

Resource: Community needs assessment

You're a Kiwanian. You want to serve your community. But to do it effectively, you must know what your community *needs*.

By conducting a community needs assessment, you will not only gain a better understanding of the area you want to serve, you will identify information needed to complete the Letter of Inquiry and grant application.

STEP 1: Define the scope.

Community issues are complicated. One issue is often related to many others, and it's easy to keep expanding the range of issues to include in your community assessment.

Begin your community needs assessment by clearly identifying the following:

- The community need to be addressed
- The community members who will be served
- The geographic area to assess

As you conduct research, continually ask yourself whether you are expanding beyond your original area of study.

STEP 2: Decide whether to go solo or collaborate.

You can “go solo” and complete all of the community assessment activities on your own—or you can work with community partners to complete the assessment.

If you decide to collaborate, consider working with potential partners such as corporations, nonprofit organizations, local community organizations or foundations. By collaborating with others, you may gain additional resources, engage more community members and establish relationships beyond the reach of your club.

STEP 3: Collect data.

Collect data regarding the community need you have chosen to address. Remember to stay within the previously defined scope of your assessment.

There are different methods for collecting data. Your club can determine which data collection methods best suit you. Here are four examples:

<p>Community meeting</p> <p>This can be a public gathering that invites community members to discuss issues, voice concerns and express what the community's needs and priorities are. Some tips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish meeting goals.• Select an easily accessible location and a convenient time.• Promote the event throughout the community.• Set and follow an agenda or schedule.• Prepare questions in advance.• Take notes.	<p>Focus group</p> <p>A focus group is used to determine a specific group's opinions on a topic. It can help your club determine what community members think the community needs and how the needs should be addressed. Some tips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Select an easily accessible location and a convenient time.• Invite 6–12 community members to participate.• Select a facilitator to lead the focus group.• Prepare questions in advance.• Explain the purpose of the focus group and outline your goals.• Ask open-ended questions.• Take notes.
<p>Interviews</p> <p>Interviews allow you to gain a deeper understanding of individual community members' thoughts on a topic. Questions should be prepared in advance, but this setting also allows for follow-up dialogue. Some tips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify your goals.• Identify and select target respondents.• Prepare your interview questions.• Establish a rapport with your respondent.• Take notes.	<p>Survey</p> <p>With a survey, you can collect information and opinions from community members in person or via email, phone or mail. Some tips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify target respondents.• Explain to respondents why you are asking questions.• Keep the survey short and simple.• Give respondents ample time to complete the survey.• Carefully review the results of the survey.

STEP 4: Determine key findings.

You will likely collect a lot of data and information about your community's needs in Step 3. Next, analyze the data to identify your key findings, which will:

- Validate anecdotal evidence of community needs and assets.
- Highlight significant trends.
- Reveal differences across segments of the community.

Key findings can be organized into categories to help summarize the data. Common categories include strengths, gaps, opportunities and challenges.

STEP 5: Set priorities and create an action plan.

Armed with key findings, your club can now make informed decisions about how to address your community's needs. Based on the key findings, create an action plan complete with goals and objectives for your project. Determine how you will measure your project's effectiveness and track it over time.

STEP 6: Share your findings.

Distribute your action plan—allow the community to benefit from your findings. Community members are more likely to support your efforts when they clearly understand the work you have done and how it meets the community's needs.