Checklist of State Requirements for Community Needs Assessments

NASCSP

Adapted from Nation Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCSP) Guide for State Office Monitors

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Structure of the Community Assessment Checklist

This checklist covers the organizational standards related to the community assessment. Three sections are contained within this checklist and includes:

1st. Organizational standards in the Community Assessment category.

2nd. Organizational standards that are associated with community assessment, but are located in other standard categories such as Strategic Planning, Customer Input and Involvement, and Community Engagement.

3rd. Highlights other elements of a comprehensive report that are not included in the standards, but will be helpful to monitors as they review assessment reports.

The checklist should answer the following questions:

- What should I be looking for when I read a Community Needs Assessment (CNA) report?
- What elements should the CNA report contain?
- How do I know if this is a "comprehensive and complete" CNA report?
- What can be done to create a more comprehensive CNA report?

The checklist is organized as follows:

- Lists each organizational standard associated with conducting a community assessment.
- Following each organizational standard is a description of what needs to be done or included in the report to meet the standard.
- Red checkboxes are provided for review to ensure that each standard is met.
- Additional information (the "whys") of the process is included.

Community Needs Assessments (CNA) Overview

Community Needs Assessments are an integral part of a Subrecipient's planning and are to be used to set the direction for their work. Section 676(b)(11), of the CSBG Act states "...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…."

A community needs assessment establishes a profile of a community, noting both needs as well as community resources. Subrecipients conduct assessments to determine the needs in a community that can be addressed and the population that is most impacted by the need. Subrecipients should include both qualitative and quantitative data to assist in identifying needs in the community. From this identification of needs on both the family and community level, and through a strategic process that also includes consideration of agency needs, Subrecipients determine the outcomes that they plan to achieve.

The process of conducting a community needs assessment and the resulting report is the first step in gathering data for the agency-wide strategic plan and the agency-wide annual work plan. While some Subrecipients may have a focus on CSBG supported services (or other program services such as Head

Start) when they do the assessment, the data considered during the process should be sufficient to inform agency-wide strategic choices.

The Community Assessment is a key component of the Results Oriented Management (ROMA) framework (graphic to the right). Assessment, including determining the needs and resources of a community, constitutes the first phase of the ROMA cycle and sets the stage for the agency planning process.

Community Assessment Checklist

I. Community Assessment Organizational Standards

Standard 3.1	The organization conducted a community assessment and issued a report within the past 3 years.

☐ The Subrecipient has completed a community needs assessment process within the past three years. Board meeting minutes confirming the date the CNA report was issued.

The date of the current report: ___________________

The date of the previous report: __________________

Standard 3.2	As part of the community assessment, the organization collects and includes current data specific to poverty and its prevalence related to gender, age, and race/ethnicity for their service area(s).

The assessment report includes current data related to:

☐ • Poverty and gender
☐ • Poverty and age
☐ • Poverty and race/ethnicity

The Engagement Network is a reliable resource that Subrecipients can use to obtain the data noted in the standard. The tool is a rich repository of census and other source data. Within the Community Action Partnership Hub's Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment (CNA) tool has the data for the indicators contained in this standard. Refer to Community Assessment Tool Instructions (PDF) for how to get signed up for this tool. Agencies can also access the US Census website to find data more specific to the geographic area detailed in the assessment report. Include:

- data from agency internal program reports, including the Annual Report. This data can be useful when compared to both Census data and Engagement Network CNA data.
- ☐ a description of the geographic location that the agency is funded to serve.

The report should contain a clear understanding of the community (ies). Check to see if the identification of the community being assessed includes the following:

- Nearby municipalities or counties.
- Smaller geographic areas such as a neighborhoods or census tract.

Standard 3.3	The organization collects and analyzes both qualitative and quantitative data on its geographic service area(s) in the community assessment.

A. Quantitative Data

Also known as statistical or numerical data, quantitative data is gathered and reflected in the report for the identified community. This kind of data will help the Subrecipient understand the scope (how big is the need?) of the needs in the community.

