Lesson Plan & Study Guide

Understanding Your Community

Part Five: Conducting a Needs Assessment

iFOLLOW

Working with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series

Seventh-day Adventist Church

Vervent

Center for Creative Ministry

Version 1.0 - 12/8/10

About the iFollow Discipleship Series
Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

Curriculum Development: The iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition curriculum development was lead by the **Center for Creative Ministry. General Editor:** Monte Sahlin; **Assistant Editor:** Debbonnaire Kovacs; **Directional Advisory:** Brad Forbes, Carole Kilcher, Ceri Myers, Cesar Gonzalez, Clayton Kinney, Curtis Rittenour, Dave Osborne, Dave VanDenburgh, Gerry Chudleigh, Jane Thayer, Jerry Thomas, John Appel, Jose Rojas, Kim Johnson, Nicole Chao, Paul Richardson, Rich DuBose, Shasta Nelson, William Sutton; **Pastoral Advisory:** Claudio Consuegra, Collette Pekar, Dave Hutman, Don Driver, Fredrick Russell, Jerry Nelson, Jesse Wilson, Leslie Bumgardner, Loren Fenton, Rebecca Brillhart; **Unit Authors:** Alberto Valenzuela, Althea Pineda, Corienne Hay, Debbonnaire Kovacs, Ed Dickerson, Gianluca Bruno, Gil Bahnsen, Greg Nelson, Jack Calkins, James Whibberding, Karen Collum, Monte Sahlin, Norma Sahlin, Pam Splawinski, Patty Ntihuka, Reinder Bruinsma, Ryan Bell; **Additional contribution** by Maria Ovando-Gibson; **Additional editing:** Dave Gemmell, Meredith Carter; **Graphic Design:** Mind Over Media; **Layout**: Paul D. Young; **Web Development:** Narrow Gate Media.

Understanding Your Community
Part Five: Conducting a Needs Assessment

This is the fifth in a series of six units designed to provide basic training in community assessment.

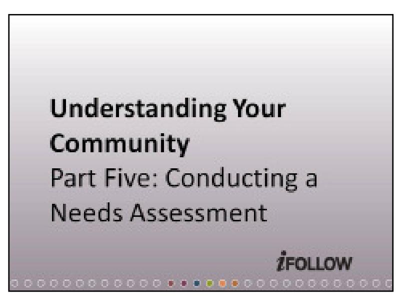
Learning Objectives

1. Understand the definition of "needs assessment"
2. Review the basic planning points necessary to conduct a needs assessment
3. Learn how to conduct a sample survey
4. Learn how to construct a survey questionnaire
5. Introduce the "focus group" method of research
6. Learn how to analyze the data gathered in a community needs assessment

Content Outline

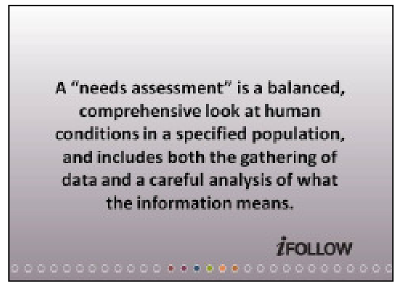
1. Introduction and overview
2. Planning considerations for conducting a community needs assessment
3. Random sampling
4. Development of a survey questionnaire
5. Methods of data collection
6. Method of analysis

Background Material for the Presenter



Demographics, interviews with community leaders, published reports all give suggestive information from which to infer the needs of the people in your community, but they do not provide hard, primary data about how people actually see their needs. What do the people in our community feel they need? What needs are the focus of their lives? What values drive their lives? It is this kind of hard information that is ultimately necessary to shape a ministry so that it has significant impact in the community, and to get the funding, mobilize the volunteers and other resources necessary to sustain it. A needs assessment is an intentional effort to get that information.

A needs assessment—as the term is usually meant by professionals today—involves more than simply gathering some information. It is more than a specific survey about a specific topic. It is more than bringing together two or three kinds of information. A "needs assessment" is a balanced, comprehensive look at human conditions in a specified population, and includes both the gathering of data and a careful analysis of what the information means.

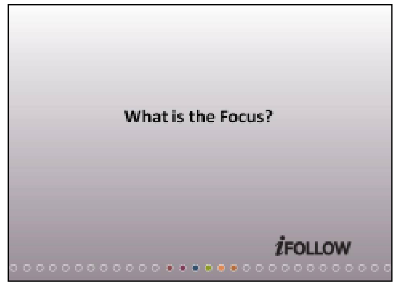


Some professionals will tell you that in order to do a real needs assessment it is necessary to contract with an individual or organization that has a certain level of education, expertise and track record in the relevant academic discipline(s). In fact, the Center for Creative Ministry can bring together a team of appropriate professionals from Andrews University and other institutions to conduct this kind of needs assessment for local churches. Of course, this is costly; these professionals will need to be paid about $200 per day for their time and knowledge, in addition to their travel to your community and the cost of materials and services related to the data collection methods used.

