





step 3

gather data



Getting Started

With a sound community assessment plan in place, you are ready to design your data collection plan and collect data. This will include contacting the data sources you identified in Step 2 and asking them questions to obtain the information you need. Before you begin administering surveys or conducting focus groups and interviews, however, make sure to identify existing data sources and what information they can provide. By gathering information from easily available internal and external sources first (e.g., your own PIR data or U.S. Census data), you can make sure to focus your more time-intensive data collection methods, such as surveys and interviews, on gathering information that is not available any other way.



Learning Objectives

Your team's ability to effectively collect and manage data will have a direct impact on the quality of your community assessment. Through Step 3, you will develop a deeper understanding of the data collection process, including:

- Data collection methods
- Creating worksheets and surveys
- Logistics and cultural considerations
- Managing the data

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Tell Me More! ▶

For a worksheet that can be used to help as data is being collected and reviewed see Appendix A–3: [Community Assessment Analysis Worksheet](#).

NEW DIRECTOR TIP

State and Regional Associations

Grantees in many states and regions have partnered together to gather and aggregate the statewide Head Start Data needed for community assessments.

NEW DIRECTOR TIP

Existing Community Assessments

Do not overlook existing community assessments done by other organizations. United Way, health organizations, and other local coalitions and agencies may have community assessment data that will complement the data that you collect enabling further comparisons and insight.

Decide on Data Collection Methods

There are a number of methods and strategies that can be used to obtain information from internal and external sources. Some data collection sources are already in place, such as the questions addressed during your program self-assessment and the interview questions answered by families when they are developing their Family Partnership Agreement.

You will select data collection methods that are likely to provide answers to the key questions you identified in Step 2. Make sure that whatever methods you select will enable you to supply information about your service area as required in the HSPPS [45 CFR §1302.11](#).






There are also a number of methods and strategies that you can use to gather information. It is a good idea to include both verbal and written strategies. For example, some families may prefer to speak with a team member as they discuss the Head Start program; others may prefer to fill out a survey. An important consideration is to think about which method is likely to result in the best quality data.

In addition, if you want to obtain answers from a large group of people, consider which method is likely to elicit a high number of responses. A long written survey may take too much time for busy parents, while a 15-minute phone call might be a quicker way to ask the same questions. Also, a written survey might be intimidating for parents who are uncomfortable with English reading and writing.

Table 3.1 presents commonly used community assessment data collection methods. Keep in mind that it is sometimes appropriate to combine methods to gather additional detail. For example, after a focus group session, participants could be asked to fill out a survey.



Table 3.1: Data Collection Methods

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
 <p>Written Survey or Questionnaire</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be widely distributed to large numbers of respondents • Can be translated into multiple languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return rate may be low • Requires reading and writing • May require materials to be translated
 <p>In-person Interview</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for in-depth responses • Can support language and literacy needs • Allows for more personal connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming to conduct • Time consuming to analyze the responses • May require interpreters to be available
 <p>Phone Interview</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for in-depth responses • Can support language and literacy needs • Allows for more personal connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming to analyze the responses • May require interpreters to be available • Requires participants to have access to telephone
 <p>Focus Group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can select participants to ensure a variety of views • Small enough to allow each person to speak • Can foster a sense of community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs a facilitator and meeting space • Time consuming to analyze the responses • May require interpreters to be available
 <p>Large-Group Meeting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can offer a variety of perspectives • Can foster a sense of community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs a facilitator and meeting space • Time consuming to analyze the responses • May require interpreters to be available • May have low participation rate • Some participants may feel uncomfortable speaking in a large group

Tell Me More! ▶

For a tool that can help program staff coordinate their efforts as they gather information see Appendix A-1: [Community Assessment Matrix](#).

Tell Me More! ▶

Appendix B includes information about the development and use of surveys and questionnaires, as well as samples of parent and community partner surveys.

NEW DIRECTOR TIP

Internal Data

Be sure to include internal data on family needs, strengths, and demographics. Consider a separate survey or focus group for staff. You have valuable, readily available information.

Plan Data Collection Logistics, Including Cultural Considerations

It is important to inform staff, parents, and key stakeholders about the community assessment's purpose and process. Programs use data to direct continuous improvement related to curriculum choice and implementation, teaching practices, professional development, program design, and other program decisions, including changing or targeting the scope of services. If staff, parents, and community partners understand that the community assessment is an important part of the Head Start program's work, it will be easier to collect and use the information. Everyone will understand its purpose and, therefore, be more likely to participate. Keeping participants informed along the way also will spur their interest and motivation.

Assuring participants' confidentiality is an essential part of gathering written or verbal information. Let all participants know that the process is confidential; individual names will not be included in the community assessment report; findings are reported for groups, not individuals; and that participation is optional. State this protocol about confidentiality up front and repeatedly. Ideally, this understanding can be extended to external stakeholders, who may also be more willing to participate if there is meaningful discussion around the importance of protecting the privacy of shared clients.

