step 2
design the work

Getting Started

Once your community assessment team is in place, you are ready to establish your primary questions, or what you want to learn through the community assessment. Begin Step 2 by reviewing the HSPPS to identify the core areas you will be exploring. The HSPPS set out three types of information you are required to gather about Head Start-eligible children and families, as well as three types of information specific to your community. Within these categories, you will develop the primary questions that explore issues unique to your families and region. Do not confuse the primary questions to be asked through the community assessment (e.g., "How are community demographics changing?") with the specific survey or interview questions you will be developing in Step 3.

Learning Objectives

There are many things you can learn through a community assessment, and what your team prioritizes will affect how you gather data and from whom. In Step 2 you will learn how to:

- Align community assessment data collection with the HSPPS requirements
- Develop the primary questions to be answered
- Identify internal and external sources of data
- Distinguish between open- and closed-ended questions, as well as quantitative and qualitative data.

Review the HSPPS Requirements

As cited in the HSPPS, six types of information about your service area must be included in the community assessment.

1. **Demographic Makeup of Head Start-Eligible Children and Families.**

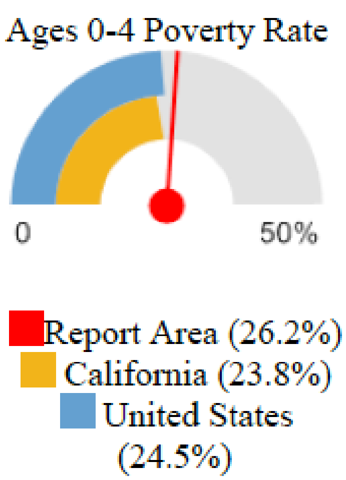
   This information is used to create a portrait of the families eligible to be served by your program. Demographic data which must be collected is found in HSPPS [45 CFR §1302.11(b)(1)(i)(A-C)](). It includes the number of eligible infants, toddlers and preschool age children, and expectant mothers, including their geographic location, race, ethnicity, and languages spoken.

   Data also must be collected about three specific populations: children experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, and children with disabilities. To gather information about children experiencing homelessness, you must work, to the extent possible, in collaboration with the McKinney-Vento local education agency liaisons (42 U.S.C. 11432(6)(A)). Community assessment data about children with disabilities must identify the types of disabilities, relevant services, and resources provided to these children by community agencies (45 CFR §1302.11(b)(1)(i)(C)).

   Demographic data will be collected through both internal and external sources. External data will help you estimate the number of eligible children and families and learn about their cultures, strengths, and needs. There are many benefits to working with community partners to gather some of the external data.

   When analyzing demographic data, be sure to report the number of children who are currently enrolled in Head Start as well as those who are eligible but not being served. This will help you establish estimates of enrollment needs, as well as make decisions about enrollment practices. For example, if the community assessment identifies slots for children experiencing homelessness or children in foster care as a clear need, that program will be allowed to reserve one or more enrollment slots when a vacancy occurs for pregnant women and children experiencing homelessness and children in foster care (45 CFR §1302.15(c)). In order to provide a comprehensive picture of the population in the

A wealth of data is readily available from federal and state data warehouses. Organizations like Community Commons provide easy-to-use, democratized access to this data. For example, they provided this per county data on children ages 0–4 living in poverty.



Children Ages 0-4 Living In Poverty			
Report Area	**Ages 0-4 Total Population**	**Ages 0-4 In Poverty**	**Ages 0-4 Poverty Rate**
Service Area	8,889	2,328	26.2%
Del Norte County, CA	1,655	498	30.1%
Humboldt County, CA	7,234	1,830	25.3%
California	2,472,442	587,696	23.8%
United States	19,605,884	4,795,039	24.5%

Source: Northcoast Children's Services, Community Needs Assessment Report for the 2017–18 Year, page 22.

service area, information about changing and underserved populations is necessary. Remember, your community assessment must include demographic data from across the entire service area. It is particularly helpful to highlight the needs of enrolled children and their families, as well as community-based services available to them. Reviewing data over time can be especially effective in identifying demographic trends such as birth rates and population shifts.