In many cases, hiring a professional to conduct the needs assessment is the best way to proceed. It is also true that paraprofessionals and community volunteers can conduct an adequate needs assessment on their own, especially when the needs assessment is related to developing the best strategy for evangelism and church growth and not related to obtaining funding from outside sources for a community service program. A number of community and church groups have done good work in conducting a needs assessment on their own, either because they lacked the funds to hire a professional or because they wanted to "own" the process and information that resulted from it.

This session is designed to empower and guide congregations and local ministries in the conduct of a community needs assessment. It is not only designed to be helpful to a volunteer group implementing a needs assessment; it is also useful to a group entering into a contract with a professional in terms of outlining the work that you want them to do.

What is the Focus?



Is the purpose of the needs assessment to get an overall picture of the needs of various groups of people in the community, or is it more narrowly focused? For example, have you decided to focus on the needs of single adults or the homeless or families with young children? A comprehensive assessment identifies the needs of each segment of the community, not a generic, overall set of needs. In reality, there is no such generic set of needs, just as there is no such thing as an "average" person.

The average age in your community may, in fact, be an age which no individual has. For example, if Kevin is 36, Ralph is nine, and Henry is three, the average age of these three individuals is 16, and no teenager has much in common—in terms of specific needs, interests and life patterns—with a 36-year-old man, or a nine-year-old boy or a three-year-old child. If we were to conclude that the needs of this group of individuals is based on the needs of the 16-year-old "average." we would completely miss the mark! The needs of a teenager are not the needs of anyone in this group. This is specifically why the results of a community needs assessment can cause a lot of controversy; the reported "needs" do not seem to relate to any visible group or individual in the community.

Part of what makes a comprehensive needs assessment complicated is that it must cover many different segments of the community, each of which will define their needs in terms of different values and social conditions. Handout 1 displays the segments identified in one small town in western Pennsylvania with a population of about 40,000. Larger communities will have a longer list of segments. Of course, a different context will yield a different set of segments. Some of these contexts will have longer lists of segments, due to a more complicated social setting, and some will have shorter lists.

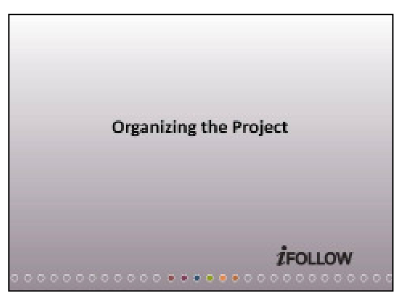
An early step in your needs assessment is to determine the list of segments in your community. Obviously, if you define the geographic parameters of your needs assessment more narrowly, then the compiling of this list will be easier than if you define it more widely. If your needs assessment is focused on one Zip Code area, for example, the complete list of segments may number only five to ten. If your needs assessment covers a 15-mile radius around your church, the list of segments may number 15 to 30. If an entire county or a large suburban town is the focus of your needs assessment, then there may be scores of segments on your comprehensive list.

Another early step in your needs assessment is to define what areas of life will be included in the study. Typically a needs assessment will focus on health, day care, family life, jobs or some other specific topic. The focus will be usually be suggested by the kind of ministry that is being planned. For example, if it has been suggested that your church school begin a day care center or preschool, then your needs assessment will focus on early childhood. Some of the methods discussed in earlier chapters are useful in obtaining a broad overview of your community. The results of these explorations can help to define specific topics that you may now want to explore in depth.

There is one way in which this narrow focus in a needs assessment can create a “blind spot” in your vision for mission. If you decide to focus only on religious needs, you will miss the large, unchurched population. In the past various questionnaires have been used by teams going door to door which asked only questions about the Bible and religious beliefs. The vast majority of Americans will not respond to this kind of focus and feel that it is a violation of etiquette. Whether we like it or not, religion has come to be defined as “private” in American society and it is considered by most people to be inappropriate to knock on a stranger’s door or phone them and ask questions about the person’s faith. Consequently, a survey that focuses only on religion will have skewed results reflecting only the views of the small portion of the community who do have a particular interest in talking about their religious beliefs.

If your needs assessment is primarily for the purposes of an evangelistic ministry and you want to focus on the spiritual needs of your community, you will need to ask questions about family life, relationships, stress, life events, values and ethics. This is where the spiritual life of the unchurched American is located in the contemporary discourse, not in the areas of religion, doctrine and theology. The mainstream of America has become “spiritual, but not religious” in its understanding of this aspect of life. (Gallup, Jr., and Jones, chapter 2) At the same time there are still pockets within the mosaic of American society where religion has the same role that it had in past decades. A more traditional set of questions could be used effectively in small towns in the Midwest, the “Bible Belt,” and Appalachia. Most African American communities also retain a much higher level of respect for and interest in religion than do most white communities.

