerships with others in the community that can help fulfill the CAA mission;
- ❖ Identify public policy issues to which the CAA should provide input; and
- ❖ Demonstrate to the community that the CAA has strategically chosen the most important issues to address, alone or with partners, and that is using its resources most effectively.

Our staff, after reviewing this newest guidance believes we [can do more/ have it just about right] for the assessment we are discussing with you today. (Optional: share the results you obtained when you used the tool "Assessing Your Last Assessment"). Our approach will be guided by the results of our conversation and brainstorming with you here.

The process for planning and conducting the assessment is expected to be [insert your timetable here. Use the graphics provided with the NASCSP *Community Action Guide to Comprehensive Community Needs Assessments* if they are relevant. The text can be edited.

PLANNING SESSION: WHAT TO CONSIDER

- ❖ **How do we define the "community" our CAA serves?**
  - For example – is our "community" the low-income residents of the legally defined service area?
  - Follow up – does "low-income" mean only those eligible for one of our programs or at risk of being eligible soon? Or, is our community everyone and every organization, including private sector enterprises in the entire area, or in a set of areas or institutions, or somewhere in between?

  (Find more ideas in the **"Community and Boundaries Decisions"** tool in Resources Appendix I-C.)
- ❖ **Thinking about the community you defined, what do you, as one of the CAA's leaders, want to know about:**
  - The economic and social conditions that affect families, individuals and their neighborhoods?

- Trends in those family conditions that will affect employment, security and families' well-being?
- The ways our agency is meeting today's needs?
- The indications of how well our strategic plan is working?
- Our impact on the community?
- The degree to which our mission is being achieved?

❖ **What information about future opportunities do you need so that you can identify and tap into resources for our CAA to improve community conditions?**

- What is changing in our community that affects the extent of economic insecurity for some and actual poverty for others?
- What is changing that affects the opportunities that will be available in the future?
- What do we need to know about trends today?
- What do we need to know about conditions we have not fully researched in past assessments?

  Prompts: For example, do we need to find out more about employers' or investors' plans for expansion and development? Do we need to identify the interests of potential private sector partners? Which ones? Do we need to evaluate changes in other private organizations' services to see if 'gaps' are developing that affect our agency activities? Can we be doing more to support local or county services? Are there plans for growth that we have not examined which will affect economic opportunities or the well-being of the low-income community?

❖ **What types of information not already listed above should be included in our assessment?**

APPENDIX I-C

COMMUNITY AND BOUNDARIES DECISIONS: SOME EXAMPLES

Before you decide that the data that you will collect will be from the CAA's assigned service area alone, consider whether the population your CAA serves has ties to places beyond your boundaries or whether important economic or social assets that could be invested in the people and communities you serve lie outside your service area but within reach.

If that's the case, the community profile you present and the group and interview information you look for, especially with regard to economic and community assets, should include additional communities, groups of partners or potential investors.

Create an example like those below (but specifically relevant to your area) to demonstrate new ways for the Board to think about the area to assess and to identify the reasons for choosing information about beyond-the-service-territory areas.

Examples of situations that call for analysis outside your "service territory":

Example 1

Your CAA serves rural counties and several small towns. More than half of your employed residents commute to jobs outside the service area in two small cities or their suburbs. Some are family farmers who need at least one employed adult to keep the farm going. Others are struggling low-wage workers who face challenges overcoming distance and limited job openings.

The economies (including employers, lenders and public services, especially transportation, job supports and health facilities) in those towns should be analyzed. Have you partnered assessment activities with the CAA that serves those two cities (or is it two CAAs?)? Will you interview or survey key employers there? Will you investigate the potential for farmer's markets, or produce partnerships with the neighboring CAA and the city schools?

Example 2

Your CAA serves a declining industrial town. Two suburban towns outside your "territory" are very high income enclaves that, in the 1930's, were city neighborhoods which incorporated separately to "keep their character." Their infrastructure and transit links to your city.

Are the residents potential contributors, volunteers or even investors in your future initiatives? Should you find out? Have you assessed their civic organizations or social services?

Example 3

Your CAA serves part of a large metro area and essential assets- factories, community colleges or medical facilities - are located outside your service area.

What do you need to know to persuade those who manage the assets either to open branches in your neighborhoods or provide easier access to your community residents?

The overlapping jurisdictions of regional and local planning bodies and economic development entities that include your service area will provide insight as to what resources are related now and what future development might link your area to new opportunities - or bypass it.

APPENDIX I-D

EXPANSIVE ISSUES FRAMEWORKS: WAYS TO ORGANIZE DIFFERENT, BUT RELATED, INFORMATION TYPES

For the Board leadership exercise and detailed decision-making by the Assessment Team, you may wish to focus attention on the way your last assessment presented issues through its issues framework, then use the examples below as comparisons.

ORGANIZING DATA BY CSBG SERVICE CATEGORIES

Traditional CAA needs assessments have largely been organized by CSBG categories of poverty conditions, plus a few other services the agency provides. Reports tend to be divided into employment, education, housing, nutrition, and other CAA services measures such as assets, income use, health and transportation.

Arguments for this approach include:

- ❖ The results can be cross-linked to the agency programs that address the needs now.
- ❖ The categories can be expansively defined so that many related indicators are collected.
- ❖ In-depth data collection on a service category may provide a wide variety of information that is related to it and may encourage new connections among ideas, resources, and partners dealing with the needs indicated by the category.
- ❖ There can be an easy match between the issues identified in the assessment and the CSBG annual plan and annual reporting process.

Arguments against it include:

- ❖ The problem of "pigeon-holing" needs and related assets (Which data related to "education" also relate to "employment"? Where does the local information technology deficit or asset "fit"?)
- ❖ The potential for a poor "fit" for indicators of important, emerging problems.
- ❖ Information on very specific issues and complex needs such as immigrant assistance, foreclosure impacts or pollution disasters could be lost in the mix of group variables, for example, on children, youth, family well-being, seniors, minorities, workers, learners and so forth. At the same time, considering all indicators of the impact of a group's situation might offer a full perspective on opportunities as well as challenges. For example, Head Start needs assessments are a group-based analysis. They offer

information on mental and physical health which could inform the health service category, but these data are not always integrated with information on all groups' health or family care needs.

- ❖ The risk of overlooking specific local priorities. Your CAA may have or may develop strategic goals that cut across the service category areas.
- ❖ The problem of getting data at all three levels of a service category: family/individual, community and agency. Easily accessible information may focus on individual or family situations but not uncover the underlying agency or community situation that is involved.

Use examples of the mismatch like this or choose an issue of greater concern to your CAA:

The agency is very concerned about at-risk youth ages 11-17. Data we have on their conditions and on the assets available for better interventions are listed under education, employment (for them and in relation their parents' work supports and employability) health (including prevention of risky behavior), and housing (the safety of their homes and neighborhoods, how often they move).

- How would the assessment be structured and what indicators would be added if an issues domain called "Youth At Risk" became part of the assessment's issues framework and all relevant data were organized under that category?
- Would it be more complete?
- Could the analysis find better connections?
- Would different opinion questions, public forum questions and interviews with local leaders be included?
- Would the final report and analysis be better if information and analysis were chosen and presented according to this complex, interrelated issue framework?

ORGANIZING DATA BY CAA ROMA GOALS

CAAs can also organize assessment data to align with the CSBG ROMA goals. Arguments in favor include:

- ❖ The six national goals are broad; using them can provide an opportunity for an agency to capture a wide variety of information that encourages new connections among ideas, resources, and partners rather than division or limitation.
- ❖ Using the broad goals allows performance indicators and strategic plans to be matched with the needs and solutions that are identified in the assessment.

Arguments against include:

- ❖ Some of the CSBG goals need interpretation for anyone not in the CAA "family," so care must be taken to use many familiar synonyms [i.e. "self-sufficient" in Goal 1].
- ❖ To achieve each of the six national goals for Community Action, many different service domains are required. Therefore, use of the broad areas may not help during the data collection phase, but may be useful in the analysis phase instead.

ORGANIZING DATA BY AGENCY-DESIGNED, ORIGINAL CATEGORIES

Broad issue categories relate best to broad strategic goals in a long-term plan. Issues that are closely related can be grouped together so that questions are designed to connect conditions that have multiple dimensions to the different statistical, programmatic and opinion indicators relevant to understanding the issue fully.

When data are collected on the recognized root causes of poverty and economic instability for individuals and communities, there can be greater depth to the information received. This analytic approach can provide greater understanding of how an agency may address problems in new and innovative ways.

Use examples to start the leaders' brainstorming. Create your original categories, or offer them the Sample Assessment Framework that is the basis for this Guide, shown below.

