

How to Conduct a Rural Needs Assessment

Helpful tips from the Fletcher Group



The stability and longevity of rural Recovery Houses largely depend on the communities where they are located. Developers of Recovery Housing should be informed about zoning, service availability, employment opportunities, public attitudes (NIMBY & stigma), and local sources of support.

A Community Needs Assessment allows an organization to measure the gaps between current and desired conditions so it can determine what needs to be accomplished to reach its goals. Conducting an assessment can be challenging for rural projects – particularly for those with limited resources.

That is why the Fletcher Group RCORP-Rural Center of Excellence on SUD Recovery made this brochure. On the following pages, you will find a detailed methodology designed to help you understand the value of assessing your community and learn how to successfully conduct a rural needs assessment.

For more information, contact the Fletcher Group at 606-657-4662 or <https://www.fletchergroup.org/contact/>

A METHODOLOGY AND RESOURCE LIST

To help you
assess the
needs of the
rural
communities
that you serve.

LAY OF THE LAND

The complexity of the Needs Assessment depends on the budget and expertise of the Recovery House. Larger facilities may possess the skills to carry out their own assessments. Smaller rural programs with fewer resources may be able to gain support from local universities, health care programs, Community Action Agencies, or Head Start programs that already conduct community assessments.

Many moving parts

Conducting a Community Needs Assessment entails a range of activities, as outlined below.

- Define the objectives of your community needs assessment
- Be realistic about the resources that you have available for conducting the assessment
- Identify who you want to query and the data that you want to review
- Analyze the data that you have collected
- Disseminate the assessment findings
- Use the results to take action

With all that needs to be done, it's important that the leaders of rural Recovery Houses make the best use of their time and energy.



First things first

Preparing to conduct a Rural Community Needs Assessment starts with collecting a body of critical information. Two steps are required to do that:

1. Review your Recovery House's original mission and vision statements to evaluate whether they are still on the mark or if they need to be modified.
2. Consider how a community needs assessment will best help you in planning, implementing, and promoting your project.

WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF A NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

A Community Needs Assessment is made up of several components including a systematic collection, review, and analysis of current information and data, or lack thereof, to inform gaps, strengths, discrepancies, needs, struggles, etc. that relate to your rural Recovery House, the people it serves, and the community where it is located.

More Than One Approach

Two Approaches to Community Needs Assessment

Needs Assessments can employ a single or combination of standard methods.

Intensive approaches

These approaches consider primary data (community surveys, key informant interviews, focus groups, and community forums) and secondary data (national, state, regional, and local sources). Local examples of data include health departments, hospitals, coroners, law enforcement/court system/jails, etc.

SWOT/PEST Analysis

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis helps identify an organization's internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats. A PEST (Political, Economic, Social and Technological) Analysis can be particularly helpful to rural Recovery Houses in refining efforts to gain political and community partner support.

Sample SWOT and PEST Analysis charts are provided on the last two pages of the toolkit.

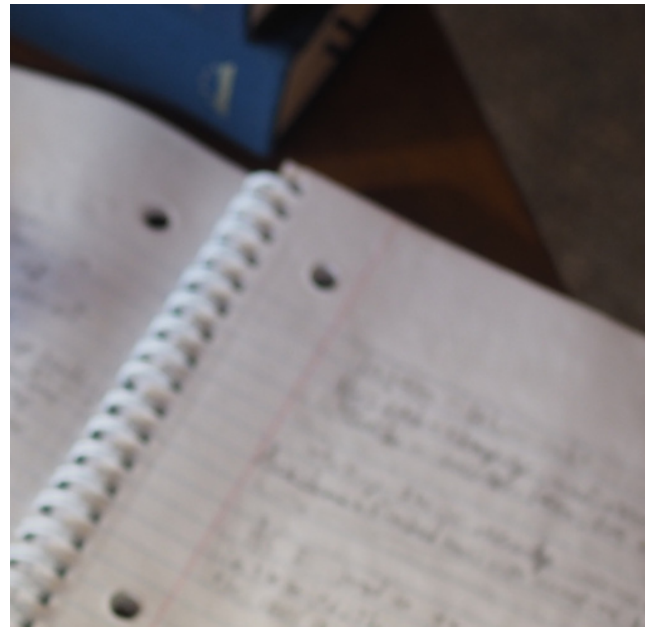


An Important Question to Ask

A community needs assessment enables the Recovery House to accurately set short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals as well as determine the next steps needed to achieve these goals. Considering that Community Needs Assessments require a significant commitment of time, expertise, and even money, you may ask why you should conduct an assessment if you already know there is a need for your Recovery House. Simply put, the long-term viability of a Recovery House is dependent on the host community's perception, availability of compelling local data, and whether the project is viewed favorably (or at least not with hostility) by community members.

UNDERSTANDING HOW TO CONDUCT EACH OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT STEPS

All of the community needs assessment steps are supported by a number of tasks that enrich the assessment's outcome. The tasks can be expanded or condensed based on the complexity and abilities of the organization conducting the assessment.



Step One: Define the objectives of your community needs assessment

- How will you use your assessment's findings? For example, the findings could be used to identify assets and barriers to creating/expanding a recovery ecosystem.
- Why consider so much data? Data associated with crime, overdose, unemployment, etc. can support the need for recovery houses as well as related programs and services.
- What does a Community Assessment Team do? It helps decide whose input will be solicited and what questions will be asked.
- Who should be on the Community Assessment Team? Those with significant local influence (elected officials, clergy, doctors, judges, etc.), and individuals, family members, and others directly affected by substance use disorder.
- Are there any resources in rural communities that may have available data that you could use instead of doing your own assessment? Yes! Hospitals, health departments, Community Action Agencies, and Head Start programs.