Organizing the Project



Once you have decided on the focus and parameters of your needs assessment, there are several other basic decisions that must be made in order to organize the project. First, will it be done by a team or an individual? If an individual is to complete a community needs assessment working by themselves, it will take significant time. You may need to hire someone to do it, or you may find a graduate student who will do the work because they must complete a project of this nature in order to attain degree requirements. (Even if your project is to be done as an internship, you will need to provide room and board and local travel expenses for the intern.) You may have a retired professional in your congregation or find one through the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) who is willing to volunteer considerable time to complete a needs assessment for you. Or a mid-career professional may be at point where they are able and willing to use time between jobs or vacation time to do the project for you. And, if you get an individual to the project for you, they will need helpers for some aspects of data collection and data processing.

If a group of volunteers are to do your needs assessment, it will require very careful planning and organization of the work. Such a project may be beyond what a typical church committee can successfully achieve. On the other hand, many Adventist congregations have a number of people with higher education in the social sciences who could effectively complete an in-depth community needs assessment.

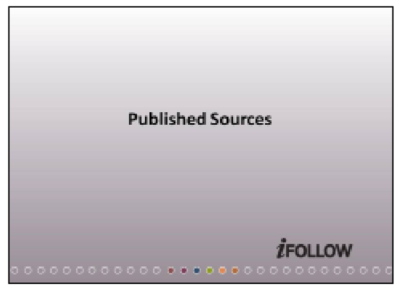
Handout 2 shows the array of methods that are typically used in a community needs assessment. In unit six, information has been provided on how to do civic leader interviews, and in this unit information will be given on how to use the other methods. Handout 2 also suggests the various tasks that must be completed in order to do your needs assessment. Handout 3 provides a planning worksheet for your project. First, a list must be made of the specific items of information needed to achieve the goals of your needs assessment. Second the methods necessary to get each piece of information and the sources of data collection. The fourth column provides a place to assign a team member to each task.

How much time will it take to complete a needs assessment? Of course, that depends on what is specifically involved in your project, but if a person is working full time, a typical schedule will involve eight to twelve weeks. If a group of volunteers is implementing the project, it will take significantly longer, perhaps six months or more.

How elaborate and costly is a community needs assessment? This kind of customized research and analysis is not cheap! When a needs assessment is prepared for someone interested in getting a license to open a nursing home, it often costs $10,000 to $40,000 or more. Christian radio stations regularly pay $20,000 or more to have a community needs assessment completed for their license renewal applications. Of course, if you have a group of qualified volunteers you can mitigate the costs considerably. Still, it will typically cost you $1 or $2 per questionnaire just to have survey data coded for computer analysis and another $50 to $500 per run of raw data tables. Focus group research typically costs $1,000 to $1,500 per group. It is important to carefully weigh the outcomes desired and carefully design the kinds of information to be gathered when you are dealing with costs of this type.

The last few paragraphs will very likely bring your thinking back to the fundamental question: Shall we hire a consultant to do a needs assessment for us or attempt to do it with a volunteer team? Or, you may be thinking shall I try to do it myself? If you hire a consultant to do your project, it will cost more, but you can come to an agreement on a solid schedule and know when your project will be completed. If you try to do it with a volunteer group from your church or ministry, or if you do it yourself, you will reduce the cost, but it may take a very long time to complete your project. The Center for Creative Ministry can help you develop a specific cost estimate for your project and put you in touch with the most appropriate and cost-effective personnel to complete the project. (Feel free to dial 800-272-4664 and discuss your needs with one of the specialists on staff.)

Published Sources



Any community needs assessment begins with gathering the existing documentation on the topic. It is unlikely that you are the first to study this topic in your community. In order to find the various studies, surveys and research reports that have already been completed, you will need to contact the major community organizations related to the topic. In addition there are three excellent resources that exist in most communities and include information on almost any community topic.

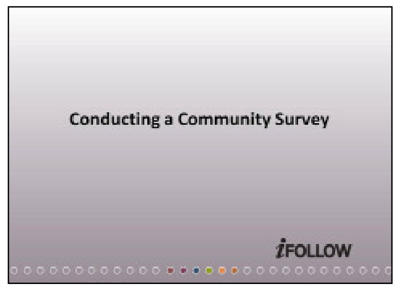
1. **The document collection at the public library.** Almost every public library has a set of official documents and reports with relevant information. These will be on topics such as "schools" and "day care" and "homeless" and "health care," etc. Some will be labeled according to the municipal or county governments. This collection can be a rich source of information. It is not uncommon to find useful documents that can be found nowhere else.