SAMPLE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

Introduction: The Assessment Process and the Chosen Issue Domains Defined

Domain I: Improving Family and Individual Economic Security

- Snapshot and trends of economic security/insecurity (Combines outside data and any relevant survey or group data including demand for resources)
- Community cultural, social, and economic "assets" that can contribute to a more secure future for all (All types of data)
- Community "deficits" that threaten a more secure future (All types of data)
- Individual and family "assets" and "deficits"(All types of data)
- Agency resources and approach to improving security for all (Agency data including demographics, interviews, resources, and other reports)
- Summary: Opportunity and resources to address (specific) conditions

Domain II: Improving the Well-Being of Families and Children

- Snapshot and trends of economic security/insecurity (Combines outside data and any relevant survey or group data including demand for resources)
- Community cultural, social, and economic "assets" that can contribute to a more secure future for all (All types of data)
- Community "deficits" that threaten a more secure future (All types of data)
- Individual and family "assets" and "deficits"(All types of data)
- Agency resources and approach to improving security for all (Agency data including demographics, interviews, resources, and other reports)

Summary: Opportunity ***Domain III: Increasing Community Economic Vitality and Opportunities***

- Snapshot and trends of economic security/insecurity (Combines outside data and any relevant survey or group data including demand for resources)
- Community cultural, social, and economic "assets" that can contribute to a more secure future for all (All types of data)
- Community "deficits" that threaten a more secure future (All types of data)
- Individual and family "assets" and "deficits"(All types of data)
- Agency resources and approach to improving security for all (Agency data including demographics, interviews, resources, and other reports)

Summary: Opportunity ***Domain IV: Increasing the CAA's Capacity to Support Growth in New Directions***

- Snapshot and trends of economic security/insecurity (Combines outside data and any relevant survey or group data including demand for resources)
- Community cultural, social, and economic "assets" that can contribute to a more secure future for all (All types of data)
- Community "deficits" that threaten a more secure future (All types of data)
- Individual and family "assets" and "deficits"(All types of data)
- Agency resources and approach to improving security for all (Agency data including demographics, interviews, resources, and other reports)

Summary: Opportunity ***Conclusion***

- Major themes:
  - Changes observed
  - Threats and opportunities
  - Assets [Ourhome] identified that may expand the economic opportunities and improve the well-being of all its residents
- The process [Ourhome CAA] will follow using this analysis in planning (and how others can join us…)

RESOURCES APPENDIX: PART II

APPENDIX II-A

TEAM SELECTION

Who should be invited to the assessment team that will plan and oversee implementation of the assessment?

Consider the potential contributions of:

- ❖ Top staff including managers of the program areas;
- ❖ CAA planning and development experts;
- ❖ Other agency staff:
  - whose work makes them familiar with key partners, or
  - whose work makes them familiar with participants;
- ❖ Board members or their organizations' planning and development staff experts;
- ❖ Your CAA's community organizers;
- ❖ Other organizations' leaders and/or community organizers – look for partners who want this kind of information too, and who value community consultation;
- ❖ Institutions that may be able to offer expertise such as academic support, graduate students, or interns assist with the assessment and analysis process, and;
- ❖ Expert consultants – can they volunteer time and limited advice?

APPENDIX II-B

SOURCES FOR COMMUNITY PROFILE DATA

***U.S. Census Bureau** (www.census.gov)*

- USA Counties – over 5,900 data items for the United States, States, cities and counties from a variety of sources (http://censtats.census.gov/usa/usa.shtml)
- Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Toolkit –facilitates obtaining census information for grant writing and Community Needs Assessments (http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/ccf/resources/toolkit.html)
- American FactFinder – a primary tool for accessing community-level data on population, income, education, and the labor force (http://factfinder.census.gov)
- American Community Surveys – provides more up-to-date information than the decennial census. The American Community Surveys are ongoing, yielding population and housing information every year, instead of every ten. These surveys provide dynamic information on how the US population is changing. (http://www.census.gov/acs/www/)
- Census 2000 – General Demographics (http://www.census.gov/census2000/demoprofiles.html)
- US Census Poverty - Related Sites (http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/links/index.html)
- US Census Income and Poverty Data Sources (http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/about/datasources/description.html)
- American Housing Survey - collects data on the Nation's housing, including apartments, single-family homes, mobile homes, vacant housing units, household characteristics, income, housing and neighborhood quality, housing costs, equipment and fuels, size of housing unit, and recent movers. National data are collected in odd numbered years, and data for each of 47 selected Metropolitan Areas are collected currently about every six years. The national sample covers an average 55,000 housing units. Each metropolitan area sample covers 4,100 or more housing units. (http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/ahs/ahs.html)

NOTES ON USING U.S. CENSUS DATA

Look for reports that may be available in a form close to what you need; this can save you time in creating your own form. The most likely choices are county or local government-created reports on poverty and economic conditions over time. Many states' CSBG networks have created statewide profile templates that are updated by a state data center or a consultant annually. See the examples from Indiana, Missouri, North Dakota and Minnesota at www.virtualcap.org. If your state has not, it may be possible to obtain such reports at little cost, particularly if your state CSBG manager will support a request to the state Census Data Center or the local Census Information Center – state government institutions have priority when research resources are allocated.

Census and American Community Survey (ACS) Issues

Because the decennial Census was conducted in 2010, information available in the next few years will be more reflective of reality than the data that has been available since the end of the last decade. The Census is also using the substantial sample from the American Community Survey to provide fresh information between decennial censuses. However, the amount of recent data you can access from the ACS depends on the size of your community.

- ❖ In 2008, the Census Bureau released its first 3-year estimates for geographic areas with a population of 20,000 or more, including the nation, all states and the District of Columbia, all congressional districts, approximately 1,800 counties, and 900 metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas, among others. These are based on ACS data collected from 2005 through 2007. In each subsequent year, the 3-year average moves forward a year.
- ❖ For areas with a population less than 20,000, 5-year estimates will be available in 2010 for the first time.

In times of rapid change, you may need state government or local sources of social and market-related data to find a true picture of your community. Speak to the analysts in state departments of Commerce or Economic Development to learn whether they have unpublished or forthcoming information.

The American Housing Survey, another Census resource, is updated biennially and contains a great deal of data related to residential patterns in addition to the expected data on housing tenure, financing, cost and quality. This includes data on frequency of moves, the trip to work, and other housing and location-related factors. Data for “zones” of 100,000 or more are consolidated, but information is also available for most jurisdictions and for all metropolitan areas. See the full description of available data and size of areas or zones reported at: http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/ahs/ahs01/appendixa.pdf.

Useful and current data in the Economic Census includes the reports on County Business Patterns (CBP), now an annual element. See its contents at www.census.gov/econ/cbp/index.html. CBP reports lag the time of data collection by 2 years, but that is one year less than it takes for the data to appear in the 'American Fact Finder' tool that generates reports using data from all major Census sources.

A new feature on the Census site is the Community Economic Development HotReport that provides information for users seeking economic indicators for individual counties or for the WIRED Regions defined by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration.

For areas that experience economic disruptions due to natural disasters, plant closings, base closings, and other economic changes that might result in abrupt changes in employment, this HotReport shows pertinent economic indicators in unified online reports from many data sources.

ECLECTIC RESEARCH: WHAT OTHER ANALYSTS AND GOVERNMENTS CAN OFFER

CAAs use a wide variety of analyses and reports, including national, local and private sector in their assessment reports.

National

The list below, posted at virtualcap.org on August 1, 2010, shows the variety of national sources available; check the site often for updates.[16]

- MapStats – FedStats Demographics
- Data Sets – County-Level Poverty Rates – USDA Economic Research Service
- Social Statistics Briefing Room – Federal Social Statistics
- Poverty Related Links by Category – Institute for Research and Poverty

[16] Ibid.

- ❖ Knowledgeplex Data Place
- ❖ Community Information Resource Center – Rural Policy Research Institute
- ❖ Demographics Wizard – National Center for Children in Poverty
- ❖ Out of Reach 2007-2008 – National Low-Income Housing Coalition
- ❖ Other:
  - Basic Family Budget Calculator – Economic Policy Institute
  - Family Self-Sufficiency Standard Reports – Wider Opportunities for Women
  - Living Wage Calculator – Community Economic Toolbox – Penn State University
  - Stats for Scaredy Cats: A How-To Guide for Rural Data Users
  - United States City Facts
  - Child Trends DataBank
  - Kids Count Data Book – Annie E. Casey Foundation
  - Bureau of Justice Statistics

EXAMPLES OF STATE, COUNTY AND LOCAL DATA SOURCES

Below is a representative list of non-federal sources drawn from the extensive Mohawk Valley CAA, NY report. It is followed by a training tool used by the Community Action Association of Pennsylvania. The purpose of this format is to allow your assessment team to plan for data collection with a clear purpose and roadmap.

Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency, Inc.

Communitywide Strategic Needs Assessment
2009 – 2011
State and Local/County Data Sources

- ❖ City Data. Employment Profiles for Oneida and Herkimer Counties. Retrieved from http://www.city-data.com/county/oneida_county-ny.html and http://www.city-data.com/county/herkimer_county-ny.html
- ❖ Family Strengthening Policy Center. Retrieved from http://www.nassembly.org/fspc/aboutus.html#FamilyStrengtheningPolicyCenter
- ❖ Federal Register. Vol. 73, No. 15, January 23, 2008, pp.3971-3972. Retrieved from http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html
- ❖ Food Bank of Central New York. www.foodbankcny.org
- ❖ Gelsomino, Mary Jean, D.P.T., Associate Professor of Physical Therapy. "Incidence and Prevalence of Overweight children Enrolled in Head Start Programs in Oneida & Herkimer Counties."
- ❖ Longitudinal Study of Preschool Special Education. www.vesid.nysed.gov

- Mid York Child Care Coordinating Counsel. Child Care Needs Assessment 2006. Retrieved from http://www.mycccc.org
- Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees. Retrieved from http://www.mvrcr.org/content/contact.php
- Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency, Inc. Child Development Division. Head Start and Early Head Start Family Assessment.
- Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency, Inc. Child Development Division. Head Start and Early Head Start Child Outcomes Report.
- National Community Action Association. New York State Poverty Report. Rooting out Poverty Report. www.communityactionpartnership.com
- New York State Children and Youth with Disabilities. www.vesid.nysed.gov
- New York State Community Action Agency. www.nyscaaonline.org
- New York State Education Department. UPK Allocations 2008-2009. www.nysed.gov
- New York State Department of Family Assistance. Office of Children and Family Services. Directory of Regulated Child Care Programs. Retrieved from http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/ccfs_facilitysearch/
- New York State Department of Health. www.health.state.us
- New York State Early Intervention Program. Report to the Legislature. www.health.state.us
- New York State Insurance Department. Report on Healthy NY Program 2003. www.ins.state.ny.us
- New York State Office of Temporary Assistance. Programs and Services. Temporary Assistance and Related Programs. Retrieved from http://www.otda.state.ny.us/main/ta/default.asp#limit
- The University of the State of New York. The State Education Department: Statistical Information for Public School Districts. Retrieved from http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/sedcar/
- Utica City School District. http://www.uticaschools.org/
- YWCA of Utica. www.ywca.org

PA Template for Organizing Sources for Your Community Profile's Social and Economic Data by Issue

The following layout of federal and state data and information resources offers **a** matrix that indicates the issue to which the data contributes.

