





step 1

plan and organize



Getting Started

The process of developing the plan for conducting the community assessment is critical. Not only does your plan have to provide a solid foundation for involving key stakeholders from the start, but it will also be your road map throughout the process. A well-articulated plan ensures that your community assessment is thorough, accurate, and efficient. Although it requires an investment of time at the beginning, the community assessment plan will save you time and effort over the long-run. Your first task will be to identify your planning team, preferably to include staff, parent representatives, governing body and policy group representatives, and community partners. Head Start families and the broader community are more likely to trust a process and support the results when the plan behind it is driven by a representative planning team.



Learning Objectives

Step 1 provides an overview of all the steps and tasks involved with planning the community assessment process. You will learn how to:

- Form the community assessment team
- Determine what information to collect
- Establish a timeline and assign responsibilities
- Prepare for the community assessment process and inform key stakeholders

Establishing the Community Assessment Team

A team approach to conducting the community assessment is beneficial because it distributes the effort among many people and adds a variety of perspectives. The community assessment team plans and implements the process, interprets the data, and presents a report of findings for review by the agency’s governing body and Policy Council. Ideally, the team will include representation from within the program, including those that reflect the diversity of the communities or populations served, as well as external partners. As soon as the community assessment team is formed, a team leader should be selected. This person will be the primary point of contact throughout the process.

When determining the team structure your program will implement, remember that your goal is to obtain an accurate and comprehensive community assessment while encouraging the effective participation of team members. Ensure all participants are orientated to the process and their role, as well as understand the importance of the community assessment and its impact on the provision of Head Start services to children and families. Team members will benefit from actively participating in the community assessment. They will become better informed about their community, the Head Start program, and the direction forward. Generally, the community assessment team should include:

- Head Start director
- Grantee agency representatives, if applicable
- Key program staff
- Governing body and Policy Council representatives
- Parents
- Community partners

It is helpful to have at least one team member who is skilled at working with numerical (quantitative) data.

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Table 1: Key Roles and Responsibilities of Community Assessment (CA) Team Members

Head Start director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures the CA is fully and accurately conducted • Uses the CA data to inform the program’s long-range goals and short-term objectives • Ensures information from the CA is used in program development and strategic planning and referenced in the grant application
Grantee agency representatives if applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For some grantee agencies, the executive director assumes responsibility for leading the CA process, and the Head Start program director is the leader or co-leader • Collects CA information for non-Head Start programs the agency may also sponsor

<p>Key program staff (e.g., managers and other staff)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Represents all program areas (e.g., education, health, family services, disabilities, transportation, and administration)</i> The information gathered and analyzed in the CA should reflect a perspective that encompasses all aspects of the Head Start’s program and services. • <i>Contributes important information and insights to the CA</i> It is beneficial to establish a process for communicating with all program staff throughout the CA (whether or not they are official CA team members). This includes both sharing information learned through the CA as it emerges, as well as engaging staff in providing feedback related to the key CA questions. Everyone in Head Start shares responsibility for learning about the community, its families, and its resources. • <i>Brings perspectives from various sources of information</i> It is beneficial to have the participation of both key management staff and staff at different levels within the organization.
<p>Governing body and Policy Council representatives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Involve the governing body, Policy Council, Policy Committee at the delegate level, and advisory committees in the CA process</i> Advisory committees might include the Parent Committee (45 CFR §1301.4(a)) and/or the Health Services Advisory Committee (HSAC). • <i>Kept informed regarding the CA progress and have opportunities to ask questions and provide input (45 CFR §1302.40(b))</i> • <i>Review the findings with appropriate decision-making bodies before the complete document is finalized when possible</i>
<p>Parents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Serve as key advisors and important sources of information in the CA process</i> • <i>Act as decision-makers as members of Policy Council or Policy Committee</i> • <i>Represent information and views from eligible families in the service area</i> • <i>Collect data and views from other parents and community members, including information about trends in the local economy, child health status, and service needs that impact Head Start planning and programming</i>
<p>Community partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Represent and bring information from social service agencies, city or county government, public schools, child care programs, health agencies, and other organizations with knowledge about Head Start-eligible families</i> • <i>Share their own needs assessments and community data</i> While information provided by partners cannot replace the Head Start CA, it may include detailed information on issues relevant to Head Start-eligible children and families, as well as organizational and program staff. • <i>Broaden partnerships</i> The CA process is an opportunity to create new and strengthen existing partnerships and increase awareness about how the Head Start program contributes to and supports the local community.

NEW DIRECTOR TIP

Getting Help

It may be helpful to review a completed community assessment report. Your regional office and/or T/TA staff may be able to help you with this and provide support to you in designing your community assessment process. You can find inspiration in the community assessment reports posted on the Internet. A Google search for “Head Start Community Assessment” provides a long list of reports to review.

As your program grows its internal expertise to implement a comprehensive community assessment process, a consultant can support your efforts. If this is the case, select a consultant who knows Head Start and has worked with similar agencies. The consultant should serve as a partner through each step of the community assessment process, providing ongoing updates and keeping you informed along the way. If a consultant is used, the community assessment team will maintain a key role by overseeing the process, leading the way forward, and ensuring the final report meets the team’s expectations.

As the community assessment team begins its work, the members may want to use brainstorming techniques to discuss the following questions and determine implementation activities.

1. What is the purpose of the team?
2. What tasks will the team need to perform?
3. What skills are required to perform the team’s tasks?
Based on the tasks and skills identified, does the team need to increase its capacity by adding other individuals to the team?
4. Who are the individuals responsible for performing each task?
5. What are the completion dates for each task?
6. What does the team need in order to stay motivated?
7. What kind of guidance, support, and resources do the team need?