2. **Dissertation and thesis collection in the university library.** The state university or a major private university nearest to your community—in your metropolitan area or rural region—will have a produced a number of major papers by graduate students over the past decade or two that include high quality research about your community. There is a good chance that you will find some related to your area of focus. Ask the reference librarian for help in searching the index of the doctoral dissertations and masters theses.

3. **The library at the county or regional planning department.** The planning department for your county or the regional planning organization for your area is likely to have a small library—possibly including a vertical file—which is primarily for the use of the staff. If you talk to right person and get permission, they may let you go through this collection. It is often a source of very helpful information. You should offer to pay for making photocopies of the documents that you want to make use of.

A careful reading of the published sources is an important step before getting started with a community survey or other research methods. These sources will reveal what is already known about the topic and suggest the kinds of questions that should be asked in interviews and survey questionnaires. You may find a questionnaire that was used in wider geographic area or a different location that your community, but if you ask the same questions, it will provide the opportunity for you to compare and contrast your findings.

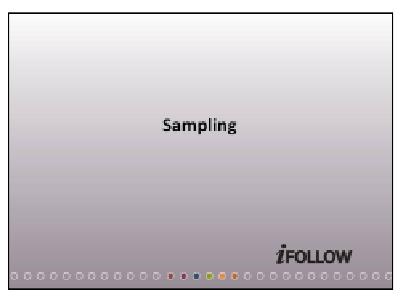
Conducting a Community Survey



Published sources and interviews with civic leaders provide secondary views of the opinions and attitudes of the people in the community, and they are subject to the particular bias of the sources. A survey involves asking people directly what they think. In order to get first-hand information of that answers specific questions, it may be necessary to conduct a survey in your community.

The Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University has developed a basic survey designed to give a general idea of the concerns that people are dealing with in your community. The Institute developed this in consultation with James Engel, dean of the school of communications at Wheaton College, and published it in Adventures in *Church Growth* by Roger Dudley and Des Cummings, Jr.

It is likely that you will find this basic survey too general for the purposes of your needs assessment and that you will need to develop your own questionnaire locally. Included later on in this chapter is information on how to develop and test a survey instrument designed specifically for your purposes. The most important part of a survey is **not** the questionnaire, but who you ask to answer the questions and how the questions are asked. These elements are called sampling and data collection.



Sampling—Obviously, you would like to question everyone in your community who is involved with the topic of your needs assessment. However, this would be too expensive and time-consuming unless the number of people involved is quite small. A carefully selected sample of the larger group will provide accurate information about the entire group at a reasonable cost of time and money. Sampling is the science of selecting a smaller number of individuals who can accurately represent the entire group.

In order for a sample to provide accurate information it must be selected randomly. It is not random selection when people are interviewed on the sidewalk or an interviewer picks a street and begins to go door to door. That is arbitrary or accidental selection and the survey results are completely unreliable. Random selection gives every person involved in your topic an opportunity of being included in your survey. Start by getting a list of all the people you should interview.

You can get a complete list of households in any community from a city directory. The public library will most likely have a copy of the city directory for your town published by Polk or one of a few companies that publish these reference books. They are too expensive for it to be worthwhile for you to purchase one. All of the streets in town are included in the book in alphabetical order and under each street name; each house number is listed with the names of the occupants and sometimes their occupations too. In order to use this as a source for your survey, you will need to define on a map the geographical area that you want to include in the survey and then make a list of the streets within that territory.

Another source for names in your community is the phone book, but it has some limitations. It does not include those people who have no telephone. This is an insignificant percentage in most communities, but in a few of the poorest communities across America it can be such a large percentage as to make this method useless. A larger percentage in most metropolitan areas will be those who have unlisted phone numbers. They, too, are not in the phone book. This tends to be the more wealthy and powerful, although in some urban communities, large numbers of single women also get unlisted phone numbers. You will have to decide, based on the percentage of unlisted phone numbers in your study area, whether or not the phone book can be used an accurate source for sampling.

How many people should you question? The table in Figure 1 (pg.9) is designed to be used as a guide to determine how many to include in a sample of your community. The column on the left— "Total Number"—refers to the total number of households or the total number of phone numbers or any other total that defines the way you will select a sample. The sample size guideline in this chart takes into consideration both missing units (such as unlisted phone numbers in a phone directory) and people who refuse to be interviewed. However, you must complete interviews with at least 80 percent of the sample in order for your survey to be reliable.