Excerpt from a handout by Barbara Mooney, Ed. D. (bmoooney@thecaap.org) at a Workshop for the Community Action Partnership Conference, August 2007 "Community Assessment Data Collection – Existing Community Data:"

Category	Data and Source	Source	What it Tells You
General Profile	**Population Trends and Annual Estimates** **% Growth Rate =** **(((2000 pop - 1990 pop)/1990pop)x100)**	1990 Census of Population and Housing, STF 1, Table P001 Census 2000, SF 1, Table P1 http://www.census.gov/ Table 1. Annual Estimates of the Population for Counties of Pennsylvania, Population Division, U. S. Census Bureau http://www.census.gov/popest/estimates.php	What are the population trends in your service area – up, down? How do the trends compare to the state, nation? Do trends differ significantly by town (e.g. older urban areas declining, rural/suburban areas growing)? What are the possible implications in terms of demand for goods and services?
General Profile	**Components of Population Change**	Table 6: Average Annual Estimates of Annual Rates of the Components of Population Change for Counties of Pennsylvania: April 1, 2000 – July 1, 2005 Population Division, U. S. Census Bureau http://www.census.gov/popest/estimates.php	Is population increasing, decreasing because of in-migration or out-migration? And/or because of an increase/decrease in local births? Each may tell you something different about how and why your region is changing.
General Profile	**Population by Age Trends**	1990 Census of Population and Housing, STF 1, Table P011 Census 2000, SF 1, Table P12 http://www.census.gov/	What are the population trends by age? For example, an increase in the 85+ population, combined with a decrease in the 18-34 group or under 18 group may characterize a community where working people are migrating out of the area for economic opportunity. What are the implications regarding demand for education, senior services, etc.?
General Profile	**Population by Race/Ethnicity**	Census 2000, SF 1, Table 8 [warning: data not fully compatible with 1990 data] http://www.census.gov/	Is the racial/ethnic composition of your area changing? Could this have an impact on service demand (e.g. ESL classes)? What impact does racial/ethnic composition of the area have?

APPENDIX II-C

COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS INDICATORS

COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS

The Community Connectedness data shown in this matrix illustrates why communities of interest or places outside your service area are an appropriate focus of your assessment.

If you need evidence to explain the choice of extended community boundaries, this may be the least demanding element of your report. Your decision to analyze a neighborhood, area, or group is based on your community leaders' real knowledge of economic and social connections; you are collecting the quantitative proofs of their choice. These data will also be needed for the "community profile" sections of the report. Each Community Connectedness indicator shown in this matrix can demonstrate why communities of interest or places outside your service area are an appropriate focus of your assessment.

What Data?	Who or What has it?	How is it Collected?
Transportation and travel data (travel to work to show connection of home place to work jurisdiction.)	Area's regional council or state D.O.T, Federal Census	Analyze online data sector reports
Major employer data numbers, sector skill sets to show economic forces and their reach	Census County profiles, Chamber of Commerce, State Department of Commerce or Labor	Current information may not be online. Written requests designed with the data analysts may be required
Government or special district Census plans for areas including the community selected	Possible overlapping local, re-gional, state land use, education recreation, other development or preservation authorities	Maps, reports also available at jurisdictional entities
Cultural organizations that link the community	Partners, United Way, your staff	Interviews, look up areas listed and organizations' own reports
At-risk populations with unique language, religious or civil characteristics with links across the entire community	Interviews or reports from school system, religious leaders; Census ACS for larger areas, metropolitan areas.	Interviews, online reports, other organizations' reports

APPENDIX II-D

BLANK DATA MATRIX

Database Information ALL TOPICS			
Individual or Family/ Community/ Agency	Indicators	What Database?	Owner and Location

Survey Data All Topics			
Individual or Family/ Community/ Agency	What Questions/Indicators?	Who is surveyed and how many?	Distribution Method

Focus Group Input ALL TOPICS			
Individual or Family/ Community/ Agency	Topic	What Group?	How to recruit / at what stage?

Community Forum Input
ALL TOPICS

Individual or Family/ Community/ Agency	Topic/Indicator	What Community?	How to recruit / at what stage?

APPENDIX II-E

FAMILY AND INDIVIDUAL ECONOMIC SECURITY: FULL VERSION

ISSUES: What are the barriers to every individual developing the skills and assets they will need to gain and keep family-supporting jobs and develop assets? What community resources can be focused on removing those barriers and expanding opportunity?

	What Data?	Who or What has it?	How is it Collected?
Individuals	• Data profile of the county residents: age, income, employment status, health status, family structure, education level • Income support program participation	• Census, ACS • Housing and economic surveys • Your state Census Data Center at your land grant university • State Public Health Department • State Education Department • State human services • Your database	• Extracts of databases for your area delivered in electronic formats your analyst(s) can use. Be sure to request any local analysis your data providers and partners have already undertaken • Analysis of your agency client data base statistics • Interviews to determine trends from former participants
	• Perceived economic insecurity by the general public and by the CAA customer	• Individuals, organizational leadership • Public officials	• Survey • Interviews with elected officials, partner organizations
Family	• Insecurity indicators: evictions, housing mobility, utility disconnects, incidence of domestic violence • Poor housing quality • Health insurance • Job benefits • Food insecurity • Substance abuse	• Sheriff, law enforcement & courts, FBI, health providers • Association of Rental Agents • Utility companies • Housing departments including inspectors • Partner organizations	• Reports on local conditions • Interview and survey partner organizations • Local government enforcement • Housing census, mortgage crisis mapping – U.S. Treasury records

	• Location in community in relation to mobility & public services	• Zip code & Census tract level matching with transit data, car ownership, identified key resources (libraries, schools, recreation, supermarkets) • Government plans for infrastructure and development • Survey of mobility indicators • Survey of reasons for un-employment , under-employment, lack of living wage	• Local directories • Partner organizations interview • Public officials /service providers. • General public and customer surveys. • Planning bodies • Your staff knowledge of reported mobility and access issues
	• Unmet needs of CAA customers • Survey results of perceived needs • Focus group priorities	• Staff expertise • Customer survey	• Focus group • Survey customers and staff • Partner organizations
	Assets • Private: car, home, savings, insurance including health, 401K, education or skills • Public: near transit amenities, art, recreation, parks, supermarket • Job supports can also be considered	• See location, above. Also map the zip codes of customers survey respondents on location of amenities • State and EITC info from your participants and the general public	• Survey • Local reports
Community	• Community affordability Benchmark cost of living indicators vs. family resources and conditions, especially housing costs and the living wage standard for the area, alternative poverty standards.	• Census • Housing survey • Partner organizations • Development plans of public agencies	• Databases: living wage coalition, unions • DOL wage data • National Low-Income Housing Coalition ‘out-of-reach report” on rents vs. wages
	• Educational resources for children , adult learners, workforce skills	• School department, State Dept. of Education, higher education institutions • Workforce Investment Board, labor	• State and local public agency reports

	Assets • Adequate facilities for public services? • Adequate facilities for health services? • Transportation access? • Population losses and gains • Family dispersion, family ties in the community • Skilled workers • Young people	• Demographic databases • Census and business census • Elected officials and government departments • Survey	• Extracts of databases for your area, delivered in electronic formats your analyst(s) can use. • Interviews with elected officials, partner organizations, employers • Community surveys
	• Tax base • Access to art and culture • Unique area assets supporting economic development – natural, cultural, geographic	• Local government and school reports	
	• Availability of family job support, childcare, training • Social and community development sector size, linkages, impact • Unemployment and underemployment	• Local non-governmental organization reports	
	• Employer and worker perception of job supports needed (transportation, child care, etc.) • Employer perception of education / training needs and matching educational resources • Venture capital or other investment availability • Government development plans for areas including the selected community	• Employers • Unions and other worker organizations	
	• Local government resources and deficits for economic development and workforce development	• Government plans for infrastructure and development	

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Agency</td><td>Assets
• Resources to support getting and keeping family-supporting jobs
• Current services in support of employment and economic development, including job supports
• Personal asset development
• Business asset development
• Small business support
• Partnerships with employers, investors and banks
• Organizations seeking to develop new jobs
• Organizations seeking to invest in workers and their families
• Community facilities
• Expertise, including planning and financial as well as specialized
• Sound credit with local banks
• Grants acquisition success
• Good reputation</td><td>• ROMA results

Meetings
• Staff, current partners
• Business organizations
• Customer survey
• General public survey</td><td>• Data base analysis
• Surveys
• Focus groups
• Partner meetings</td></tr>
<tr><td>Deficits
• Lack of any of the above
• Mission restrictions
• Political concerns</td><td>• ROMA results
• Staff
• Customers
• Leadership</td><td>• Database analysis
• Surveys
• Focus groups</td></tr>
</table>

CSBG Categories of Service

The following indicators in the complete Economic Security Planning Table will “cross-link” to the CSBG categories of service; for some of the service categories other data are needed, too. In this list, the service category or poverty condition is followed by the indicators in the planning matrix that relate to it.

