

# Needs Assessment Toolkit

#### Why a Needs Assessment?

A needs assessment is a systematic process used to understand and create a profile of a community school's needs. Without a current and comprehensive needs assessment, a community school is less likely to provide offerings or foster partnerships that effectively address risks and promote opportunities for all of its students and families. The purpose of the needs assessment is NOT to rigorously or scientifically evaluate the impact of individual programs, strategies and curricula, but instead to gather a wide range of information that will inform and drive decisions about the community school's programming and operations.

#### How was the Needs Assessment Toolkit developed?

This Toolkit was developed by the Children's Aid Society National Center for Community Schools in partnership with the leadership and staff of the Chicago Public Schools Community School Initiative (CSI), an advisory group comprised of representatives from key CSI Lead Agencies and the New York-based research firm ActKnowledge. The Toolkit builds on the collective strengths and experiences of all of the aforementioned and includes adaptations of the Plus 50 Needs Assessment Toolkit developed by the American Association of Community Colleges.

#### What's included in the Toolkit?

The Toolkit was designed to be user-friendly and as brief as possible. It is organized around the key steps of the needs assessment process, which are listed below and best completed in sequence:

1. Getting Started

2. Archival Data Review

3. Initial Analysis

4. Surveys

5. Key Informant Interviews

6. Focus Groups

7. Final Analysis

8. Reporting

Depending on your community school's practice, you may already have some of the above steps in place, in which case it is entirely appropriate to include those existing resources into this process. Each step is described in the same format. You will see the following under each:

**Tasks:** Key activities or strategies that should be taken

**Tips:** Best practice suggestions to consider and pitfalls to avoid

**Tools:** Worksheets or sample instruments that can be used to support the process

The Needs Assessment Toolkit is available in electronic (.pdf) format. Additionally, all of the tools are available in editable electronic format (.docx) and can be easily adapted to meet your particular needs.







# **Step 1: Getting Started**

Tasks	☐ Convene the Advisory Council
	☐ Revisit the Advisory Council's mission/purpose and consider whether to add members
	☐ Conduct a Readiness Self-Assessment
Tips	You should not need to create a new team to take on the data gathering and analysis
	responsibilities. Conducting needs assessments should be one of the core functions of the community school's Advisory Council. The process described in this Toolkit may serve as
	an opportunity to reengage key stakeholders in your school and neighborhood and activate your Advisory Council.
	<ul> <li>Consider the existing diversity of experience, skills and perspectives of the Advisory</li> <li>Council to help you identify which potential new members you need.</li> </ul>
	One person should act as the project manager to keep track of the overall process and keep team members accountable.
Tools	Building Your Team Worksheet
	Readiness Self-Assessment Worksheet

## **Step 2: Archival Data Review**

Tasks	<ul> <li>Gather and record key information from existing data sources (such as school suspension rates, after-school attendance, community health statistics, etc.)</li> <li>Manipulate existing data sources to deepen your understanding (determining the chronic absence rates of English Language Learners, for example, will require some reworking of existing data sets)</li> </ul>
	Complete the Archival Data Collection Worksheet
Tips	<ul> <li>Make full use of the School Profile and Early Warning Indicator reports provided by Chicago Public Schools</li> <li>As you collect and record each datum, new questions will likely come to mind, as might concerns about the accuracy of the data. Record those questions, concerns and other thoughts on the Worksheet.</li> <li>Add Need Indicators to the worksheet as needed and appropriate. Blank rows have been inserted for this purpose.</li> </ul>
Tools	Archival Data Collection Worksheet

# **Step 3: Initial Analysis**

Tasks	☐ Convene Advisory Council to review the Archival Data
	Identify the top five high priority needs that emerge from the review
	☐ Brainstorm particular questions that should be considered for the survey, interview and
	focus group steps
	☐ Identify the key informants to be interviewed in Step 5
Tips	Remember that this is an <i>initial</i> analysis and that you are not expected to have findings at
	this point. The purpose, instead, is to collectively identify patterns, see connections
	between the need indicators and begin to narrow the focus of your needs assessment.
Tools	Archival Data Collection Worksheet