Surveys are built on a mathematical principal, the law of large numbers that says if there is a large number of people; a truly random slice that is quite small will provide an accurate picture of the whole. If the selection is truly random, it will work, although it does not work well in groups where the larger total is under 1,000. In a neighborhood with a population of 15,000, very accurate findings can come from interviewing as few as 200 or 300 people, if it is a truly random sample.

Figure 1

Total Number	*Sample Size*
100	80
200	133
300	171
400	200
500	222
700	255
1,000	286
3,000	353
5,000	370
10,000 or more	400

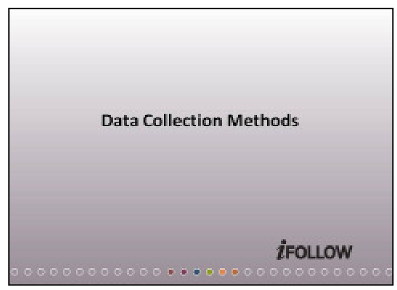
Source: *The Community Survey*, Iowa State University (1964)

One way to make sure sampling is random is to use a table of random numbers which is included in most standard references on statistics. There are also software programs that generate random numbers and one of these is now available on the Internet for use at no charge. (See Resources section below.) Another way is called "Nth name select." This is the easiest method to use. A simple formula is used to establish N and then every Nth name on the master list is included in the sample to be contacted. For example, if there are 15,718 households with phone numbers listed in the phone book in your community and you have decided to try to interview 500 of them:

15,718 households divided by 500 = 31

So, every 31st number listed in your phone book will be dialed. Each interview will be given a number of pages and told to count down 31 names from the first listing and then dial that number. Then, count down another 31 names and dial that number, and so on until the entire list is completed.

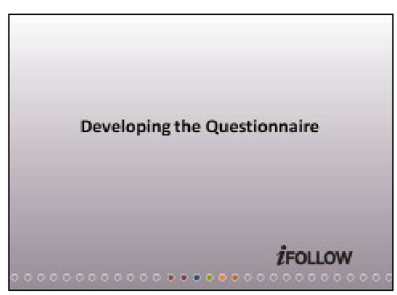
How accurate is the information from a survey? Because of the controversy which usually surrounds political polls, many people doubt the accuracy of sample surveys. This is really a monument to political manipulation because sample surveys provide very accurate information; politicians simply do not like to face the facts when their positions or personalities are unpopular. The accuracy of survey results are not in any way related to whether the sample as a percentage of the total. With about 300 million people in the United States, researchers can predict their behavior accurately by interviewing about 1,200 of them in a random sample with an allowance for sampling error of only one percentage point, plus or minus, at the 95th percentile of reliability. The 95th percentile of reliability means that if the entire group had been interviewed instead of sample, 19 out of 20 times the results would be within the allowance for error (one percentage point). The smaller the sample, the larger the standard allowance for error. Handout 4 provides a chart which can be used to understand the standard allowance for sampling error based on the size of the completed sample.



Data collection methods: There are three ways used to conduct a survey. The most common approach is to use telephone interviews because they can be done rapidly with a minimum of difficulty. For example, eight to ten volunteers can work from about 10 a.m. on Sunday morning until the middle of the afternoon and complete 300 interviews using a two-page questionnaire.

Door-to-door interviews are more difficult to complete in most neighborhoods. People are only home for a few hours each evening and on the weekends. Privacy issues are more and more difficult. In many communities it is considered impolite, if not intrusive, to knock on the door of a stranger. Refusal rates are much higher than with telephone interviews.

Sending a questionnaire through the mail typically gets a very low response rate. All of this data about sampling is based on the assumption that at least 35 percent of the individuals selected in the sample, preferably 50 percent, actually answer the questions. It is very difficult to get 35 percent of most lists to send back a questionnaire that comes to them in the mail. Research companies often include a dollar bill or even a five-dollar bill in the envelope to encourage people to send back the questionnaire. Graduate students will report that they had to do several repeat mailings to get an adequate response rate.



Developing the questionnaire: Another key element in a successful survey is writing the questions. This takes the form of a questionnaire or form used to record the answers given by respondents. If interviewers talk to the respondents, they follow a script to make sure that the questions are asked in the same way each time.

The most fundamental rule in developing a questionnaire or interview script is to ask only the questions that will provide the information needed. Do not ask questions that only seem reasonable or relevant. Begin by making a list of the topics that need to be covered in the survey, then make a list of the specific kinds of information that you want about each topic. Use the list of topics and items of information as the starting point in writing the questions. Include at least one question for each point on the list.

The first few questions should be easy to answer, get the attention of the person being questioned and put the person at ease. The first questions should not be controversial. Each question should lead up to the next item. All of the questions on the same topic should be grouped together instead of jumping from one topic to another and back again. At times a check-list of questions should be grouped together. Ask the open-ended questions last.