2. Education, Health, Nutrition and Social Service Needs of Head Start-Eligible Children and Families

As set forth in the HSPPS, the community assessment must include data that identifies prevalent social or economic factors affecting the well-being of children and families (45 CFR §1302.11(b)(1)(ii)). This includes identifying community issues that impact on children's nutritional health needs (45 CFR §1302.42(b)(4)). The goal is to present a balanced, comprehensive assessment of the needs by drawing on a variety of information gathered from both internal and external sources.

Internal data collected from program staff, parents, and local service providers will give your Head Start program an in-depth understanding of family and child needs. In addition, your program will draw on existing information, such as data from the PIR, minutes of advisory committees, and family assessment data. These are just a few examples of accessible internal information.

External data, drawn from community partners, media outlets, and websites, provides information about the needs of the community at large and newer populations your program might serve.

3. Work, School, and Training Schedules of Parents with Eligible Children

The community assessment must include the typical work, school, and training schedules of parents with eligible children (45 CFR §1302.11(b)(1)(iii)). This information is needed as you make decisions about your program's structure and calendar (45 CFR §1302.20(a)(1-2)).

It is beneficial to gather schedule data from parents already served by your program, as well as from parents whose eligible children are not enrolled. You may reach out to a variety of organizations to help gather this data, including teen parenting programs, adult education programs, educational institutions (e.g., community colleges, trade schools, and other higher education programs), technical training programs, and state agencies.

NEW DIRECTOR TIP

State Collaboration Directors

Your Head Start State Collaboration Director can connect you with state-level data sources.

"The goal is to present a balanced, comprehensive assessment of the needs by drawing on a variety of information gathered from both internal and external sources.

> Your community assessment report will include a discussion of trends that you anticipate will affect your program throughout the grant cycle. Head Start programs can use these trends to predict the potential influx of new families and to assist in program planning.

4. Other Early Childhood Education Programs that Serve Eligible Children.

Information about other child development services, child care centers, and family child care programs that serve eligible children must be included in the community assessment. Details about home visiting services and publicly funded state and local preschools must also be included, along with an estimate of the approximate number of eligible children served in these various settings (45 CFR §1302.11(b)(1)(iv)). Across many population groups, young children may be cared for by relatives or neighbors. This is sometimes referred to as "family, friend, and neighbor" care. Because these arrangements are often unlicensed and informal, they may not appear in official child care counts. Nevertheless, it is important for the community assessment to estimate their prevalence as it may indicate a need for additional child care services for eligible families.

It is beneficial to consider such factors as location, schedule, and duration of services; vacancy and waiting list statistics; affordability and accessibility of care services; ages served; and the scope and quality of services. By including an analysis of this data, your program will be better positioned to meet its requirement to take an active role in promoting coordinated systems of comprehensive early childhood services to low-income children and families (45 CFR §1302.53(b)).

5. Community Resources

The community assessment is required to provide an overview of community resources that address the needs of eligible children and their families (45 CFR §1302.11(b)(1)(v)). When gathering information about programs that help eligible families, you will want to consider supports related to nutrition, housing, employment, education, health, transportation, finances, and other services.

By compiling a thorough description of available community resources, your program can determine which services can be provided by Head Start and which are best provided by your community partners. You will also use this information as you establish collaborative relationships and partnerships with community organizations through formal mechanisms, such as joint agreements, procedures, or contracts. As outlined in the HSPPS 45 CFR §1302.53(a), such formal agreements can be used to arrange on-site delivery of services and facilitate access to a range of community programs that are responsive to children's and families' needs, family partnership goals, and community needs.

It is important to know which services are being used by families already enrolled, as well as for families who are not being served. This helps to identify who may be most in need of your program's support. Sometimes low-income families face obstacles as they seek to find and access community resources. It is beneficial to compare the views of the families and the community institutions in order to identify needs and gaps in services. You may find that in spite of the existence of many community services, eligible families are not using them. The families may not know about them; they may not find them "user friendly;" or they may encounter language or other barriers.

6. Community Strengths

Identifying the strengths of the community is an integral and required component of the community assessment (45 CFR §1302.11(b)(1)(vi)). Knowing these strengths will help programs identify what supports and services can be accessed by eligible families as well as what supplemental supports may need to be provided by the grantee.