Keep in mind that the assessment process is more effective if there is a clear understanding of it from the beginning so that the objectives of the planned assessment match the Recovery House's goals.

Step Two: Be realistic about available resources to conduct your assessment

Personnel and financial resources available for community assessment will differ for each Recovery House. Programs must be realistic about the resources that can be devoted to the assessment.

Here are some questions to consider regarding resources.

- Do you have staff who have time and/or skills to conduct a needs assessment?
- Are there others who can help your staff conduct the assessment (for example, board members, interns, or other volunteers)?
- Can you get a grant or donation to hire someone to conduct your assessment?
- Is there another organization that assesses community needs that would be willing to gather information on your behalf? For example, Community Action Agencies and Public Health Departments are mandated to conduct community assessments.

Step Three: Identify who you want to query and the data that you want to review.

To better reflect the input of the collective community, interview or survey as wide a range of rural community members (individuals and organizations) as possible. This will also help to develop community ownership of the assessment.

Potential community members to interview/survey are unlimited. Some examples are:

- People (and their families) who are affected by substance use disorder
- Human service agencies, treatment and recovery programs, elected officials, and Ministers
- Employers, Chambers of Commerce, workforce development programs
- Law Enforcement, court systems, and jail staff
- Members of the general public

The types of data that you can consider are also very broad. For example:

- Primary data from surveys, interviews, focus groups and community forums (open ended and/or Likert scale questions)
- Secondary data sources that may vary from community to community. Examples include Hospitals/Health Departments, EMS/Coroner, Law Enforcement/court system/jails, Employers, Social Services (shelters, Veteran's programs, etc.), as well as other recovery houses if there are any.



Step Four: Analyze your data

fact may make you wonder if data analysis is complicated. It doesn't have to be!

Basic data analysis can be performed by reviewing facilitator notes, transcribed interviews, and survey feedback and then sorting the responses into themes or categories either manually or by using a Qualitative Data Analysis software program – some of which are available free of cost.

Quantitative data (such as that generated from Likert Scale questionnaires) can be tallied by hand, or a local university or larger social service program may be willing to analyze the data on your behalf.

Once the data from your rural community has been reviewed and sorted, it's time to record common or recurring themes in the feedback and then draw your conclusions.

Step Five: Disseminate your findings

So far you've dedicated much time and effort to completing your needs assessment. The time has come to disseminate your findings and inform community stakeholders of the outcomes of your assessment. Below are three suggestions for effective dissemination.

- 1.To reach the most community organizations and individuals, broadly present your results to as many audiences as possible (for example, at conferences, civic clubs, health fairs, press conferences, churches, schools, and at other community gatherings).
- 2.Specifically targeted presentations may also be made to funding sources, policy makers/legislators, and other entities who are of particular interest or importance to your organization.
- 3.Use a variety of dissemination techniques (such as in-person, social media, print, radio/television, infographics, written reports, posters, or charts).

Step 6: Use the Needs Assessment Results to Take Action

This step of the needs assessment process involves comparing the initial objectives with the assessment's final results and then developing plans to meet your project goals.

The Action Plan: It's a good idea to formalize your intentions by developing a written action plan. Consider incorporating the following into your plan: Objectives, tasks, responsible parties, and start/completion dates. A sample work plan, modeled after one created by HRSA, that you can either use "as is" or modify to your specifications is provided on page 8.



Congratulations! You now have the information needed to conduct a Community Needs Assessment for your rural Recovery House.

To provide you with more detailed information on community needs assessment a resource list is provided below. When a specific topic, form, or sample document is referenced within a large document, the relevant page number/s is noted.

Resource List

SOURCES OF SECONDARY DATA

U.S. Census Bureau

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219> (NOTE: Enter your zip code at the top left)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Drug Overdose Deaths: National Vital Statistics System
<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm> (NOTE: Scroll down to the map to review state overdose data)

Vulnerable areas for HIV & Hepatitis infection

outbreaks [https://www.cdc.gov/persons-who-inject-drugs/vulnerable/counties.html?](https://www.cdc.gov/persons-who-inject-drugs/vulnerable/counties.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/pwids/vulnerable-counties-data.html)

[CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/pwids/vulnerable-counties-data.html](https://www.cdc.gov/pwids/vulnerable-counties-data.html)

Fletcher Group RCORP- Rural Center of Excellence in SUD Recovery

<https://www.fletchergroup.org/> (NOTE: Vast array of information about recovery housing available in "tools") or call 606-657-4662

HEALTH CARE

Federally Qualified Health Centers

<https://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/> (NOTE: Enter your location to find a health center near you.)



Organizations that may have already done an assessment that they will share:

Community Action Agencies

Consult with your state's Community Agency Association or the National Community Action Partnership

Head Start Programs Consult with your state's Head Start Association or the National Association for Head Start

Public Health Departments Consult with your state's Department of Health for a listing of local health departments.

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SAMPLE ACTION PLAN

GOAL: _____

DESIRED OUTCOME: _____

OBJECTIVES*	TASKS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	START DATE	COMPLETION DATE

*Objectives should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-Based)

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

WEAKNESSES

OPPORTUNITIES

WEAKNESSES

PEST ANALYSIS

POLITICAL

ECONOMIC

SOCIAL

TECHNOLOGICAL