



Community Needs Assessment Frequently Asked Questions May 2006

Q: *What is a community needs assessment?*

A: A community needs assessment is a way of gathering information about a community's opinions, needs, challenges, and assets used to determine which project(s) will meet the real needs of the community.

Q: *How should a community needs assessment be conducted?*

A: Your club should begin by appointing an assessment committee. This committee should be comprised of knowledgeable Rotarians who are familiar with the community and will be able to dedicate the time and resources necessary to assess the community's needs. In conducting the assessment, the committee will work with community leaders and members at large. The following are some community needs assessment tools:

- Interviews – Collect information from community members who are in a position to know community needs. These people might be community leaders, professionals, or other individuals who have affiliations with particular organizations or agencies.
- Public forum – Bring a wide range of community members together at public meetings to gather information via group discussions.
- Focus group – Obtain opinions and ideas from a small, targeted group of community members.
- Survey – Use a formal survey or questionnaire to collect information from a wide range of community members.
- Secondary data analysis – Review and analyze data that has already been collected regarding community issues and needs.
- Asset mapping – Gather information about existing community assets and resources.

Some factors that might influence the type of assessment selected include time, cost, target audience, and available manpower. Ideally a community needs assessment should include a combination of tools.

Q: *What are the steps involved in conducting a community needs assessment?*

A: Here are the basic steps:

- Form a community needs assessment committee
- Determine the community to be assessed
- Select a community needs assessment tool(s)
- Develop a plan for the assessment (who, what, when, where, how)
- Implement the assessment using the selected tool(s)
- Analyze the results
- Prepare report detailing the results
- Use report to determine club intervention(s)

Q: *What type of information should be gathered?*

A: This will depend on the individual community and its specific needs. However, the following information should be gathered in all community needs assessments:

- Description of the community and applicable statistics
- Needs identified by community leaders and members
- Current action being taken to meet community needs
- Local resources available to help meet community needs
- Opportunities for projects
- Challenges to projects
- Involvement of the community in the project
- Long-term sustainability of the project by the community

Q: *What should be done with the information once it is gathered?*

A: The information should be analyzed and compiled into a report and shared with the club's board, all project partners, and community members that were particularly involved in providing information for the assessment. In an effort to assist Rotarians, TRF has prepared a Community Needs Assessment form that provides a template for recording information gathered during the assessment. This form is available for download from the RI website and should be completed and attached to the Matching Grant application for grant requests of US\$25,001 and above.

Q: *How does a community needs assessment assist clubs in the selection of a project?*

A: Based on the needs identified during the assessment, clubs can select areas where they would like to become involved. The selection of a project should be based on the needs of a community as well as the resources available to the club and its partners.