In the course of the community assessment, you will also collect information about trends and changes in your service area. You will review this information to determine whether population counts or percentages have changed and, if so, how they have changed (e.g., increased, decreased); the reasons for the changes; and whether your program's internal data (e.g., PIR, enrollment forms) indicates similar changes or trends.

This process can place your program in the best position to serve those eligible children and families who are most in need of services. Contact local employers, city or county governments, and community partners to obtain information on local employment and housing trends. Document changes in area jobs, such as in the agricultural, construction, or service sectors. Your community assessment report will include a discussion of trends that you anticipate will affect your program throughout the grant cycle. Head Start programs can use these trends to predict the potential influx of new families and to assist in program planning.

NEW DIRECTOR TIP

Identifying Gaps

When identifying community resources, it's important to identify where the gaps in services are. Consider the following:

- Are there agencies with long waiting lists or a complete lack of services for a particular area of need?
- What barriers exist for families and are those barriers different or unique for certain cultural or ethnic groups?
- Are community service providers aware of the challenges and barriers unique to Head Start families?
- What are the potential partnerships that could alleviate gaps or barriers?

How has your program's service area changed in the past five years? Were any of these trends anticipated in past community assessment reports? How can you learn from that in future community assessment reports?

Tell Me More!

To learn more about preparing and collecting data see the webinar: [Measuring What Matters: Making Progress toward Expected Family Outcomes](#).

Develop Questions to Ask

The kinds of information you are required to gather in the community assessment shape the questions you will ask. For example, you will need to ask families about the services they are receiving from Head Start in order to assess whether their needs are being met. You will have to ask child care providers about their enrollment of different age groups and children with disabilities. In other words, once you identify the data you want to report about your service area, you will be able to figure out how to get that data by asking the right questions.

The community assessment will inform decisions in many areas, including program goals and objectives; services and program options; recruitment and service areas; program locations; and criteria for recruitment and selection. The community assessment report provides a rationale for changes in program options, locations, and other matter, assuming the evidence gathered during the community assessment process supports the need for those changes.

Five Key Considerations in Assessment Design

In preparing to collect data, the team should consider and discuss how to use both internal and external data to address these five key considerations in assessment design:

1. What data needs to be collected?
2. What sources can be used to obtain the data? Will new worksheets or reports need to be created to capture data?
3. What issues or challenges might affect data collection efforts?
4. In light of the potential issues or challenges, are there alternative methods that could be used to collect data? (Data collection methods are discussed in Step 3.)
5. How will the data be displayed or disseminated after it is collected and analyzed? Visualizing this ahead of time will help frame how the data is collected and organized.

Identify Internal and External Data

One useful framework for designing data collection is to identify your sources of data. This includes determining where you will go to get the information you need, including:

- Internal data: Both past and current program data.
- External data: Information from resources outside your program and agency.

Tell Me More!

See Appendix A–5 Data Collection Sources by Topic Worksheet for more information about internal and external data sources.

Table 2.1: Types and Sources of Internal and External Data

Types of Internal Data	Types of External Data
• Child outcomes • Demographics on children and families on the waiting list • Demographics on enrolled children and families • Existing community partnerships • Family engagement outcomes • Fiscal reports • Health records • Facility maintenance records • Staff qualifications and professional development needs and outcomes	• Child welfare data • Community resources for child care and child development • Community safety data • Demographics of the service area (e.g., race, ethnicity, household income, employment, poverty levels, housing and homelessness, and education levels) • Environmental issues • Health and education issues • Number of children with disabilities and the types and services they require
Sources to Obtain Internal Data	**Sources to Obtain External Data**
• Enrollment forms • Family Partnership Agreements • Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) • Human resources records • Ongoing monitoring reports • Progress reports on program goals • Meeting notes (e.g., minutes of governing body, Policy Council, advisory committees, and staff meetings) • PIR Report • Program self-assessment • Family assessment data • Transportation logs	• Federal, state, and city departments of —Health and Human Services —Education —Labor • Faith-based institutions • Federal monitoring reviews • Local economic development agencies • Local media sources • Nonprofit services • Local and regional environmental planning agencies • Public school systems and local colleges • State, county, and local governments • U.S Census Bureau

Using Open-Ended and Closed-Ended Questions

Designing questions that elicit useful answers is critical to conducting a quality assessment. A best practice is to design both open-and closed-ended questions in order to get a range of information.

