

## **Community Assessment Steps**

Building safe and healthy communities starts with a full understanding of who we are, what resources we have, and what challenges we face. Community Assessment is a critical first step that gives us real information about the needs we face and the assets we have so that we can develop a clear, practical, and meaningful action plan. The following steps provide a framework for your coalition's community assessment planning.

### 1. Develop a plan

Developing a plan helps to involve your community and engage your coalition members in collecting relevant data. By organizing your work ahead of time, you will save time and effort later on. It is very important at this stage to seek and include input from the community so that you can prioritize your efforts. Get ready for the next steps in the process by:

- ✓ Developing a timeline
- ✓ Identifying partners to outreach and develop plan for outreach
- ✓ Working with client/members to define the community
- ✓ Identifying data needs and develop plan for collection
- ✓ Developing a plan for analysis
- ✓ Determining authors and review process
- ✓ Making a communication plan
- ✓ Establishing plan for supporting partners in next steps

# 2. Identify partners

Who is affected by this issue? Who has expertise? Who can bring others to the table? These are your partners, and it's critical to involve them throughout your community assessment. Full community participation in planning and carrying out an assessment also promotes leadership from within the community and gives voice to those who may feel they have none. ECS has a <a href="Partner Outreach">Partner Outreach</a> template available for identifying partners and assigning contacts.

## 3. Define community

Community is people who share a place, experience, and/or interest. Writing a community description will help you produce a locally-sourced definition of your people, situations, geography, demographics, history, problems, and strengths. This is how to describe important concerns that may go unnoticed and develop a richer understanding about local conditions.



### 4. Conduct data collection

Use quantitative and qualitative techniques to gather primary (what you collect) and secondary (information gathered by others) data. This happens in two phases: preparation and collection.

### Prepare

- 1. Agree on the value and purpose of the information that you will collect
- 2. Determine when you want to use this data
- 3. Determine exactly what you want to know
- 4. Determine who will find the information
- 5. Identify possible sources of information
- 6. Set limits as to how much information you want to collect

#### Collect

- 7. Collect the data
- 8. Identify gaps in your knowledge
- 9. Redo the process to try to fill those gaps -- or collect your own data
- 10. If possible, you might want to compare data for your community with that of other communities, or that of the nation as a whole or to trend out your own community's data over time.

### 5. Review data and analyze

Analyzing information involves examining it in ways that reveal the relationships, patterns, trends, etc. that can be found within it. It's helpful to have analysis from those with expertise in statistical analysis on hand as well as those with expertise in the characteristics of the local community.

## 6. Formalize findings

Produce reports with the information specific populations need. For example, you might develop an executive summary for community-wide release as well as a report that provides detailed data for a specific organization.



### 7. Share results

Sharing what you've learned with the community and partners involved in the project shows transparency in your motives and engagement with everyone involved. ECS has a Community Assessment Communication Plan template to help you plan who and how you will share your results.

# 8. Partners use findings for planning

Now that the community can see where it has strengths and challenges, coalitions and partners can conduct problem analysis, develop logic models, draft action plans, and think about long-term sustainability.