Each question must be simple, clearly stated and easy to answer. Ask for specific information, not generalities. Try to keep the questions short and to the point, especially if they are to be asked in a telephone interview. Each response must include only one idea. Otherwise you will not know which of the two or more ideas the respondent is responding to. Do not suggest or hint at the answer you want; that is both manipulative and self-deceptive. Stay away from questions that are personally challenging or "loaded" questions.

When a draft of the questionnaire is completed, it is important to get others to review it. Ask one or two individuals who have some expertise in the area of focus to review the questionnaire. Also, test it on six to ten individuals of the type you will be contacting. Indicators of poorly-constructed questions in a test include those that everyone answers the same way, those that have a high number of no answers or "don't know" responses, and those in which people say they do not understand the question. Listen carefully to the feedback you are given and refine the questionnaire accordingly. Handout 5 provides a tool for evaluating your survey questionnaire.

Focus Group Research

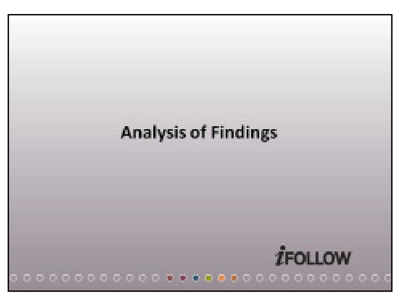
Another tool that is used more and more in community needs assessment is the focus group. This is an interview conducted with a group of individuals who have been selected to represent the general population and who are paid to participate. The idea is that paid participants are more likely to be honest with the interviewer. Often focus groups are used early in the process, before a survey is conducted, in order to find the types of questions to ask and the kind of language to use in asking them.

It is very important to understand that the focus group is a "qualitative" method of research, not "quantitative" research. That means that the statistical results are not reliable, but the experience of watching people interact in a group conversation about a topic will give many clues as to types of attitudes and views—and the emotions behind the views—that are present in the community. Both types of research are really needed in order to fully understand the dynamics and needs of a community.

Some church leaders have used the term "focus group" in a misleading way to refer to a kind of committee or brain-storming session. Professional focus group research is interviewing conducted in a professional manner, not a committee or brain-storming session. The participants are strangers to the interviewer, recruited from the community by telephone and paid for their time. A neutral location is used. The entire session is taped for transcription and word by word analysis. Trained interviewers are used and they work from a loose script of key questions, although they use their own skill and judgment in asking follow-up questions and clarifications. The interviewer never answers any questions that come from the participants and never betrays his or her own, personal views on the topic.

It is impossible for me to fully describe this method here in a way that would enable you to do it on your own. You can get help from the Center for Creative Ministry, which will supply professional focus group interviewers who have experience working with community groups. If you are interested in learning to use this method on your own, the standard tool in the market research industry is *The Focus Group Kit*, a set of six books by David L. Morgan and Richard A. Krueger.

Analysis of Findings

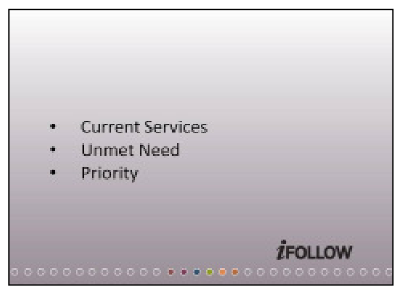


The most important part of a needs assessment is careful analysis of all of the information that has been gathered from many different sources and using a variety of methods. This is something like fitting together a large jig-saw puzzle. Tool 9 provides a worksheet which enables you to assemble all of the information that has been collected from many different sources and methods, and then complete an analysis of unmet needs. This organizes the information in a way that leads to recommendations, planning and goals. This worksheet can be used individually or with a team.

Need—In the first column on the left, fill in those issues and concerns that have surfaced repeatedly in published reports, interviews, surveys, and focus groups, or can be seen in a scan of the profile data. For example, you might write, "drug abuse."

Target Group—For each need listed in the first column, identify the specific segment or segments of the community who are most affected. Continuing the previous example, you might note, "teens at risk of drug abuse," and "adults, age 18 to 35 in need of treatment services," and "parents and families of these teens and young adults in need of support, help in prevention behaviors."

Data—List data pertaining to the particular need and to the target group(s) involved. How prevalent is the concern? How many individuals belong to the at-risk population? What are their characteristics? Again, continuing the same example, you might write, "number of teens in the community," and "percentage of at-risk teens," and "demographic profile of at-risk group."



Current Services—Describe the current capacity of the community organizations that have programs designed to address this need, including data about actual utilization of these services. Continuing the same example, you might write, "32 slots in parent-teen drug prevention groups at high schools; 10 slots used," and "56 slots in a after-school program with drug prevention emphasis; waiting list of one year."