☐ Check for these considerations:

- Is the data collected relevant?
- Does the report connect the data back to the identified community?
- Is there enough data to make a connection to a need?
- Is there too much data?

The following is a list of types and sources of data that may be included in the assessment report:

☐ i. National data

Since the Partnership's CNA tool is not exhaustive, Subrecipients should also look for the data sources and the information obtained from the sources contained in Table 1.

Table 1

Data Source	Information/Rates
Census: American Community Survey (ACS) and/or Small Area Income & Poverty Estimates (SAIPE)	Population, poverty, age gender, race, ethnicity, veterans, seniors, households, family types
US Department of Labor	Employment, unemployment, underemployment, household income
National Center for Education Statistics	Adult literacy, educational attainment
Department of Housing and Urban Development	Homeownership
US Department of Health and Human Services	Federally qualified health centers, Medicaid and Medicare providers
National Low Income Housing Coalition	Housing burden
Local Surveys	The number of people who responded about a certain item
CSBG Annual Report /Agency Program Data	Client demographics (who the Subrecipient serves), outcomes obtained and services utilized (and what types of services they received)

ii. Local Data

Locally collected data, collected from state departments such as health, education, and criminal justice help to clarify and expand on national report numbers. Note if these data sources are included:

- Local crime statistics
- School district high school graduation
- School district school readiness
- Employers and employment opportunities
- Child care providers
- Public benefits usage (SNAP, TANF, etc.)
- Input directly collected from low-income people

iii. Agency's Service Data

The agency collects data to manage their programs. This includes the number and demographics of customers who have applied and those impacted by a particular need. Note the following:

- Client demographics
- Services provided

B. Qualitative Data

Qualitative data (often referred to as descriptive or narrative data), is used in assessment reports to augment the numerical data. These opinions and observations offer a rich picture and help provide insight into the depth and breadth of an issue. The information can be gathered in a variety of ways. While not all methods need to be employed in the assessment process, it's important for Subrecipients to note that more than one of the following methods are evidenced in the assessment report. For example, conducting a survey offers valuable information; however, responses to a survey are unlikely to reveal the depth of an issue. Qualitative data must be presented and reported using the actual words of the respondents. (i.e., "the cost to rent an apartment in my community is too high and it makes renting a safe apartment difficult.") Otherwise, summarized qualitative data is quantitative (i.e., "x number of people said that rents for apartments are too high.")

i. Surveys

If surveys are utilized, each survey should be individualized to the specific target group. It's important to note that a survey intended for low-income customers should be wide-spread and extend to individuals beyond those who utilize the services of the Subrecipient. If the surveys are done only with customers in the Subrecipients programs s/he may find that the survey coincides with current programs and services but does not provide a true assessment of the customers' complete needs. Conducting surveys that include other individuals with low incomes (participants of partner organizations) and the broader low-income community can be useful to clarify and/or further define the need.

The Subrecipient should include information about the method used to distribute and promote the survey. Consider the following:

- How was the survey promoted?
  - Was it promoted through social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)?
  - Was it done in coordination with the Subrecipient's community partners?

- How was the survey(s) distributed?
    - Was there a way to complete the survey on-line?
    - Were paper surveys available?

Surveys can be conducted with the following groups:

- ⟹ Customers
- ⟹ Partners and other service providers
- ⟹ General public
- ⟹ Staff
- ⟹ Board members
- ⟹ Private sector
- ⟹ Public sector
- ⟹ Educational institutions

Note: if the survey has both multiple choice and open-ended questions to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. To assess the methodology used to implement the survey, confirm that the report includes the following:

- A copy of the survey questions
- A print-out of the report summary (if done through an online tool)
- A written summary that includes the responses to open-ended questions and provides the reader with a thorough summary of the survey results and the needs identified.