❖ Employment

- Job supports available to all workers, to low-wage workers and the location of the supports
- Economic projections for industries in your area - development expectations, workers’ location in community vs. mobility and services, individual education, skills, employment status, job services available

- ❖ Education
  - Family and individual characteristics
  - Educational resources for children
  - School system performance
  - Resources for adult learners
  - Workforce skills instruction and support
- ❖ Income management
  - Assets – private (car, home, savings, insurance, 401K, education or skills); access to credit and bank services
  - Community affordability: housing costs and availability, living wage standard for the area, public services
- ❖ Housing
  - Housing costs and availability, self-sufficiency standard for the area
  - Unmet housing needs of CAA customers
  - Housing quality assets
- ❖ Emergency
  - All the insecurity indicators in the matrix and all benchmarks of community affordability
- ❖ Health
  - Insured status, Medicare and Medicaid participation
  - Service accessibility
  - Community-wide or neighborhood health facilities

APPENDIX II-F

SUMMARY: FAMILY AND CHILD WELL-BEING INDICATORS

Level	Whose Data
Individual	• Child health: health coverage, immunization, screenings , access to medical and dental care • Early childhood: development indicators, including Head Start assessment factors • School age children: quality of care and education resources • Social engagement: youth organization participation including faith organizations, sports access and participation • Youth: employment

Level	Whose Data
Community	• Educational resources for children, dropout rates, higher-education rates • Adult learners, including workforce skills & accessibility • Social and economic support services, quantity and quality • Health infrastructure, public service quality including law enforcement • Family recreation and arts access and utilization, civic and social organizations for families and youth • Environmental hazards • Workplace safety, distance to work • Youth out-migration

Family	• Income level and source, assets • Employment status and history • Health status • Family structure • Education level • Condition of home, cost vs. income • Healthy indoor environment • Income support program participation • Family and social local connections • Energy security /costs • Mobility • Child and adult nutrition & food security, SNAP and school lunch participation, • Obesity and other health risk indicators • Access to supermarkets, fresh food, income stability • Insecurity indicators: violence, addiction, ex-offenders, need for emergency assistance. • Other barriers: language, literacy		Agency	• Range and quantity of family and children's services, percent of those in need reached and served • Expansion or change of investment needed • Quality indicators of capacity - staff skills, reputation, financial records, results measured • Quality indicators of growth opportunities - access to funding, local lenders, local partners and donors resources, potential for co-expansion partnerships with schools, youth organizations, faith community, judicial system • Volunteers

The following indicators in the Family Well-Being planning table will "cross-link" to the CSBG categories of service:

- ❖ School age children: quality of care and education resources
  - Social engagement: youth organization participation including faith organizations, sports access and participation
- ❖ Employment:
  - Job supports available to all workers, to low-wage workers and their location
  - Youth employment and training
- ❖ Education:
  - Family and individual characteristics
  - Educational resources for children
  - School system performance
  - Resources for youth – recreation, social support
  - Parent and youth workforce skills instruction and support
- ❖ Income management:

  - Assets – private (car, home, savings, insurance, 401K, education or skills), access to credit and bank services
  - Community affordability: housing costs and availability, living wage standard for the area, public services

- Housing:
  - Housing costs and availability, self-sufficiency standard for the area
  - Unmet housing needs of CAA customers
  - Stability at same address
- Emergency:
  - All the insecurity indicators in the matrix, the benchmarks of community affordability
  - Child homelessness
- Health:
  - Insurance status, state child health insurance program or Medicaid participation,
  - Screening results, immunization rates
  - Community-wide or neighborhood health facilities access
- Nutrition
  - Child and adult nutrition & food (in) security, SNAP and school lunch participation
  - Obesity and other health risk indicators
  - Access to supermarkets and fresh food, income stability

APPENDIX II-G

COMMUNITY ECONOMIC VITALITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Level	What Data?	Who or What has it?	How is it Collected?
Individual	• Proximity to transportation • Cost of transportation and services • Health services cost/access • Credit and banking resources • Quality of educational systems • Services that support working individuals/parents	• Local public officials • Government transportation authority • State records • Residents	• Interview with government officials • Analyzing rankings and documentation from state, local and county records • Community survey
Family	• Housing, services, energy and other price trends vs. disposable income • Credit and banking investment resources by neighborhood and population • Local and regional plans for growth, public or philanthropic growth capital sources, local natural and cultural resources to protect, and/or develop as assets • Profile of infrastructure quality for current and prospective business: transportation facilities, water and energy access and cost, land use restrictions, tax profile, labor force quality • School and housing quality. Worker supports - child care, health facilities, transit	• Utilities • State Housing , Commerce Departments • Partner organizations • Public officials • Business community members • Census data in Profile • Residents	• Housing Census, analysis of mortgage crises in area • Interviews of other organizations, and community members • Reports on local conditions • Survey of individual community members • Focus groups of partners

Community	• Changes: populations, investment or disinvestment, services added or redacted, policy changes affecting the community • Partnerships between community organizations and employers; partnerships between community organizations and sources of capital; access or barriers to low-income workforce • Small business sector growth and employment profile; small business capital sources and needs; indicators of micro-enterprise market opportunities • Predatory and other high-risk financial factors.; community re-investment pattern and amount	• Census • Agency record • Public officials • Community business members • Zip code tracking • State budget records	• Extract data from Census • Interviews with partner organizations, elected officials, and community business members • Analyze state budget records and spending trends • Community surveys

APPENDIX II-H

AGENCY'S CAPACITY TO SUPPORT GROWTH IN NEW DIRECTIONS

Agency Capacity to Support Growth and New Directions			
Level	**What Data?**	**Who or What has it?**	**How is it Collected?**
Individuals	• Customer opinion: service or volunteer experience satisfaction, awareness of all resources • Agency assets: staff skills, financial record and credit access, management and information systems, fundraising record, banking and investment partners • Agency deficits: unsatisfactory outcomes or procedures, unmet goals	• Agency record database • Individual community members • Public officials	• Community and partner survey • Leadership interviews • Analysis of agency capabilities • Interviews with agency leaders
Family (the Agency 'Family')	• Staff perceptions: results, support to staff, education for staff, resources and linkages for the job, 'good place to work' • Resource development results	• Your database • Your staff • Your Board	• Agency reports • Agency wide interview and surveys • Staff focus groups • Agency records: fiscal or program performance indicators
Community	• Public assessment: knowledge of agency, reputation of agency; results. • Partner perceptions: opinion on agency performance, capacity, leadership qualities, coordination, skill, reaching its community • Agency assets: programs successfully coordinated with other community service and civic partners with potential for co-expansion.	• Individuals in community • Agency reports • Partner organizations • Local leadership	• General public and community surveys • Partner organization interviews and focus groups • Public forums • Analysis of agency leaders

APPENDIX II-I

PEER EXPERTS SUPPORTING ASSESSMENT DESIGN

Community Action of Franklin, Hampshire and North Quabbin Regions (MA)
Needs Assessment and Community Action Plan 2009 – 2011
Excerpt from section 2 (pp.7-8) "Primary Data Collection"

… The agency hosted several focus groups that provided input into the content of the surveys, in particular the survey for adult constituents. This resulted in adding or clarifying questions that would provide information that many community professionals would consider useful to have, for instance, voting behavior, need for education and training, child care utilization and satisfaction, and debt.

The Strategic Planning Committee also made important suggestions regarding the wording and visual Needs Assessment and Community Action Plan (FY2009-FY2011) presentation of the surveys. For instance, Committee members expressed a need for additional information on community involvement and help-seeking behavior on the part of adult constituents who would complete surveys, and they urged that questions about lifetime experience of trauma be worded as neutrally as possible in order not to trigger a trauma reaction for respondents. Because the 2005 adult survey results suggested that food insecurity far exceeded food pantry utilization, we added a set of questions related to why people with evidence of food insecurity had not used a food pantry. Surveys that had pen and paper versions were reformatted to allow for more white space. All surveys were field-tested at least once with as wide a representation as possible of prospective respondents. Feedback from these field tests led to further significant revisions to the survey tools.

Focus Groups and Conversations with Mayors

At the beginning of our needs assessment and planning process (November 2007 – February 2008), we met with eight community groups to ask them about the type of information they thought we should gather through our surveys of constituents; trends that they saw developing; and what role Community Action should play in their communities in the near future.

Their input was invaluable to our survey design. For instance, during one meeting, the group suggested that we ask about whom respondents turn to for help when problems come up. This gave us very important information about people's help-seeking behavior and the role social service providers play relative to family, friends, and faith communities.

The groups' input about trends to be aware of for the future will help us in program development and helped us to know what to focus on in our review of secondary data for this Community Action Plan.

For instance, we heard from several sources a concern that increased difficulty of standardized school tests (MCAS) and GED tests will mean that more young people will not be able to attain the credential needed for entry-level jobs and will have a very difficult time transitioning to work. In our review of secondary data, we look closely at graduation rates, particularly for students from families with low incomes…"

This report includes a detailed preface about the assessment planning process.

It can be found at www.virtualcap.org or from the agency, www.communityaction.us.

RESOURCES APPENDIX: PART III

APPENDIX III-A

SOURCES OF ALL DATA

Published Statistics		**Survey Information All Topics/Domains** (Group together data questions that go to the same respondents. Eliminate duplicates.)		**Focus Group or Interviews Information**		**Community Forums' Responses**	
What?	Who Has It?	What?	What Group?	What?	Who?	What?	Who Is Invited?

Appendix III-B

CAA Staff Experts' Discussion Tool on Unmet Needs

Circulate the discussion issues beforehand so staff members have time for well-considered answers.

Sample introduction: When we study "needs," we are really looking at "unmet" needs and trying to analyze how to match them up with appropriate resources. Unmet needs are rarely recorded in our programs [*exceptions in your agency should be mentioned*] except crudely in waiting lists.