Unmet Need—Assess the gap between the services currently available and the services needed. Is there a need for additional services? Are services sufficient in number, but not being fully utilized? Why? Is because they are poorly organized or not what people want? Again, continuing the same example, you might write, "total of 88 slots in drug prevention programs for an at-risk teen population of 700 means that there is a need for more programs."

Priority—Leave the last column alone until you have listed all of the issues and concerns you can think of and included all the information available about the target group, data, existing services, and unmet need. Then, decide with a decision-making group about which needs are the highest priority to you. This decision will be based both on the nature of the needs themselves and the resources available in your congregation or to your ministry. Which unmet need does it make sense for you to take on first? In this column you can write a number one next to the need that you agree to tackle first, a number two next to the need that might be a second choice, etc.

This last column provides the basis for specific recommendations in your needs assessment report. Be sure to describe the reasons why you recommend that a particular unmet need by the first priority, and reasons for other high priorities.

Handouts in this Package

1. Population Segments in a Typical Town
2. Methods Used In a Community Needs Assessment
3. Needs Assessment Work Plan
4. Recommended Allowance for Survey Sampling Error
5. Guidelines for Evaluating Survey Questionnaires

Additional Resources

Dudley, Roger and Des Cummings, Jr. (1983). *Adventures in Church Growth.* Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association. (On pages 80-82 you will find a basic survey designed to give a general idea of the concerns that people are dealing with in your community.)

Gallup, George Jr., and Timothy Jones (2000). *The Next American Spirituality.* Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications.

Hildebrand, David K. and Lyman Ott (1991). *Statistical Thinking for Managers Third Edition.* Boston: Duxbury Press. (On page 925 there is a table of random numbers that can be used in constructing a true random sample.)

Morgan, David L. and Richard A. Krueger (1998). *The Focus Group Kit.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. (This is a set of six short, practical books that includes all that is known about how to conduct focus group research.)

Resource Center

The Center for Creative Ministry is an information and resource organization affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America. The headquarters is located in Walla Walla, Washington, with branch offices in Lincoln, Nebraska, and Dayton, Ohio. You can reach the staff at research@creativeministry.org or (800) 272-4664. It has a website at www.creativeministry.org

Websites

A website used by researchers around the world provides a random number generator software system at no charge: www.random.org

Discussion Questions

1. Why must we know “felt needs” and try to meet those before attempting to meet the needs we believe someone or some community has, such as a need for Christ, or salvation?
2. How did Jesus model this attitude in His ministry?
3. What kinds of spiritual gifts are needed by the persons who will do the sort of surveying and analysis outlined in this unit?
4. How can we determine if we need to pay an expert to do our community needs assessment, ask an expert for help doing it ourselves, or just do it?

Handout 1

Population Segments in a Typical Community

1. Elite community leaders
2. Owners of small businesses
3. Middle management in the major employers, including city and county government, the school district and community hospital
4. Middle class families where one or both spouses has a professional career and higher education

   4-A. With no children

   4-B. With children in the home

   4-C. With children who have left home ("empty nest")

5. Middle class families where one or both spouses is employed in a technical or white collar occupation

   5-A. With no children

   5-B. With children in the home

   5-C. With children who have left home ("empty nest")

6. Families in which one or both spouses are police officers or fire fighters

   6-A. With no children

   6-B. With children in the home

   6-C. With children who have left home ("empty nest")

7. Farm families in the immediate vicinity of the town

   7-A. With no children

   7-B. With children in the home

   7-C. With children who have left home ("empty nest")

8. Working class families where one or both spouses is employed in a blue collar occupation

   8-A. With no children

8-B. With children in the home

8-C. With children who have left home (“empty nest”)

9. Families with incomes below the poverty line (but not homeless)

   9-A. With no children

   9-B. With children in the home

   9-C. With children who have left home (“empty nest”)

10. Single mothers with children, little education and no experience in professional or technical occupations

11. Single adults with no children

12. Single, aged adults living in their own homes

13. Residents of institutions

   13-A. College dormitories and fraternity houses

   13-B. Senior citizen housing facilities

   13-C. Nursing homes

   13-D. Youth Detention Center

   13-E. County jail and state prison

14. The homeless

   14-A. Homeless with addiction and other mental health problems

   14-B. Homeless, single males without addiction or other mental health problems

   14-C. Homeless women and couples with children

Note: No segments were defined on the basis of ethnicity or immigration status because less than one percent of the population of this town is in an ethnic minority group.