Once you have developed your interview or survey questions, there are still a number of decisions to make before you begin.

Interviews and Focus Groups

- **Will you take handwritten notes or record your conversations?**
Recordings are useful if you want to include quotes from participants in the community assessment report, but it will take time to review them. Some people may not participate openly because they do not want a recording made of what they have said. Remind them that the information you gather is confidential. Software can now record and transcribe notes at the same time. But if they prefer not to be recorded, take notes instead.
- **How long will an interview take?**
Before interviews, tell participants how much time you may need. Most people begin to tire and lose interest after an hour of being interviewed in person or after 15 minutes on the phone.

- **Will you ask the same questions of all the respondents? Or, will you ask the same general guiding questions and then follow up depending on what the respondents say?**

The latter approach enables you to collect comparable information while allowing more freedom and adaptability in how you obtain that information from different respondents. If the questions differ too much from one person to the next, however, it will be much harder to analyze and compare the answers.

Surveys and Questionnaires

- **How long will it take to fill out the survey?**
Consider how busy respondents are and how much reading and writing are required. Also, keep in mind that some individuals may have limited literacy skills for a variety of reasons. Creating opportunities for everyone to have a voice in the community assessment process is critically important.
- **Is it necessary to have materials translated?**
If you are gathering information from non-English speakers, it is important to have the materials translated. Make sure all translated material is accurate and terminology consistent.
- **Are the instructions clear?**
Some respondents may not be used to filling out surveys or may have particular issues with concepts like giving a numerical response to a question. It may be helpful to demonstrate or give an example of how to answer these types of questions.

Cultural Considerations

Ideally, team members will be able to communicate with families in their primary language; if this is not feasible, make sure to have interpreters available. One possible strategy is to have family advocates or home visitors distribute and collect family surveys. If they can directly assist adults who have reading difficulties or who prefer an interview format, this will increase the survey response rate and support the staff person's involvement in the process.

As you plan to conduct the community assessment, make sure to understand and observe the social customs and practices of families whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds differ from your own. Some populations may be cautious about engaging with you, particularly if they don't know why you are approaching them. In these situations, seek out trusted individuals who can introduce you rather than simply showing up and introducing yourself.

“ Creating opportunities for everyone, regardless of literacy level, to have a voice in the community assessment process is critically important.

NEW DIRECTOR TIP

Pilot Data Collection Tools

When developing a survey or questionnaire, consider piloting it with a small group of your intended audience. They can provide feedback to ensure your questions are clear and your instructions are easy to follow.

“ By building an in-depth understanding of how to effectively and respectfully interact with people from a wide range of cultures, you will establish a foundation for engaging diverse groups in your program after the community assessment is completed.

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NEW DIRECTOR TIP

On-the-Ground Perspective

Consider the benefits of systematically walking or driving through your service area. This provides a firsthand understanding of public transit access, movement patterns, and cultural resources.



What new cultural groups have joined your service area since your program's last community assessment? How will you address their communication needs during the next community assessment?

There is no one correct approach to interacting with people from different backgrounds; expectations around personal interactions are as many and as diverse as the groups involved. For example, individuals from some cultures may expect interactions with you to be reciprocal, with you beginning by sharing something about yourself, your family, your affiliations, and where you are from. In these situations, allow time to get acquainted before moving on to business. It is important to build an in-depth understanding of how to effectively and respectfully interact with people from a wide range of cultures. You will not only obtain more useful feedback and data, but you will also establish a foundation for engaging diverse groups in the life of your program after the community assessment is completed.

Collecting data related to community resources and strengths can be particularly challenging. The best advice is to build strong relationships with community agencies and maintain ongoing contact with them. Then, when it is time for the community assessment, they are more likely to participate in the process and provide useful information. In fact, representatives from community organizations might be willing to serve on your team.

There are a number of strategies that might help you collect information about community resources. Send a brief questionnaire to a large number of agencies. The strategy is to use a short questionnaire that is not time-consuming and to reach many agencies because a low response rate is likely. You can include a stamped, self-addressed envelope as an incentive to respond. You can follow up with phone calls or interviews when an agency does return the questionnaire. ■



► *Photographs and maps from the service area can humanize the data and visually highlight key resources and needs.*

Gather and Organize Data

Your community assessment data comes from many places and in a variety of forms. Before starting the data collection process, it is important to approach the issue of data management systemically by addressing the following questions:

- How will you keep track of all the data?
- How will you make the data available to key members of your team?
- How will you ensure certain data is kept confidential?
- How will you collect and integrate data over a period of time?
- How can you set up the system so others can step in if your job responsibilities change?
- Do you want to use a graphic information system (GIS) to link gathered data to the respondent's location?

It is beneficial to have a team member who has experience collecting and reporting internal data, such as entering data for PIR or management reports. This team member can help set up a system for managing the data.