Your expert knowledge about what our clients come in with and the way our resources align with their requirements is our best resource and we are tapping into it by having you work on the design of analysis and surveys or focus groups for our needs assessment. What you tell us is important data, and it also is input for the formal questions we should ask to demonstrate the need you know about from your professional experience.

Staff Preparation for Discussion

Pre-meeting communication to participants: Think about what it would take for the people you work with to thrive and be able to ensure their families thrive. Before you come to the meeting, jot down your list - including details. Also indicate:

- Which of those resources you believe that our programs deliver, including resources delivered through any partnerships between our programs and other organizations
- Whether only some of those who need the resource access it or whether most of those who need the resource have access
- Whether each resource you believe is needed should come from the community and its economic or government resources or from this agency and/or a partner

Staff Focus Group

Begin with reports on the written prepared reactions; follow with questions

Q Thinking about all we have been discussing so far, what would you say are the 3 or 4 most important unmet needs for families and individuals in this community?

- **Q** What would you say are the 3 or 4 most important changes that would help this agency to do its job more effectively?
- **Q** Do our programs, process and system use any tools that you think do a good job in uncovering individual or family needs? How well do our tools and information sources to help you identify where resources might be available and whether the participant can access them? What other tools do you need?
- **Q** Think about the organizations that are our partners. Which ones always or almost always can add useful resources to your work? Which ones work well in coordination with you? What would help them do more? What would help you coordinate with more partners effectively? Are there some partnerships that we should focus on building up? Are there different organizations our leadership should reach out to for deeper or more consistent partnerships?
- **Q** Do our records help you keep track of participants, their progress or unmet needs? What could we do better in our recordkeeping?
- **Q** Do you have the feeling that, in general, you know how families or individuals are getting along after they finish a part of our programs? For how long afterwards? What do you know about their outcomes that may not be recorded in our formal systems? What would you like to know and why? How could we find that out?

APPENDIX III-C

DO YOUR QUESTIONS CAPTURE THE 'WHY'S?'

Designing questions and choosing statistics that will lead to action-oriented analysis requires that all the important contributing factors to a condition are captured in the answers. The practice of having survey respondents indicate their needs from a checklist of needs (as in: "Please rank the following needs in order of importance to you and your family: better transportation, more affordable health care, health insurance, etc.") does not yield enough information to allow decision makers to craft effective solutions.

Data and opinions that are indicators describing and measuring poverty conditions such as lack of education, lack of family-supporting jobs or poor nutrition do not measure the *factors that cause the conditions*, but the CAA's mission is to change the *causes* of poverty, not to treat the symptoms of poverty.

A more extensive presentation on the differences between measuring conditions and their causes is available from the PA CAA Association. It includes a tool, "The 5 Why's" for conceptualizing the underlying causes of a condition in order to collect data on them or to address them when designing a remedy for a condition. That tool is reprinted below.

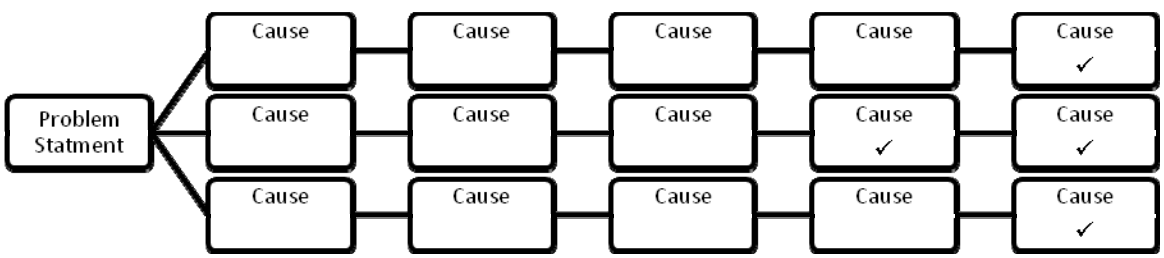
Following it is a sample of the template filled in with a CAA's list of causes. Indicators of these causes need to be part of the statistics collected, from the plans of local authorities, and in your survey and meeting questions. Without them, your decision makers will not detect whether the inability to find and keep a good job is related to transportation issues or to the worker's personal qualities. If transportation is identified as a problem, but then there are no data on whether the problem is inappropriate transit schedules or the cost of private vehicles, the CAA will not know whether it is more important to advocate changes with the transportation authority, set up a van service partly funded by employers, establish a transit program, or finance cars for low-wage commuters.

FIVE WHYS

From The Change Agent's Guide to Radical Improvement, Copyright 2002, With Permission by Ken Miller, as cited by Mooney.[17]

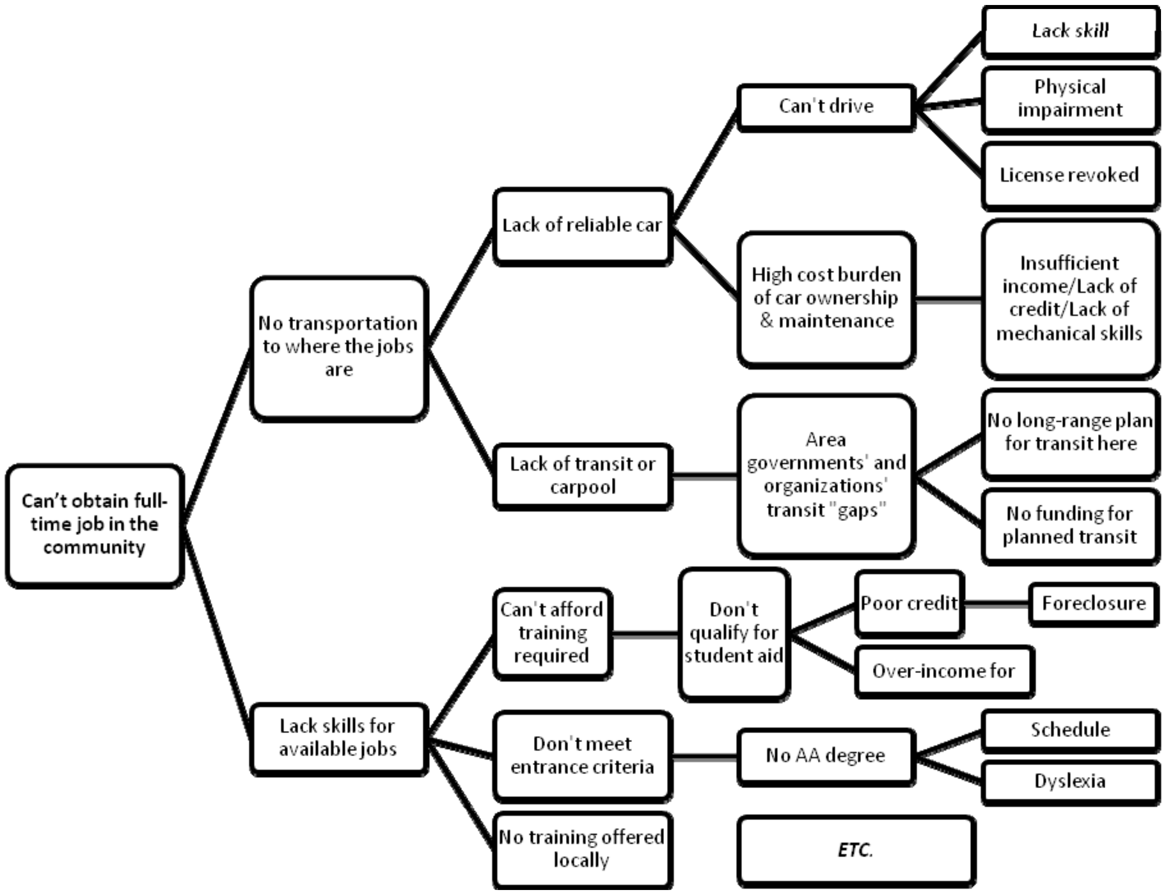
This exercise will assist you in determining the root cause of a problem. It will help reveal what you know and what further information you may need to obtain. Use this tool to ensure that the problem itself is fixed, not just the symptoms.

1. Write the problem on the far left of the page, half-way down.
2. Ask why this problem occurs and write each cause vertically to the right of the problem statement.
3. Each cause now becomes its own problem statement. For each cause, ask "Why does this problem occur?" or "How does it cause a problem?" and write each response vertically to the right of the cause.
4. Repeat step 3 at least five times, or until you feel you have reached the final cause.
5. Place a checkmark on the causes you want to pursue further.



17 From Conditions to Causes- Assessing the Key Indicators, From: Barbara Mooney, Ed. D. "What's In a Needs Assessment?" presentation at the Community Action Partnership Convention, August 2007. barbara@thecaap.org

THE 'FIVE WHY'S' METHOD APPLIED TO CAA INQUIRY ABOUT THE POVERTY CONDITION 'LACK OF EMPLOYMENT'



APPENDIX III-D

'POVERTY': *DOES THE 'P' WORD BELONG IN THE DATA COLLECTION TOOLS?*

Americans react negatively to the concept of "poverty." Recent communications research has proven that today many of the terms in Community Action's founding principles and goals, as well as some of the vocabulary commonly used in CAA programs and reports, have unexpected and negative meanings. "Poverty" is one that primarily evokes hostile reactions. When Americans hear someone is "poor" or "in poverty" most respond with a mental picture of people who have failed and/or are destitute. [How often have CAA professionals been told "we had very little coming up, but we were never poor!" or seen people ashamed to be receiving help, because they believe anti-*poverty* resources are only for those who are "different?"]