HANDOUT 2

Methods Used in a Community Needs Assessment

Method	Definition	Reasons to Use
Published Sources	Gathering and summarizing information from the census, university studies, market research, agencies, etc.	□Creates a base line for your other fact finding. □Easy access to information without duplication of effort.
Civic Leader Interviews	Interviews with public officials, administrators of community organizations and institutions, etc.	□Allows for detailed responses to questions, follow-up questions, etc. □Not expensive to do. □Can focus on specific issues by interviewing a selected set of leaders. □Easy to get a high response rate. Opens the door to future relationships. Your team gets acquainted with community leaders.
Focus Group Research	Small group meetings with community residents to hear views, opinions, anecdotes, experiences, and attitudes.	□Easy to arrange. □Is more direct than other methods; **but** is **not** a reliable sample of those who don't attend. □Lets the community know your group is interested in them and community needs. □Develops a consensus about needs and priorities.

Community Survey	Formal, systematic research about a defined population in a specific area: a random sample of residents is interviewed or completes a questionnaire to provide information on residents' health, social well-being, and evaluation of community needs and services.	□Provides respondents with anonymity. □Gets more up-to-date data than published sources. □Provides reliable data that can be generalized to the entire community sampled. □Results can be released to the media, gaining public attention for your efforts. □Does cost more than the other methods.

HANDOUT 3

Needs Assessment Work Plan

Item of Data	Tool to Use	Source(s)	Person Responsible

HANDOUT 4

Recommended Allowance for Survey Sampling Error

Size of Sample	1,500	1,250	1,000	750	500	250	100
Percentages near 10	2	2	2	3	3	5	7
Percentages near 20	3	3	3	4	4	6	10
Percentages near 30	3	3	4	4	5	7	11
Percentages near 40	3	3	4	4	5	8	12
Percentages near 50	3	3	4	4	5	8	12
Percentages near 60	3	3	4	4	5	8	12
Percentages near 70	3	3	4	4	5	7	11
Percentages near 80	3	3	3	4	4	6	10
Percentages near 90	2	2	2	3	3	5	7

Handout 5

Guidelines for Evaluating Survey Questionnaires

Question Content

1. Is the question necessary? Just how will it be useful?
2. Is the point already sufficiently covered by other questions?
3. Does the subject matter require a separate question or can it be integrated with other questions?
4. Is the question unnecessarily detailed for the purposes of the study?
5. Does the question adequately cover the material intended?
6. Does the language of the question make the point clearly?
7. Do respondents have the information necessary to answer the question?
8. Is it a matter they can report on adequately?
9. Does it call for information they either cannot give at all or cannot give reliably?
10. Is the point of the question within the realm of their experience or expertise?
11. Is the question written in their language and at their reading level?
12. Does the question need to be more concrete or require more specific information? Is it too general?
13. Does it help respondents recall information that they might not otherwise recall? (One way of doing this is to ask respondents to recall a series of events in sequence.)
14. Might the question elicit inaccurate or misleading responses?
15. Is the question biased in one direction without accompanying questions to balance the emphasis?
16. Is the question unfair or inaccurate in any way?
17. Is the question likely to elicit answers that will unduly favor one side of the issue ?
18. Is the question sensitive enough to respondents' gender, race, age, religion,

socio-economic status, etc. to prevent undue bias in responses?

19. Will respondents feel comfortable giving the information asked for in the question?

20. Is the material too private, or of an embarrassing nature, or otherwise likely to lead to resistance or deception?

21. Does the question put respondents "on the spot" or make them feel as though they were being "quizzed"?

Question Wording

1. Is the question likely to be misinterpreted or misunderstood?

2. Does it contain any difficult or unclear wording?

3. Are the words simple enough to be understood by the least educated resident?

4. Are any terms (jargon) used in a specialized way without be accompanied by an explanation?

5. Is the question's true meaning clearly distinguished from other possible interpretations?

6. Does the question adequately express the alternatives with respect to the point?

7. Is the question misleading because of unstated assumptions or unexplained implications?

8. Is the frame of reference clear and uniform for all respondents?

Answer Formulation

1. Is the survey well structured and easily understood, given the number of questions it asks?

2. Does the survey contain one or several unstructured questions near the end, to allow for respondent comments not specifically requested earlier?

3. Is the form of response easy, consistent, and suitable for the purpose?

4. When appropriate, does the question contain an "other" category and a space in which respondents can write an answer that would otherwise not be an option?

5. Is the answer to the question likely to be influenced by the content of the preceding questions?
6. Do earlier questions create a set of expectations that might influence answers to this question?
7. Do the preceding questions aid the recall of ideas that relate to this question?
8. Does this question become inappropriate if certain answers were given to certain questions?
9. Is there a natural transition to the question?
10. Does the question come too early or too late to arouse respondents' interest or avoid resistance to answering?