



Community Report Card and Needs Assessment

A Community Report Card and a Community Needs Assessment are two similar methods for understanding and prioritizing community needs. The primary difference between the two methods is that the Community Report Card provides information on a wide variety of issues without indicating which issues are of a higher priority, while the Community Needs Assessment narrows the focus to several issues and gathers more specific information about each of the focus issues. The two methods are similar in that both include a community survey to understand community needs and perceptions, and both include research about community issues. Both methods also take approximately one year to complete and cost about the same.

Community Report Card

The Community Report Card is designed to provide basic information about many issues facing the community in one unified document.

Research

The Community Report Card includes a survey of community members to understand community needs and perceptions. This survey is normally conducted by telephone using random-digit dialing so that the survey results represent the entire community. The survey includes between 400 and 800 interviews and can be up to fifteen minutes in length.

The Community Report Card includes secondary research on many issues (60 to 100) facing the community. For each issue the appropriate local, state and national organizations are contacted to collect information about the issue as it relates to the community. The information collected provides a brief overview of the issue in the community along with reference sources for finding additional information. The issues are not prioritized or ranked in any manner and are grouped by topics such as; seniors, accessing health care, early childhood development, health and well-being, civic participation and culture, housing, education, economy, community safety and public services.

Pros and Cons

Advantages of the Community Report Card method include:

- Focus on fact-based as well as perceptions
- Data can be used to show measurable change in the community
- Offers a comprehensive view on many different topics
- Serves as a reference encyclopedia of data
- Helpful to many different organizations

Disadvantages of the Community Report Card method include:

- Provides some information about a lot of issues, but does not focus on any particular issue
- Data is not uniform – frequency of collection, etc.
- Provides information, not recommendations



Community Needs Assessment

The Community Needs Assessment is designed to provide basic information about issues facing the community, and then more in-depth information on issues determined to be the highest priority.

Research

The Community Needs Assessment includes a survey of community members to understand community needs and perceptions. This survey is normally conducted by telephone using random-digit dialing so that the survey results represent the entire community. The survey includes between 400 and 800 interviews and can be up to fifteen minutes in length.

Stakeholder interviews are also conducted with board members, nonprofit leaders, and government officials to assess and prioritize the needs in the community. These stakeholder interviews can be supplemented by focus groups in order to insure that the diversity of opinion in the community is realized.

Upon completion of the survey of community members and the stakeholder interviews and focus groups a facilitated half-day session would be held with community leaders in order to identify the highest priority community needs. Normally, this results in identifying about ten to twelve community needs, without ranking them.

The Community Needs Assessment then uses secondary research to better understand the highest priority needs. For each need the appropriate local, state and national organizations are contacted to collect information about the need as it relates to the community. In addition, best practices information about how other communities have addressed these needs is collected.

Pros and Cons

Advantages of the Community Needs Assessment method include:

- In-depth view of fewer topics, topics selected by prioritizing needs
- Researches best practices and solutions
- Interviews with people who have professional and personal expertise
- Qualitative and quantitative research

Disadvantages of the Community Needs Assessment method include:

- Only looks at up to twelve priority areas
- Prioritization of priority areas driven more by perception than by data indicators