Unfortunately, the phrase "low-income" also evokes "poverty" to most people. By contrast "low-wage worker" and "fixed-income retiree" are perceived as sympathetic concepts. Further, there is little agreement about whether and how economic, political and social factors cause "poverty." Many believe poverty, especially persistent poverty, primarily results from personal weaknesses. Americans value hard work, discipline and sacrifice. Some believe that applying those characteristics will solve every problem.

It is entirely possible to survey opinions, hold assessment focus groups and conduct public meetings without ever using the "P" word. The concepts Americans value will work equally well. The examples in this paper use research-tested phrases such as "economic insecurity" "opportunity," "investment," "change" and "support."

Your assessment reports and presentations can categorize the data as you choose, including the facts on those with incomes below the FPG, and their living conditions. More extensive materials on messaging research and on presenting information about fighting poverty are available at www.nascsp.org

Try the following exercise:

Below are some typical survey and forum questions for the general public used in CAA assessments.

Re-design them so they convey the same concepts without using the word “poverty” or any phrase that evokes dependency or other negatives in connection with economically insecure residents. How might the answers be different with your new language substituted?

In a General-Public Survey:

❖ What do you think is the *main* cause of poverty here in Ourhome County? Select only one.

__ Lack of jobs

__ Low motivation or low work ethic

__ Language or cultural barriers

__ Lack of affordable and/or quality housing

__ Obsolete industrial facilities

__ Poor schools

__ Low-wages

__ Drug abuse/addiction

__ Not enough federal or state investment

In Focus Group or Public Forum Agenda Item:

❖ What would our community look like without poverty?

❖ What would it take to end poverty here in Ourhome County?

APPENDIX III-E

IDENTIFYING AND MEASURING INDIVIDUAL, AGENCY AND COMMUNITY ASSETS

Beware! *There's a bias toward the negative* in any assessment report focused on "needs." Needs are often defined as "deficits that cause harm and/or impede progress" towards some goals that are important to the CAA. Needs are conventionally met by access to or transfer of resources or services. Therefore, to balance a discussion about "community needs" the CAA also needs to identify the "community assets."

After you identify issue areas, you can pick related "asset" indicators to identify potentially accessible resources that are *not* currently being directed to ending poverty, as well as those that are assets already used in the low-income community. You can identify the strengths and skills in the low- and moderate-income families in your community as well as their "needs."

An assessment that did not count the assets in the community and include the capacity and potential of the agency, its partners, and the customers who are served would define only problems; it would contain no information that would lead to action and solutions. Further, an assessment that focuses on a narrow set of needs, as in "social service needs," will result in choosing a narrow set of solutions, such as additional social services, rather than more encompassing solutions, such as a capital investment partnership with a new, major employer that wants a workforce that has the necessary training and job supports.

"Social capital" is an objective in Goal 6 of the CSBG ROMA goals, where it is called 'Participation in the Community'. There are other kinds of social capital as well, including: measureable family well-being, including the intensity of connections with family and friends; participation in social, faith and civic groups, and; access to services and economic resources. Social capital is closely related to community capital because facilities, practices and traditions of civic engagement, as well as family and social ties, are community-wide assets.

COMMUNITY ASSETS

Asset-based analysis is unfamiliar to many in the social service community, as is the concept "community assets"; it is more commonly used in the economic or business planning sector. Community assets include items that can be developed further to increase employment or income, to improve the community resources its residents use and to deepen the connections its residents share to one another and to their neighborhoods

The assets you choose to assess should be convincingly relevant. For example**,** information on community mortgage lending by locally-based banks is relevant because in the future the boundaries of their lending area might be influenced by your CAA. However, information on credit cards issued by the same banks' national holding companies is not so relevant because there is less prospect of partnering with a national or international organization that issues cards not only to local residents but also to millions of others.

Identify quantifiable community assets that you might assess, including the built environment, natural resources, economic resources that benefit the local economy directly, "social capital" that residents can access, especially through civic organizations and social groups and "community capital" such as nonprofit agencies and public and community services.

BRAINSTORMING INFORMATION ABOUT STRENGTHS AND ASSETS

As a way to begin your planning team's brainstorming session on ways to collect parallel assets and deficits, use a simple matrix to record a list of conditions, then use a larger matrix to organize the data items you will need, as in the examples included in Part I Resources.

Explain that the exercise is, first, to list conditions, opportunities or threats of interest or concern and *then* to take the step of listing, for each one, the information elements needed to develop a clear assessment of the topic.

Ask participants to focus on the lists for the left-hand cells first and to jot down their ideas on a handout sheet with these two sets of "appreciative inquiries."

- ❖ Community Strengths:
  - List the things you, your family and friends value most about living in [community]. What makes residents happy? Gives them strength? Offers opportunities to have fun? To grow?
  - What (other) local organizations or institutions do you admire and respect for their work in the community? What about government organizations?
  - Thinking about the daily lives of the families and individuals you have personally served in the CAA programs and met at CAA events held during the past year, what aspects of the community seem to give them the most support for their family needs? Consider public services, physical resources, service organizations, social, religious and cultural assets, and any other resources that you included on the list you made for your own family.
- ❖ Opportunities:
  - Thinking about the community's stores, entertainment, local employers and industries, natural resources and older commercial facilities, list the ones you believe might be developed to produce additional local jobs or to create business or facilities that would improve the community.
  - What could our active partners do together with the CAA, given the ideas and resources?
  - What other organizations that you respect might want to work with the CAA on your idea?
  - How could the resources that you believe give the CAA customers support and strength be developed further or expanded?

It is likely that the asset-identification exercise will influence the choice of negative factors for that part of the table. Problem-listing is a familiar assessment process and may not require the two-step procedure you followed for defining community assets.

End the exercise by listing data and sources, including survey questions that you need to assess the availability of assets or the prevalence of problems.

Note that the planning practice today embraced techniques of "appreciative inquiry" to ensure assessments of a situation are balanced and include assets and strengths that can support plans for positive change. The table below summarizes the differences.

Comparing Traditional and Appreciative Assessments	
Problem Solving (Deficit-Based Change)	**Appreciative Inquiry (Strength-Based Change)**
Identify problem	Appreciate "Best of what is"
Conduct root cause analysis	Imagine "What might be"
Brainstorm solutions & analyze	Design "What should be"
Develop treatment – action plans	Create "What will be"

Source: Appreciative Inquiry Commons (http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/whatisai.pdf)

Learn more about applying these techniques to measuring and learning from your results, as well as for planning purposes at Appreciative Inquiry Commons: http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/.

Learn about defining and measuring community capital at: http://heapro.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/16/3/275 and http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/Sustainability/KeyTermCommCapital.html

APPENDIX III-F

SURVEY DESIGN TOOLS

Design Balanced Questions

Design attitudinal and community-related questions with an "appreciative inquiry" style where possible. Make sure positive impressions can be recorded, not only "lack of problem" responses. For example: Do you believe the community will offer more job opportunities in the next five years? More entertainment (or recreation) opportunities?

Set up positive-to-negative scaled answers to answer possible "deficit" questions.

Example

For each of the following, please rate whether it is:

1 = Lacking in our community

2 = Available to most in our community but of poor quality or too costly

3 = Available to most in our community and of acceptable quality

4 = Available to most in our community and improving rapidly

5 = Available to most in our community and of high-quality

a. High-quality public education
b. Entertainment and arts
c. Recreational facilities and events
d. Safe streets
e. Affordable housing
f. Public transportation

Put New Issues in the Spotlight

Connecting your local data to emerging issues both keeps your information fresh and prepares your agency with new information on risk factors or emerging opportunities. One example is the recent USDA studies that proved that the lowest income neighborhoods offer the least access to fresh produce. Below are the questions in the USDA study; difficulty in accessing 'the kinds of food you want' is added to the food insecurity questions:

http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/AP/AP036/AP036b.pdfhttp://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/AP/AP036/AP036b.pdf

Questions On Access to Grocery Stores

From: USDA 2007 Access to Affordable and Nutritious Food: Measuring and Understanding Food Deserts and Their Consequences

SS1 Which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household--enough of the kinds of food we want to eat, enough but not always the kinds of food we want to eat, sometimes not enough to eat, or often not enough to eat?

1. Enough of the kinds of food we want to eat (SKIP TO SX1CK)
2. Enough but not always the kinds of food we want to eat (SKIP TO SS1B)
3. Sometimes not enough to eat (SKIP TO SS1C)
4. Often not enough to eat (SKIP TO SS1C)

Those who gave response #2, "enough but not always the kinds of foods we want to eat" were asked SS1B

SS1B Here are some reasons why people don't always have the kinds of food they want. For each one, please tell me if that is a reason why YOU don't always have the kinds of food you want to eat.

	YES	NO
1. Not enough money for food	[ ]	[ ]
2. Kinds of food we want not available	[ ]	[ ]
3. Not enough time for shopping or cooking	[ ]	[ ]
4. Too hard to get to the store	[ ]	[ ]
5. On a special diet	[ ]	[ ]

Those who responded to question SS1 with response #3 or #4, "sometimes" or "often not enough to eat" were asked SS1C:

SS1C Here are some reasons why people don't always have enough to eat. For each one, please tell me if that is a reason why YOU might not always have enough to eat.

	YES	NO
1. Not enough money for food	[ ]	[ ]
2. Not enough time for shopping or cooking	[ ]	[ ]
3. Too hard to get to the store	[ ]	[ ]
4. On a diet	[ ]	[ ]
5. No working stove available	[ ]	[ ]
6. Not able to cook or eat because of health problems	[ ]	[ ]

Ask About Community Connections

You can learn a lot from correlating people's answers with their status as community newcomers or lifelong residents. A newcomer's situation and opinions may suggest some important trends. On the other hand, if a person who just arrived from another country answers questions about whether things are getting better or worse than ten years ago, you may want to weight that opinion differently than someone who has always lived in the community. You'll see who is planning to stay: is it only the elderly? Or only those satisfied with their circumstances?