After a survey has been conducted it is helpful and valuable to hold focus groups, community meetings, and/or conduct interviews to better understand the depth and breadth of an issue. These methods will be further discussed.

ii. Interviews

Interviews are conducted to obtain an informed perspective by those working in the field. Interviews help focus the needs assessment on particular issues of concern and provide information about community organizations, services, and resources. One-on-one interviews can be conducted with individuals who represent important community constituencies such as:

- ⟹ Local leaders
- ⟹ Elected officials
- ⟹ Partner organizations' leadership
- ⟹ Board members
- ⟹ New and potential partners

If interviews are conducted, confirm that the CNA report contains an appendix with the following information:

- A copy of the interview questions
- A summary that provides the reader with a thorough understanding of the information gleaned from the interviews and the needs identified.

iii. Community meetings

Community meetings are held to involve community members and organizations in defining and discussing the needs and resources in the community. Community meetings are a good way to assess community concerns and perceptions.

If community meetings are a part of the Subrecipient's methodology to determine community needs, the report should contain a list of the leading questions as well as a summary of the salient points.

iv. Focus groups

Focus groups are small-group discussions guided by a leader that focuses on specific topics. The group's composition and discussion are planned to create an environment where participants are free to talk openly and express their opinions. Focus groups can yield valuable information in a relatively short time.

Like surveys and interviews, focus groups can be done with:

⇒ Local leaders
⇒ Elected officials
⇒ Partner organizations' leadership
⇒ Board members
⇒ New and potential partners
⇒ Customers
⇒ Staff

If focus groups are a part of the Subrecipient's methodology in conducting the assessment, include the guided questions asked and a summary of the discussion.

Standard 3.3 indicates that not only should information be collected (as described above) — it should also be analyzed. Once data is collected, it must be analyzed to be useful for the organization to identify needs and determine a plan of action based on those needs. Data without analysis is meaningless and not useful to the Subrecipient. Provide a clear analysis of the data

v. Data Analysis

The data needs to be analyzed. When reviewing the report, consider:

- Who completed the analysis? The community needs assessment committee? Or other group?
- What method of analysis was used?
- Does the analysis include both the qualitative and quantitate information in the discussion?
- Was there effort to look at the similarities and differences between what the numerical data says (quantitative) and what the people are voicing (qualitative)?
- Is there a summary?

Standard 3.4	The community assessment includes key findings on the causes and conditions of poverty and the needs of the communities assessed.

vi. Causes and conditions of poverty

The report includes key findings on the causes and conditions of poverty and the community's needs. Include a section in the assessment report that clearly states that the agency made a determination of the key findings from their analysis of the data and have identified the needs.

When reviewing causes and conditions of poverty it is good to keep in mind:

- **Cause of poverty** can be defined as a "negative factor that creates or fosters barriers to self-sufficiency and/or reduces access to resources in communities in which low-income individuals live," while
- **Condition of poverty** can be defined as a "negative environmental, safety, health and/or economic condition that may reduce investment or growth in communities where low-income individuals live."

An important part of the assessment is the identification of needs by level:

- Family (does the need concern individuals and families who have identified things in their own life that is lacking),
- Agency (did the data identify areas where the agency does not have resources or capacity to respond to an identified need), or
- Community (does the issue impact the community as a whole, not just customers or potential customers of the agency).

Below are examples of how the identification of needs by level would be integrated into the assessment report:

Example 1: Identified Need: Employment
Community Level: There is a lack of good paying jobs in our community.
Family level: Individuals do not have good paying jobs.
Agency Level: Our SUBRECIPIENT does not have the resources to provide appropriate job training to help low income individuals secure available jobs.
Example 2: Identified need: Increase in drug abuse
Community Level: There is a lack of drug abuse services in the community.
Family level: Individuals need drug abuse counseling and treatment.
Agency Level: Our SUBRECIPIENT does not have experienced staff to work with the increase in demand related to drug abuse issues.

Subrecipients, in determining the causes and conditions of poverty, can use several techniques. The Introduction to Results-Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) trainer manual provides examples of how to analyze assessment data. The following provides a brief description of a few techniques.

- "The Five Whys"
  - The five whys is a process of identifying root causes of a problem or situation before identifying possible outcomes and strategies. The process involves identifying a problem statement and asking "Why does this problem occur?" Repeat the "why?' question five times until the problem has been distilled to a root cause(s).