## **Step 4: Surveys**

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Tasks	Develop surveys for key constituent groups. Surveys of students, parents and teachers are
	required, but others may be added.
	☐ Administer the surveys
	☐ Compile survey results
Tips	Questions should be mostly closed-ended (multiple choice, true/false, Likert Scales, etc.) and limited in number.
	<ul> <li>Paper vs. Online (using the method or combination of methods most likely to ensure a high response rate)</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>Use vocabulary and language that is appropriate for each audience. In all cases, avoid using technical language and terminology.</li> </ul>
	Particularly for youth surveys, you might consider offerings incentives.
	Decide whether to use a paper-based or web-based survey (or both). Each has its
	advantages and disadvantages, but web-based surveys are especially convenient because
	they can tally up and graphically present responses automatically. There are free and low-
	cost solutions out there. When using paper, it may make sense to record the responses
	on an electronic spreadsheet .
	Timing the administration of surveys to coincide with, for example, faculty meetings,
	parent-teacher conferences, after-school special events may increase the yield of
	responses
Tools	Archival Data Collection Worksheet (completed, from Step 3)
	Sample Surveys

# **Step 5: Key Informant Interviews**

Tasks	☐ Conduct Key Informant Interviews
	☐ Summarize findings
Tips	Keep interviews to 30-45 minutes long
	Decide whether you want the same person conducting all of the interviews for the sake of
	consistency.
	Do your best to frame questions in a way that elicits the key informants' interpretation of
	the data and perhaps some suggestions for addressing the needs
	Avoid making the informant feel defensive; keep the conversation focused on the ways in
	which students may require supports and opportunities, and away from what they
	themselves have or have not done to address those needs
Tools	Key informant interview Worksheet
	Sample Interview Questions

## **Step 6: Focus Groups**

Tasks	☐ Conduct Focus Groups. Groups including students, parents and teachers are required, but
	others may be added.
	☐ Summarize findings
Tips	Focus groups are generally most lively and effective when composed of 6 to 12 people
	They should last between 45 to 60 minutes. Consider your audience when scheduling the
	focus groups (i.e., evenings or weekends for working parents, in-school hours for teachers
	if possible)
	You will need a facilitator and a note taker. Do not combine these roles as it is
	exceedingly difficult to do both simultaneously.
	Prepare a scripted introduction and 8 to 12 questions in advance (samples are provided
	for you). Unlike with the surveys, questions in focus groups should be open-ended and
	should encourage participants to elaborate. Ask participants to follow up on and react to
	each others' responses. Stay away from yes/no questions.
Tools	Sample Focus Group scripts and questions

# **Step 7: Final Analysis**

Tasks	☐ Convene Advisory Council to review summaries of surveys, interviews and focus groups
	☐ Determine three priority need areas for the next 12 months
	☐ Review and brainstorm additional recommendations for how to address the needs
Tips	Advisory Council members should receive – in advance of the final analysis convening –
	summaries of the survey, interview and focus group results
	Schedule enough time to have a thorough reflection and discussion. If needed, schedule a
	second session to ensure completion.
Tools	Needs Assessment Analysis Worksheet

## **Step 8: Reporting**

Tasks	☐ Write Need Assessment Report
	☐ Disseminate Report
Tips	Resist the urge to over think, over format or over produce this report. Bulleted lists are
	more readable – and therefore more actionable – than narrative descriptions
	<ul> <li>Include completed worksheets from the toolkit as supporting material in an appendix.</li> </ul>
	The report itself should focus on your identified findings, priorities and recommendations.
Tools	Needs Assessment Analysis Worksheet (completed, from Step 7)
	Needs Assessment Report Outline