Connectedness

- ❖ Do you have available to you and your family as many social organizations, including sports or recreation groups as you want to participate in?
  - If no, what activities would you like to have available? OR
  - Why are they not accessible to you?
- ❖ Which of the following are you active in monthly/yearly/weekly? (LIST of local institutions plus faith community, etc.)
- ❖ Does your extended family live in the area?
- ❖ Are you able to keep in touch with and visit family members as much as you want:
  - in person? by phone?
  - by mail? by email?
- ❖ When you need help with daily problems or an occasional crisis, where are you most likely to go for advice or resources? Please rank the one you would approach first with a 1, second with a 2 and enter 0 if you would not use that source.
  - _ family,
  - _ close friend,
  - _ church/mosque/temple/synagogue,
  - _ Ourhome CAA,
  - _ other community organization
  - _ government agency

Mobility

- ❖ How long have you lived here in [Ourhome]? ___ years or all my life ___
- ❖ Do you plan to stay for a decade or more if you can? Y__ N__ Undecided___
- ❖ When you moved here, did you come from ___ Less than 100 miles away? ___ More than 100 miles away? ___ Another country?
- ❖ In the time you have lived here, how many different addresses have you had? ___
- ❖ Have you moved in past year? If yes, how many times have you moved in the past year?___

Lack of community connections is a known risk factor for poverty. You can learn how many times low-income residents or families who rent have moved, which can identify a major risk factor for their economic security.

Other Questions Taken from 'Insecurity Scales'

These questions are used to uncover very specific unmet needs that may occur in many income groups. The language of the questions is generally a version of the Census Survey of Income and Program Participation or of the USDA Food Insecurity Scales above. See several simplified examples in the assessments of Westcap, WI and Norwescap, NJ at virtualcap.org. The answers can provide very concrete pictures of deprivation and are used in some form by most developed nations. Brief versions work for many issues.

Energy Insecurity Example

[5 of 11 questions from Roger Colton's Home Energy Insecurity Scale used in HHS and numerous state studies.[18]]

The respondent is read each statement and asked to respond: Was that often true, sometimes true, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?

Q1. The first statement is: (I/We) worried whether (my/our) home energy bill would become overdue before (I/we) could get money to pay it.

Q2. Our home energy bill became due, and (I/we) didn't have money to pay it without somebody's help.

Q3. (I/We) couldn't afford to heat or cool our home to the temperature we wanted it to be, or to use our water or appliances to the extent we wanted to use them.

Q4. (I/we) reduced our energy consumption to uncomfortable or inconvenient levels because (I was/we were) running out of money to pay our home energy bill.

Q5. (I/we) could not use our entire home because we could not afford to heat or cool it.

The follow-up below is *not* in most CAA surveys yet. By using it, your survey can connect hardships to the availability of community resources, and consequently your analysis can better match the community's resources to the need.

[18] http://www.fsconline.com/05_FSCLibrary/lib2.htm

Energy Security Resources Example

At any of those times when you could not afford your energy bill did you seek assistance from:

Ourhome CAA? ___Y ___N

If yes, did you receive assistance that helped you afford your energy use? ___Y ___N

Another community organization? ___Y ___N

If yes, did you receive assistance that helped you afford your energy use? ___Y ___N

A government agency? ___Y ___N

If yes, did you receive assistance that helped you afford your energy use? ___Y ___N

Sensitive Questions

Your goal is get each respondent to answer all questions, but you should accept incomplete responses if they include the basic demographic information. Be sure respondents can return incomplete surveys or submit them online. You can specify which fields are required for a valid response.

Survey professionals, even for government surveys, generally put income questions *last* in a questionnaire. Many people quit the survey when they get to an income question. If you have zip code information or program participation information (for example, if Social Security is their only income) you may be able to estimate income even if the income section is not completed.

A softer way to ask for income information is: “The median family income in this area is [$XX,XXX]. Half of residents have more income, and half have less. Would you say your family income is (check one): above median/below the median/pretty close to the median?”

APPENDIX III-G

BOARD VALIDATION MEETING

Review the following information with members of your Board of Directors:

- ❖ An outline of the primary Assessment Report sections:
  - Specify your issue domains
  - Review the questions you want to answer about each
  - Decide how to organize them (See Part V Resources Appendix for examples)
- ❖ An estimate of time and costs for each element
- ❖ The reports and products that will result, both for internal or public use

There are assessment tasks in which board involvement is essential, from leadership interviews – where they may need to open doors or join the meetings – to participation in public events. Before they commit to the time necessary to help the project, they must understand how it will work. Questions for the Board to use in considering the assessment include:

- ❖ How will the agency position the CAA's search for information and community guidance? Is it a hallmark of your commitment to civic engagement and community control? A funder requirement? An opportunity for others to help you do your job better? An opportunity to identify the CAA as the county expert on poverty, or on community growth and opportunity?
- ❖ What will, or can, Board members' organizations contribute to the study? Can Board members offer staff from their organizations to help with some tasks? What can the assessment process and its data offer them in return?
- ❖ Will Board members represent the agency at focus groups with partners? Will they participate in public forums?
- ❖ What benefit can elected officials realize from the assessment process? Do they need information? Would they appreciate a platform from which to listen to constituent concerns? Should Board members attend all sessions where elected officials are represented? How can their participation be managed so they don't dominate the discussion?

The answers to these questions will show the degree to which the assessment process will become a part of your CAA's outreach, define its role in raising your agency profile and show how the process will be used to strengthen or initiate partnerships.

RESOURCES APPENDIX: PART IV

APPENDIX IV-A

SURVEY MANAGEMENT TIPS

WHO TO SURVEY

- *Former and current clients or customers* are a primary source of information for the majority of CAA assessments today. Typically, surveys are mailed to all clients and are also provided on paper to participants at agency facilities.
- *Other residents of the low-income community* can inform you of needs that they are dealing with in other ways, and can assist in your definition of community assets. Agencies that want to reach many community households not associated with the CAA can make mailings to low-income census tracts and/or housing developments, and enlist other neighborhood organizations, including faith organizations, to distribute to their clients or members.
- *Individuals in the community at-large* provide information from those who are not low-income to allow a comparison of opinions and help the agency gauge community-wide potential for supporting particular solutions. Involving them also builds the CAA's name recognition and may attract new volunteers and supporters.

Survey Methods

Most surveys are anonymous. Some CAAs have achieved substantial response rates by putting the survey online, such as in the "Survey Monkey" program; Google Surveys offers another simple tool that produces clear spreadsheets. To get the maximum number of responses, do not require that an online survey have every item filled in before it can be submitted.

In a direct mailing to non-clients, you will likely be limited to the address lists your programs and partners own, unless the local government property tax officials will help you access and sample addresses from a full list of residences in target areas. Tracking the nine-digit zip code of respondents will enable you to judge how representative the answers may be. Other ways to reach more people with the survey could include putting a survey in the newspaper, handing them out at shopping centers or including them with utility billing mailings.

Avoid the Trash Can

Your survey cover letter or brochure must answer the question "Why survey me?" if it is to convince a potential respondent that it is worthy of their time and attention. A professionally formatted letter or graphic flyer can make these points:

> *[Ourhome CAA] is asking for the ideas of every resident of [community] about how to open more opportunities for economic advancement and security to everyone who lives here. Your answers to the questions on this anonymous survey are important to us. Whether or not you or someone close to you has experienced the needs listed, we would appreciate your opinions on how to develop better resources and improve the entire community.*

Tracking and Recording the Survey Responses

A coding system on the mailed surveys will let you know the characteristics and geographic area of respondents. For example, use different numbers or letters to indicate if the response is from an agency client, a client or member of another organization that supplied the CAA with mailing addresses (using a separate number for each organization), or from a member of the general public. Include an identifier for the zip code area to which the survey was sent.

It is well worth the effort to set up a simple database for each survey format, structuring it with one record per response. It is essential to use a data structure that will allow you to cross-tabulate opinions by groups or respondent characteristics, so you are able to answer questions like "What do long-time residents think is changing? How are older residents using transit?"

The Survey as an Outreach Tool

Don't ignore the outreach opportunity associated with all the community contacts you are making! Even your anonymous survey can be packaged with a separate sheet or a post card to mail back with the individual's name and address and a request to be on your mailing list or to be contacted about volunteering. A sheet or card for the recipient to *keep* can list the numbers to call for your services, state the agency mission, and, of course, tell them how to contribute.

Be sure to tell respondents where/when you will post the total results of the survey; this increases the likelihood of a response because it engages them further. When you create that Community Needs Assessment report web page, include outreach, contribution and volunteering information on the same page; it may be the only page your new contacts visit.

Appendix IV-B

PUBLIC FORUMS INPUT

PREVENT MISINTERPRETATION AND CONFUSION

Participants in your group meetings will offer problems or solutions that are not at the same "level" as another's remark. Many will describe a symptom of an underlying problem but not get to the need that should be addressed. Your facilitator can either ask participants to collectively categorize statements recorded at the meeting as to whether they are descriptions of problems, identification of root cause of a condition and/or suggested solutions. You can make the discussion more action-oriented by following up a problem description with a probe to get the *cause* on your list. Using a form of the "But why?" technique outlined in the materials on constructing survey questions, draw out the speaker. (Example: "You mention too many kids are home alone after school. Can you go further and say why you think this happens?" then "Ok, thanks. But *why* do you think all their moms spend afternoons at the pool hall?"). Alternatively, your Assessment Team will need to categorize the meeting input in order to use it in the analysis appropriately.