It is likely most data, especially quantitative data, will be stored on a computer. Keep in mind that the data management system needs to be understood by key members of the team, particularly if they will be involved in analyzing the data and making contributions to the community assessment report. ■

◀ Tell Me More!

To help keep track of your data see Appendix A–5.1 [Sample Template for Data Collection](#).



Technology is always evolving. What technical expertise did your previous community assessment team require? What technical expertise does your future community assessment team require?



Once you have mastered data collection, you may feel as though your work is basically done. Data is only valuable, however, if it's been analyzed and understood. Step 4, Analyze and Make Decisions, will help you make sense of the information you have gathered and determine what it means for your program.

Tools for Collecting Data

A host of proven data collection tools can help community assessment teams focus their efforts and act upon their findings.

The **Sample Head Start Parent Survey** offers an efficient way to collect a lot of information fast about the pre-school families programs serve. See [Appendix B-1.1](#).

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A-3

Community Assessment Analysis

The CA process is part of program planning. It is used as a basis for making decisions, as a foundation for establishing strategic long-term goals and measurable objectives, and to inform strategic and ongoing planning. Your CA team can use this worksheet while collecting and reviewing data and developing recommendations. As you go through the CA process, ask:

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PROCESS REVIEW		Yes	No
Does our process include:			
1. Information collection and analysis of:			
A. Demographics, including:			
a. Eligible infants, toddlers, preschool-age children, and expectant mothers?			
b. Children experiencing homelessness?			
c. Children in foster care?			
d. Children with disabilities?			
i. Types of disabilities?			
ii. Relevant services provided by community agencies?			
iii. Resources provided by community agencies?			
B. Needs of eligible children and their families for:			
a. Education?			
b. Health?			
c. Nutrition?			
d. Social Services?			
C. Schedules of parents with eligible children:			
a. Work?			
b. School?			
c. Training?			
D. Other child development programs serving eligible children, including:			
a. Child care centers?			
b. Family child care programs?			
c. Public pre-K programs?			
d. Home visiting programs?			
E. Resources available in the community?			
F. Strengths of the community?			
2. Identification of trends?			
3. An annual review and update to the CA, and the undertaking of a new CA every five years?			
4. The effective integration of the CA process and data into ongoing program planning?			

1

The **Community Assessment Analysis** can help establish strategic long-term goals and measurable objectives. See [Appendix A-3](#).

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B-1.1

Sample Head Start Parent Survey
Data Collection: Preschool Head Start Parent Survey

This survey is being completed by:

Father White Black/African American
 Mother Hispanic
 Both parents Asian/Pacific Islander
 Guardian Native American
 Other (Relationship: _____) Other (_____)

Name of Head Start _____

Directions: Check Yes or No

	Yes	No
1. The location of my Head Start center was convenient for my family's participation.		
2. The Head Start program provided transportation for my child.		
3. Information provided by Head Start included materials for both fathers and mothers.		
4. The current program schedule met the needs of my family.		
5. Our family's needs would be better served with a 12-month Head Start program.		
6. Our family's needs would be better served with a 5-day per week Head Start program.		
7. Our family's needs would be better served with a 8-10 hour per day Head Start program.		

Directions: Check the box that best describes how YOU feel about the following statements:

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Don't know
8. I am satisfied with the Head Start services my family receives from:				
a. Classroom staff				
b. Administration				
c. Family service providers				
d. Health staff				
9. Head Start has helped my child get ready for school by:				
a. Becoming more independent				
b. Learning basic concepts in language				
c. Learning basic concepts in math				
d. Learning to share and cooperate				

The **Community Assessment Matrix** helps staff collect community information and identify the diverse needs of families who may receive services. See [Appendix A-1](#).

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A-1

Community Assessment Matrix

The community assessment describes the context in which a Head Start and/or Early Head Start program operates and is useful for ensuring that the right services are provided to the right population. This resource can assist program staff in coordinating their efforts to gather information required for a community assessment. The assessment paints a picture of the community and describes the diverse needs of families who may receive services. In addition, the community assessment covers the community's history, its economic and political scene, and the community's strengths, needs, and resources. Note: Italicized items are required by the Determining community strengths, needs, and resources, 45 CFR §1302.11(b)(1) Subpart A.

"Triggers" for Data Collection (Customize this list and add information not listed. What do you want to know?)	Information Source (Who/What agency or resource can assist you in gathering the information you need for your community assessment?)	These columns can be completed upon return to your programs		
		Responsible CA Team Member	Date Initiated	Date Completed
General Area Description – Demographics				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed service area—Geographic boundaries (size, counties, distinguishing characteristics) Governing structure Population and related trends Racial and ethnic composition Language spoken by families and children Gender, ages Household composition Economic activities Future trends Median income level Principal source of income Number / percentage below poverty level 				
Head Start ELIGIBLE Children and Families				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of eligible infants, toddlers, preschool age children and expectant mothers Geographic location Race and ethnicity Languages spoken Number of children experiencing homelessness 				