- Open-ended questions allow respondents to provide more complex, thoughtful answers, often based on their own feelings or experiences. Such questions tend to obtain a range of opinions because they are less leading than closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions often begin with words such as "Why" and "How," or phrases such as "What do you think about…," "What has been your experience with…," or "Can you tell me about…." Open-ended questions allow respondents to tell you anything they feel is relevant, which may also mean you discover things that are new or unexpected.
- Closed-ended questions provide respondents with a limited set of possible answers. Questions that can be answered by a simple "yes" or "no" are closed-ended questions, as are questions that provide a pre-determined checklist of items to be selected. "Did you use mental health services?" is an example of a closed-ended question. Another example is a question that asks respondents to rate a service: "On a scale of 1–5, how would you rate the educational program of Head Start?" Typically, closed-ended questions are easier for respondents to answer, and the data gathered is easier to compare and analyze statistically.

> Using a combination of open- and closed-ended questions will help you obtain rich data and a range of valuable insights.

By using a combination of open- and closed-ended questions you will be able to obtain rich data and a range of valuable insights about eligible families, community resources, and your program. Relying on just one question format would not provide the same variety of in-depth information.

An Important Distinction: Quantitative and Qualitative Data

As you plan for data collection, it is also important to distinguish between quantitative and qualitative data. In addition to being collected in different ways, these data are also expressed differently.

- Quantitative data is expressed in numerical terms.
- Qualitative data is represented in words, collected either verbally or in writing.

In order to have a high-quality community assessment, it is necessary to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data. If you can visualize ahead of time how the data might be displayed in graphs, tables, or charts, you will have a frame of reference for organizing your information. ■

Have your program's previous community assessment reports had a good mix of qualitative and quantitative data? What are the benefits of each kind of data?

