

Gathering Voices: Surveys

Community Needs Assessment Surveys and Data Collection

The following is an excerpt from *Community Needs Assessment: The Resources and Examples Your Organization Needs* by Angela Watters, originally published on November 3, 2022 (last updated on October 25, 2022). Sourced from Galaxy Digital website: <https://www.galaxydigital.com/blog/community-needs-assessment#collect-community-data>.

Your assessment should highlight the voices of those at ground level. So, what's the best way to gather these voices? Surveys!

Interviews, focus groups, and surveys are great data collection tools that will help you understand the perceived and expressed needs of your community.

Surveys are efficient at collecting lots of information, and they empower participants to get involved in community development. They can also provide both qualitative data (like observations, ideas, and feelings) and quantitative data (like statistics).

Collecting Qualitative Data

Survey questions that produce qualitative data ask open-ended questions, and may look something like this:

- *In what ways do you feel your community supports at-risk youth?*
- *What services and programs would you like your local library to provide*
- *What time, skills, or expertise can you offer as a community center volunteer?*
- *What parks and recreation services and programs do you enjoy? Which services are relevant to you and your family? Which ones do you feel need improvement? In what ways?*
- *Has food insecurity affected you or your family in the past year? If so, how?*

Qualitative data can provide your organization with a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that exist within your community.

Collecting Quantitative Data

On the other hand, surveys can also give you quantitative data. Quantitative questions have limited answers that can be tallied (or quantified), giving you a quick snapshot of a topic. It's also easier to measure, summarize, and track over time.

Survey questions that produce quantitative data may look something like this:

- *On a scale from 1-10, how well do you feel your child is supported by public services? 1 = not supported at all, 10 = my child is given everything they need to succeed.*
- *In the past month, how often have you used your local library's public services? Very often, sometimes, not very often, or never.*
- *How many times per month do you volunteer with the community center?*
- *How many parks and recreation services have you used in the past year?*
- *Do you feel your neighborhood has access to enough healthy grocery options? Yes or No?*

The drawback of this kind of data is that you may get a more limited understanding of an issue than if you were to learn about people's thoughts, stories, and ideas.

Types of Community Needs Assessment Surveys

You'll also want to consider the type of survey that best suits your organization's needs. Generally, there are three types of surveys:

- a. **Case Study Surveys** - These surveys collect information from a portion of a group of people that represent the voices of a larger group or community. Case studies are more in-depth and provide qualitative data and stories to help inform your assessment. They are effective in providing data on perceived needs.
- b. **Sampled Surveys** - These surveys ask a sub-group of people to answer questions that you provide. Sample surveys, when performed correctly, should reflect similar results if you would have surveyed the entire group, making sampled surveys more efficient.
- c. **Census Surveys** - To conduct a census survey, you will distribute your questionnaires to every member of the population you're hoping to learn about. Census surveys give you the most accurate information but will require more significant resources to conduct, especially if your population is vast. Therefore, a census survey is more effective when conducted in smaller groups, such as all parents at a particular school as opposed to all residents of a city.

The type of survey you choose will depend on the types of needs you want to assess, as well as your organization's capacity for distributing and collecting surveys.

Survey Resources

Kansas University Community Tool Box - Assessing Community Needs and Resources Toolkit

<https://ctb.ku.edu/en/assessing-community-needs-and-resources>

- Conducting Surveys: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conduct-surveys/main>

More than Numbers: A Guide Towards Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in Data Collection

<https://www.thealliance.media/members/more-than-numbers-a-guide-toward-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dei-in-data-collection/>

Sample: Illinois Housing Development Authority Community Needs Assessment Survey

<https://www.ihda.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Community-Needs-Assessment-Survey.pdf>

Sample: William Ramsay Elementary Needs Assessment Survey

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/9fz64oh9i8wy7nl/4.1%20Survey%20Example.pdf?dl=0>