Specify Information to be Collected

Use Data that Describes Community Strengths, Needs, and Resources

According to the HSPPS [45 CFR §1302.11\(b\)\(1\)\(i-vi\)](#), “the community assessment must use data that describes community strengths, needs, and resources and include, at a minimum:

- (i) The number of eligible infants, toddlers, preschool age children, and expectant mothers, including their geographic location, race, ethnicity, and languages they speak, including:
 - (A) Children experiencing homelessness (when feasible, this data should be gathered in collaboration with McKinney-Vento Local Education Agency Liaisons (42 U.S.C. 11432(6)(A));
 - (B) Children in foster care; and
 - (C) Children with disabilities, including types of disabilities and relevant services and resources provided to these children by community agencies;

- (ii) The education, health, nutrition, and social service needs of eligible children and their families, including prevalent social or economic factors that impact their well-being;
- (iii) Typical work, school, and training schedules of parents with eligible children;
- (iv) Other child development services, child care centers, and family child care programs that serve eligible children, including home visiting, publicly-funded state and local preschools, and the approximate number of eligible children served by other service providers;
- (v) Resources that are available in the community to address the needs of eligible children and their families, as well as gaps in service delivery or lack of accessibility to services; and,
- (vi) Strengths of the community.”

After you have collected and analyzed all relevant information, you will be able to use the data for goal-setting and decision-making, as required in the HSPPS. Use the community assessment findings to prioritize key issues; determine the unmet need for Head Start and Early Head Start services among eligible children; identify vulnerable populations; and locate recruitment areas. You will present information about your service area and your conclusions in a written summary report.

Focus on the Service Area

Keep in mind that the community assessment must provide information on the entire service area, not just on recruitment areas.

- **Service area:** Geographic area identified in an approved grant application within which a grantee may provide Head Start services. A program must propose a service area in the grant application and define the area by county or sub-county ([45 CFR §1302.11\(a\)\(1\)](#)).
- **Recruitment area:** Geographic locality within which a Head Start program seeks to enroll Head Start children and families. The recruitment area can be the same as the service area or it can be a smaller area or areas within the service area ([45 CFR §1305.2](#)).

The community assessment addresses the entire service area, which may include places that are not currently identified for recruitment. Maps submitted as part of the community assessment document should show both the service area and recruitment areas.

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NEW DIRECTOR TIP

What Data to Collect

Resources in Appendix A can help you plan for the collection of the required data and identify data collection needs unique to your community. Check out the Community Assessment Matrix and Data Collection Sources by Topic Worksheet.

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Establish the Community Assessment Timeline

The length of time it takes to gather information for the community assessment and then to write the report will vary depending on the size and complexity of the Head Start grantee, the community at large, and the service area. The community assessment timeline must include enough time for a report to be written. In addition, because the community assessment provides the evidence and rationale for a variety of programming decisions, the process must be timed to enable the findings to be used to inform the grant application. For example, proposed changes to program options or calendar, locations, or recruitment criteria that are presented in the grant application must be guided by information previously gathered and analyzed in the community assessment report.

Time will also be needed throughout the five-year grant period for an annual update, which helps programs monitor their progress or modify their strategic plans.

“ Be strategic and plan ahead as you establish your community assessment process.

Prepare for the Community Assessment Process

You need to be strategic and plan ahead as you establish your process.

- Decide on the structure you will use. For example, the team might be a work group composed primarily of members of existing committees and functioning groups in the Head Start program, or it could involve the creation of a new community assessment committee.
- Select team members from the agency and from the community at large.
- Make sure each staff member's time has been “freed up” or partially reassigned by their supervisor so they have the necessary time to devote to the community assessment.

▼ When planning and organizing for your community assessment, remember that the calendar is your friend.

- Ensure all participants are orientated to understand the importance of the community assessment and its impact on the provision of Head Start services to children and families.
- Identify the resources you will need to implement the process; examples include the translation of key pieces of information for parents, additional clerical support, and scheduling meetings in conjunction with other activities.





Inform Key Stakeholders About the Community Assessment Process

These organizational tools will help you communicate efficiently and effectively with the community assessment team and others throughout the process:

- **Draw up a plan** that includes the tasks and time frames assigned to each team member. Distribute this as a chart to all team members so they can stay informed about the overall process.
- **Keep a calendar to help your team, the Policy Council and the governing body/Tribal Council to stay informed.** Define the tasks that will be under way each month and note the expected completion dates. You can add other important program-wide tasks to the calendar, such as the Program Information Report ([PIR](#)), OHS monitoring reviews, and program self-assessment.
- **Communicate the plan.** Prior to its implementation, the team leader can consult with the governing body/Tribal Council and Policy Council to get ideas and assistance from the members, hear concerns that might need to be resolved, and review ongoing communications. ■



How does your program inform key stakeholders of the community assessment process?



Once you have established your planning team, community assessment timeline, and main tasks, it is time to move onto Step 2, where you will clarify what you want to learn. Specifically, think about what questions you want answered and how best to gather accurate data that will inform those answers.

The Community Assessment Team

A team approach to conducting the community assessment is beneficial because it distributes the effort among many people and adds a variety of perspectives.

Head Start Directors

ensure that the community assessment is fully and accurately conducted.



Managers and Key Staff

represent all program areas and engage staff in providing feedback related to the key questions. It is beneficial to include staff who have experience working with quantitative data.



Representatives from Policy Groups

involve various governing bodies and provide regular updates during the process.



Parents

serve as key advisors and represent information and views from eligible families.



Community Partners

bring information from social service agencies and other organizations with knowledge about Head Start-eligible families.

Buy-in from the immediate and larger community is more likely when the process is driven by a representative planning team.