



National Center for  
**Community Schools**

# Assets and Needs Assessment Toolkit

## Why an Assets and Needs Assessment?

An assets and needs assessment is a systematic process used to understand and create a profile of a community school's needs. Without a current and comprehensive assets and 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 assets and 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 Assets and Needs Assessment Toolkit developed?

This Toolkit was developed by Children's Aid 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 assets and 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 Stakeholder 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 Assets and Needs Assessment Toolkit is available digitally and can be easily adapted to meet your particular needs.

## Assets & Needs Assessment Stages

### Step 1: Getting Started

<b>Tasks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Convene the Advisory Council</li><li>● Revisit the Advisory Council's mission/purpose and consider whether to add members</li><li>● Conduct a Readiness Self-Assessment</li></ul>
<b>Tips</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● You should not need to create a new team to take on the data gathering and analysis responsibilities. Conducting assets and 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.</li><li>● Consider the existing diversity of experience, skills and perspectives of the Advisory Council to help you identify which potential new members you need.</li><li>● One person should act as the project manager to keep track of the overall process and keep team members accountable.</li></ul>
<b>Tools</b>	<i>Building Your Team Worksheet</i> <i>Readiness Self-Assessment Worksheet</i>

### Step 2: Archival Data Review

<b>Tasks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Gather and record key information from existing data sources (such as attendance—both average daily and chronic absenteeism; grades; school suspension rates/behavior incidents; after-school attendance; community health statistics; median income; crime rates, demographics; culture and climate ratings; 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><li>● Complete the Archival Data Collection Worksheet</li></ul>
<b>Tips</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Make full use of the data reports provided by Local and State Education Agencies and other public and private sources (US Census data; collective impact initiatives; community action associations; foundations; etc.)</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>

<b>Tools</b>	<i>Archival Data Collection Worksheet and Resource Inventory Worksheet</i>
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### Step 3: Initial Analysis

<b>Tasks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convene Advisory Council to review the Archival Data</li> <li>• Identify the top five high priority needs that emerge from the review</li> <li>• Brainstorm particular questions that should be considered for the survey, interview and focus group steps</li> <li>• Identify the key stakeholders to be interviewed in Step 5</li> </ul>
<b>Tips</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember that this is an <i>initial</i> analysis and that you are not expected to have findings at this point.</li> <li>• The purpose, instead, is to collectively identify patterns and see connections between the need indicators and begin to narrow the focus of your needs assessment.</li> </ul>
<b>Tools</b>	<i>Archival Data Collection Worksheet</i> <i>Resource Inventory Worksheet</i>

### Step 4: Gather Voices - Surveys

<b>Tasks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop surveys for key constituent groups. Surveys of students, parents and teachers are required, but others may be added.</li> <li>• Administer the surveys</li> <li>• Compile survey results</li> </ul>
<b>Tips</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions should be mostly closed-ended (multiple choice, true/false, Likert Scales, etc.) and limited in number.</li> <li>• Paper vs. Online (using the method or combination of methods most likely to ensure a high response rate)</li> <li>• Use vocabulary and language that is appropriate for each audience. In all cases, avoid using technical language and terminology.</li> <li>• Particularly for youth surveys, you might consider offerings incentives.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Timing the administration of surveys to coincide with, for example, faculty meetings, parent-teacher conferences, after-school special events may increase</li> </ul>

	the yield of responses.
<b>Tools</b>	<i>Gathering Voices: Surveys</i> <i>Sample Survey</i>

### Step 5: Gather Voices - Key Stakeholder Interviews

<b>Tasks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct Key Stakeholder Interviews</li> <li>• Summarize findings</li> </ul>
<b>Tips</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep interviews to 30-45 minutes long</li> <li>• Decide whether you want the same person conducting all of the interviews for the sake of consistency.</li> <li>• Do your best to frame questions in a way that elicits the key stakeholders' interpretation of the data and perhaps some suggestions for addressing the needs</li> <li>• Avoid making the stakeholder 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</li> </ul>
<b>Tools</b>	<i>Key Stakeholder Interview Worksheet</i> <i>Sample Interview Questions</i>

### Step 6: Gather Voices - Focus Groups

<b>Tasks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct Focus Groups. Groups including students, parents and teachers are required, but others may be added.</li> <li>• Summarize findings</li> </ul>
<b>Tips</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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)</li> <li>• You will need a facilitator and a note taker. Do not combine these roles if possible as it is exceedingly difficult to do both simultaneously.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Ask participants to follow up on and react to each other's responses</li> <li>• Stay away from yes/no questions.</li> </ul>
<b>Tools</b>	<i>Sample Focus Group Scripts and Questions</i>

### Step 7: Final Analysis

<b>Tasks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Convene Advisory Council to review summaries of surveys, interviews and focus groups</li> <li>● Determine three priority need areas for the next 12 months</li> <li>● Review and brainstorm additional recommendations for how to address the needs</li> </ul>
<b>Tips</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Advisory Council members should receive – in advance of the final analysis convening – summaries of the survey, interview and focus group results.</li> <li>● Schedule enough time to have a thorough reflection and discussion.</li> <li>● If needed, schedule a second session to ensure completion.</li> </ul>
<b>Tools</b>	<i>Assets and Needs Assessment Analysis Worksheet</i>

### Step 8: Reporting

<b>Tasks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Write Assets and Need Assessment Report</li> <li>● Disseminate Report</li> </ul>
<b>Tips</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 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.</li> <li>● Include completed worksheets from the toolkit as supporting material in an appendix.</li> <li>● The report itself should focus on your identified findings, priorities and recommendations.</li> </ul>
<b>Tools</b>	<i>Assets and Needs Assessment Analysis Worksheet (completed, from Step 7)</i> <i>Assets and Needs Assessment Report Outline</i>