Table 2.2: Displaying the Data

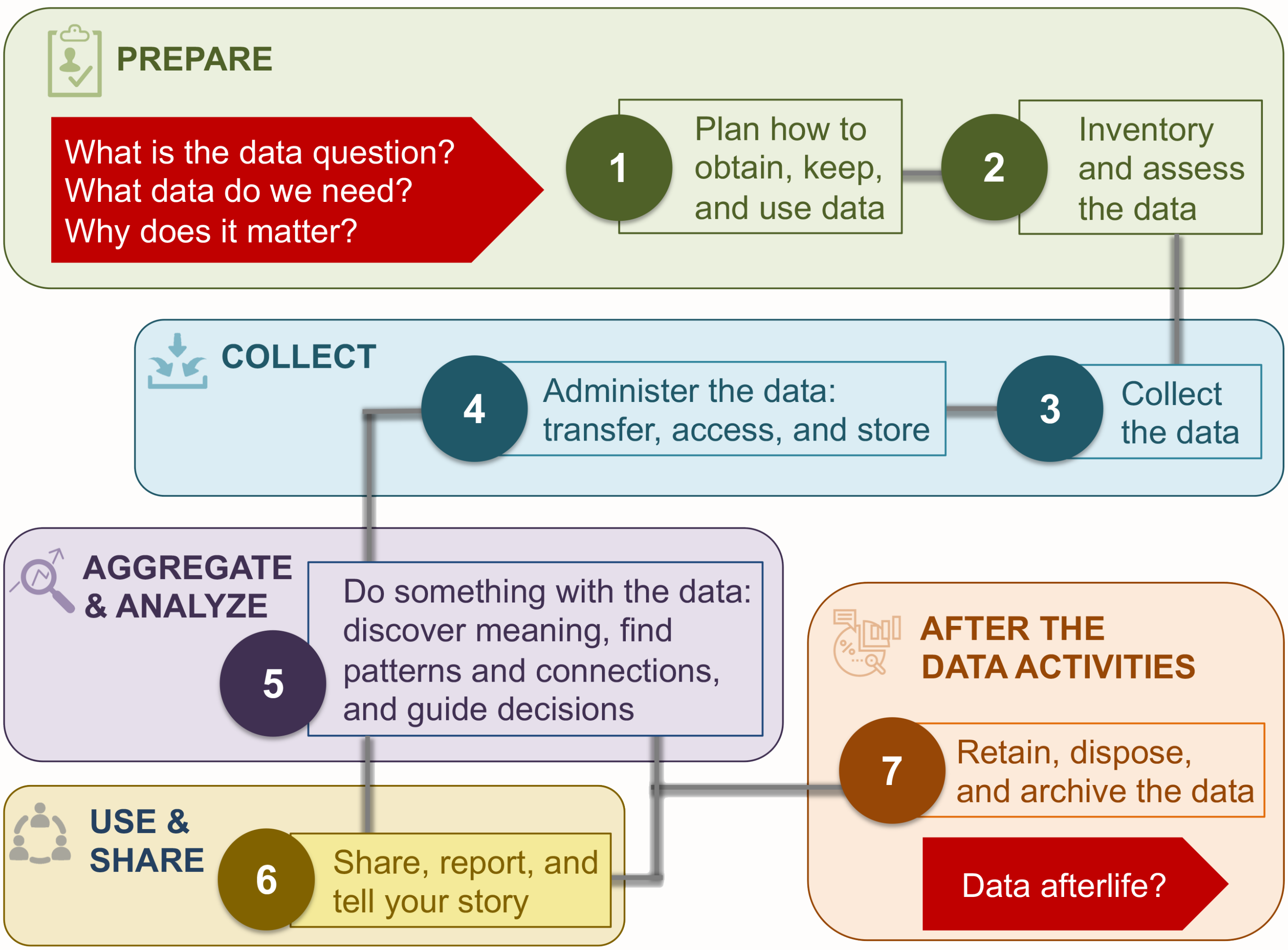
Data that are...	can be explained in a...
in **numbers** or **percentages**	table, pie chart, graph
in written or spoken **words**	narrative, case study, table
geographic	map, diagram, photograph

Everything you have done so far has laid a solid foundation for Step 3, Gather Data. This next phase will establish the method you will use to gather the data, who you will engage, and what questions you will ask.

A Closer Look

Responsible Data Management

A community assessment is a data-rich undertaking. That data needs to be treated in a respectful way that upholds the rights of the people whose data is collected. This graphic provides a framework for exploring these issues and highlights overarching principles that guide responsible data management.



How might this Responsible Data Management graphic inform and reshape your program's community assessment process?

PREPARE

1. Plan How to Obtain, Keep, and Use the Data

Be clear about the purpose of collecting the data. How will the data be used, collected, and stored? How will personally identifiable information (PII) be protected?

2. Inventory and Assess the Data

A thorough inventory of the data collected is important for all stakeholders involved. What data already exists and what is needed? Who will collect the data and how will it be analyzed? When will the data be purged?

COLLECT

3. Collect the Data

Carefully train the data collectors on the protocols they will follow and the technology they will use. Assess the risk for security and confidentiality. Before the collection occurs, make sure families know what data will be collected and how it will be used and protected.

4. Administer the Data: Transfer, Access, and Store

The HSPPS require grantees to develop procedures that support the availability, usability, integrity, and security of the data. These procedures need to be systematic and operationalized.

AGGREGATE & ANALZYE

5. Do Something with the Data

To find meaning and direction in the community assessment, grantees must carefully aggregate and analyze the data they collect. Identifying patterns, connections, and trends helps grantees craft responsive options and services for the communities they serve.

USE & SHARE

6. Share, Report, and Tell Your Story

To inform stakeholders and rally consensus, the findings need to be shared through accessible and compelling reports. In addition, grantees must adhere to the detailed reporting requirements in the HSPPS.

AFTER THE DATA ACTIVITIES

7. Retain, Dispose, and Archive the Data

Data lives on long after its findings are shared. Deleting digital documents is not the same as shredding paper documents. Grantees should have a plan for how digital data will be securely archived or purged from various devices and systems.