In training materials prepared by Dr Barbara Mooney, the following tool is offered to demonstrate the way to categorize statements and open the possibility of receiving additional information[19]:

SORTING OUT COMMUNITY INPUT

Here are some statements made at a public meeting on housing and employment problems. One statement will be the Problem Description. Some statements will reflect what participants feel is the cause of the problem and some represent strategies they feel might address the problem. [Categorize] each statement, or the number(s) of the statement, where you think it belongs on [this] chart …

[19] The following is an abbreviated excerpt from: Planning for Results op.cit. (available from the author Barbara@thecaap.org)

Problem Description	Cause	Strategy

Housing Statements
1. We don't have bond money for housing like they do in Smithville.
2. Interest rates are too high.
3. We need a housing counseling program.
4. Landlords won't rent to unmarried women, especially those with children.
5. Too many low-income families live in substandard housing.
6. We don't have a fair housing ordinance in this town.
7. People don't know about available housing programs.

Employment Statements
1. The City spent a lot of money to bring a plant here, and all the good jobs went to people who moved here from out of the area.
2. Our Development Corporation and the City do not support local small business development.
3. We need a GED/Job Referral Program in this town.
4. Too many poor people here can't find jobs or can't find jobs that pay well.
5. The ABC Company only hires high school graduates, even for jobs anyone can do.
6. We need to get the College to offer different training courses.
7. We need to get employers to drop education requirements for some jobs.
8. There's no training offered here for the jobs that do exist.

The participant statements about Housing classified by Problem Description, Cause, or Strategy would be categorized like this:

Housing Statements by Category		
Problem Description	**Cause**	**Strategy**
1, 4, 5	2, 6, 7	Suggested by 2, 6, 7

Some other tools you can use to obtain and record clear results from your public meetings can be found in the University of Kansas Community Toolbox, at http://ctb.ku.edu. The following descriptions are excerpts from that resource:

Listening Sessions

Listening sessions are public forums you can use to learn about the community's perspectives on local issues and options. They are generally fairly small, with specific questions asked of participants. They can help you get a sense of what community members know and feel about the issue, as well as resources, barriers, and possible solutions.

Public Forums

[P]ublic forums …. tend to be both larger in number of participants and broader in scope than listening sessions. They are gatherings where citizens discuss important issues at a well-publicized location and time. They give people of diverse backgrounds a chance to express their views, and are also a first step toward understanding the community's needs and resources. A good public forum informs the group of where the community is and where the members would like to go.

Example #1

Ideas resulting from a public forum on adolescent substance abuse:

Issues and Concerns Surrounding Adolescent Substance Abuse:

- Availability of drugs
- Tolerance for alcohol abuse - community permissiveness
- Gangs and increased juvenile crime
- Lack of supervised activities after school
- Lack of communication among students, teachers, and parents
- Teenage alcoholism and prolonged health problems
- Low or diminished self-esteem
- Parental abdication of responsibility
- Lack of jobs
- Lack of merchant accountability (sale of cigarettes)

Barriers and Resistance to Addressing Adolescent Substance Abuse:

- Apathy
- Family issues: TV, financial stress, lack of quality time, lack of extended family support, both parents work
- Combating media, advertising
- Tolerance for social drugs
- Lack of treatment services

Community Strengths and Resources for Change:

- Churches - Ministers
- Local businesses
- Youth organizations
- People in neighborhoods whom kids and parents respect

Recommended Alternatives and Solutions

- More reporting of substance abuse issues in media
- Schools become more full-service organizations/community centers
- Increased presence of parents in school
- Business mentoring programs increase job opportunities for teens
- Closed lunch at high school

See more in the Community Toolbox at http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/section_1018.htm

RESOURCE APPENDIX: PART V

APPENDIX V-A

FROM COMPARING TO ANALYZING

Include Comparisons in your Analysis

Useful contrasts or similarities may include:

- ❖ Your community data vs. the same data for the state and nation
- ❖ Your community data vs. benchmarks (such as: self-sufficiency income, affordable rent, grade-level achievements)
- ❖ Today's data compared to previous periods to describe trends or new developments
- ❖ The CAA client data (from CSBG-IS, ROMA) compared to the community at-large and to the low-income community
- ❖ The demographic data on needs indicators (children of working parents, uninsured adults, low-income seniors living alone) vs. resources "needed" (licensed child care openings, community health centers and emergency rooms, elders with home visits or meal delivery)
- ❖ Compare subgroups of people or communities to one another or to the general population

EXAMPLES OF COMPARISONS IN ACTION

Community vs. State or Nation

- ❖ Children
  - 39% of residents of [Ourhome] are 17 or younger, and 29% are in poverty
  - By contrast, 28% of state residents are children and 20% are in poverty
  - In fact, if you take our city out of the state total: 22% of the state's residents are children and 18% are in poverty.

  With figures like these, you can title your paragraph, graph, or data table to reflect the *meaning*: "Lifting the children of [Ourhome] out of poverty will improve the entire state's ranking in child well-being."

- ❖ Economy
  - There are 226 employers in our community, and 174 employ ten workers or fewer. Last year, the 52 larger firms employed 621 workers all together. However, 3,900 individuals of working age live here. <u>That means that there is only one job for every 1.95 potential workers.</u>
  - Statewide, the figure is one job for every 1.1 worker (Headline: "Expanding [Ourhome] jobs will give our workers the same economic opportunity as the workforce in the rest of the state" or "Local small businesses keep most workers employed and must be helped.")

Your Data vs. Benchmarks

[XX] households in [Ourhome] do not earn enough to meet their basic needs here, as calculated by [Ouruniversity]. There are, in fact, [XX] households with incomes at or far below the Federal Poverty Guideline. [Use tables or samples showing basic needs budget and FPG.] In fact, the majority of the people served by [Ourhome] CAA have incomes below 75% of the figures shown in the FPG column.

Past Data

English is a second language for 15% of children in [Ourhome] schools, and the school department reports 64% of them receive reduced price school lunch, indicating low family incomes.

Growth: Not only is this figure one quarter higher than three years ago (then 12%); the number of languages has increased. Three percent of students (or 20% of ESL students) speak Pashto at home. (Headline: “Many new neighbors and their children need language support as they settle in” or “[Ourhome] CAA Head Start reaches out to help new Afghan neighbors and their children learn English.”)

General Data vs. Agency CSBG Data

There were [X] individuals in [Ourhome] with family income below the FPG in 20_ _ [*Note: Census poverty data usually lags at least a year. Use your CSBG data from the matching period, not the current year for a valid comparison*]. [XX] percent of those individuals participated in [Ourhome] CAA programs which are designed to increase their economic security.

Many working families still had incomes below 150% of the FPG, although [XX] % of them participated in one or more [Ourhome] CAA activities.

Needs vs. Community Resources

Subgroups

From “outside” data: People living in the semi-rural counties of our community had lower median income, older homes, and smaller families than in the urban core or the suburbs. The median age was 51 in those areas, compared to 38 in the suburban counties and 32 in the city.

From your survey data: Residents of the semi-rural counties [X, Y and Z] were less satisfied with their home’s condition, less optimistic about the future, and less likely to be able to afford their utility bills or to pay for gasoline or needed dental care than residents of other communities. [Show a table with columns for those three counties, suburbs, city, and rows for questions with dramatic differences.]

APPENDIX V-B

CLEAR DATA LABELS TELL (PART OF) THE STORY OF THE STATISTICS

Typical Confusing Data Display	Selected Poverty Statistics All Responses					
	Single mother avg. household income	**Single dad avg. household income**	**% all single parent households in poverty**	**% children in poverty**	**% children served**	**Senior house-holder avg. income**
Home County	$16,462	$23,890	81	89.5	33	$20,154
Other County	$15,639	$22,696	77.0	85.0	31.4	$19,146
Far County	$14,816	$21,501	72.9	80.6	29.7	$18,139
Near County	$18,108	$26,279	89.1	98.5	36.3	$22,169

Interpretive Data Display of Family Data	OurCAP Participants' Very Low Incomes: A Challenge to Family Well-Being in Every County Served					
	Single-mother participant family Avg. household income (317 families)	**Two-parent participant families with children Avg. household income (300 families)**	**Basic needs budget* for family of 3**	**Average family size of OurCAP clients**	**Children entering OurCAP programs w/health conditions requiring care (454 children)**	**% families reporting insufficient healthy food for children when entering program**
Home County	$16,462	$23,890	$34,309	2.8	19%	43%
Other County	$15,639	$22,696	$33,000	2.7	23%	35%
Far County	$14,816	$21,501	$34,102	3	20%	41%
Near County	$18,108	$26,279	$35,999	3.1	25%	44%

Or, you can organize the data to create meaning for your audience:

Interpretive Data Display of Data that Illustrate Community-wide Deficits	**Area Families With Very Low Incomes Struggle to Meet Basic Needs, but their Kids Come First**						
			Parents Responding 'Yes' to 'In the last year was there a time when...?'				
	Basic Needs Budget* for Family of 3	**% Local Households with Children 0-12 & Income Lower than Basic Needs Budget**	**Household had no utility service for some period due to lack of money to pay utility bills?**	**Children missed a meal because of lack of money?**	**Adults went a whole day without eating because of lack of money?**	**Adults needed medical care but could not see a medical practitioner because of lack of money?**	**Children needed medical care but could not see a medical practitioner because of lack of money?**
Home County	$ 34,309	31%	9%	3%	15%	32%	3%
Other County	$ 33,000	33%	9%	2%	14%	34%	1%
Far County	$ 34,102	30%	3%	3%	10%	30%	4%
Near County	$ 35,999	41%	7%	4%	17%	29%	2%

OURCAP 2010 Survey: 2240 Households with Children 0-12

NASCSP

National Association for State Community Services Programs

444 N Capitol Street NW, Suite 846
Washington, D.C. 20001

www.nascsp.org