- Force Field Analysis
  - This process helps identify the forces, both promoting and restraining, in the community that has an impact on the issue that has been identified. Both kinds of forces are identified and then consideration is given to how the forces interact to produce the problem and how they will have to be changed to reach as positive outcome.
- Compassion techniques
  - This process involves looking at areas where community needs are high and community resources are low. Using a chart, compare each area to all of the others and then count up the times each area was selected, which will help to identify the priorities.
- Cause and effect
  - This exercise helps to examine the relationship between a "cause" of an identified need and the "effect" of that need through a graphic representation. Consider the priority issue and how it is linked to related issues. Using arrows, create a diagram to show how these issues could be related to each other. The diagram can help understand the connection between issues.
- Trend Analysis
  - This process considers any emerging trends that may impact on the identified problem or on resources such as new demographics or a gain or loss of resources.

Standard 3.5	The governing board formally accepts the completed community assessment.

☐ The Community Assessment was approved by the board.

The community assessment report must be accepted by the board and Board meeting minutes of action item to accept the CNA clearly delineated stating the board accepted the completed CNA with motion and vote noted.

II. Organizational Standards Related to Community Assessment

The following standards, while not in the community assessment category, are related to conducting a needs assessment. These standards are included in the following categories:

- Category 1: Consumer Input and Involvement
- Category 2: Community Engagement

Standard 1.2	The organization analyzes information collected directly from low income individuals as part of the community assessment.

☐ The report describes the information collected from low-income individuals (surveys, meetings, focus groups, etc.) and utilizes the methods described above in Standard 3.3 to both collect and analyze the information.

Refer back to Standard 3.3 for more information on data collection and analysis. Address the following:

- Information was collected from individuals with low-income
- The population assessed identified as having low-incomes
- The process used
- Describe the information that was collected
- Information was reviewed and analyzed

Standard 2.2	The organization utilizes information gathered from key sectors of the community in assessing needs and resources, during the community assessment process or other times. These sectors would include at minimum: community based organizations, faith-based organizations, private sector, public sector, and educational institutions.

The assessment report includes information gathered from the following sectors:

- Community based organizations
- Faith based organizations
- Private sector
- Public sector
- Educational Institutions
- Other

Determine that the information obtained during the assessment data collection process—whether through surveys, interviews, community meetings, focus groups or other methods— be representative of the groups listed in the standard. Note that the standard indicates that the information can be derived at other times. It's possible that Subrecipients can collect this information throughout the year as part of its ongoing work in collaborations and partnerships where this data could be discussed.

III. Additional Elements Related to Community Assessment

While the standards provide a good basis for the review of a needs assessment, there are a couple of additional items that are to include in the report.

A. Resources are identified

The report includes:

- Existing resources in the defined community
- Resources that are being developed
- Threatened resources (current resources that are being lost)

B. The process used to conduct the assessment.

Include the process the Subrecipient used to conduct the community assessment. An assessment should not be conducted by only one person at an agency. Rather, the process should be overseen by a team, often referred to as the "assessment team." This team should be involved in all aspects of the assessment including making decisions on what data to collect, the methods used to collect the data, analysis of the data, and the content and format of the final report.

While not all assessment teams will be comprised of the same individuals within an agency, a complete assessment team could include the following staff:

⟹ Subrecipient leadership
⟹ Program Managers/Directors
⟹ Planning/Development staff

⟹ Staff who are familiar with the community and Subrecipient partnerships
⟹ Board members

Utilizing the team approach to conduct an assessment will help assure that multiple viewpoints are considered. This team could also be the group to complete the data analysis process. Documentation supporting the assessment process could simply be that the process is noted in the report.

IV. Resources

For further information about conducting needs assessments and compliance with the Organizational Standards, refer to the following guide's and tool kits available on the NASCSP and CAP websites:

- Community Assessment Technical Assistance Guide
- Writing Your Community Needs Assessment
- Community Needs Assessment Resource Guide