

Points for Consideration

Asset / Capacity Building Approach to Needs Assessment

Overview:

Traditional needs assessment approaches look at what is missing in a community. We use the asset / capacity building approach (also known as asset-based needs assessment) to identify what is available or potentially available to a group / community. This approach helps to identify the organizational, agency, community, fiscal, and individual people skills available. The approach is used to apply and build upon what has been identified to improve a community / group in a positive way.

The asset-based approach to needs assessment is a useful tool when we don't know enough about both assets and needs in a community. It is used to gather in-depth information on both assets and needs to improve the situation in a community.

The Process:

- 1) Identify participants (Extension users, non-Extension users, community leaders, etc):

Have worksheets for each discussion group

- 2) Have participants work in two different discussion groups:

Assets discussion group:

- a) Participants are individually guided to identify assets, capacities, and strengths
- b) Each individual clusters the identified assets into groups (e.g., educational assets, infrastructure, organizations, etc.).
- c) Individuals are asked to name the clusters and how they might learn about them (their location, their nature).
- d) Meet as an assets discussion group to compare and contrast what was individually generated.
- e) Combine the lists and discuss options to learn about each cluster and how to leverage assets.

Needs discussion group:

- a) Participants individually guided to identify community needs, issues, and concerns.
- b) Each individual clusters the needs into groups (e.g., education, health, transportation, organizations, etc.).
- c) Individuals are asked to name the clusters and how they might learn about them.
- d) Meet as a needs discussion group to compare and contrast what was individually generated.
- e) Combine the lists and discuss options to learn about each cluster.

- 3) Combined Large Group Discussion:
 - a) Assets and Needs groups meet together.
 - b) Discuss the identified assets and needs.
 - c) Make a plan for deeper investigation of specific issues / identify needs and available resources to meet the specific needs.

Advantages:

- 1) Creates more in-depth data than traditional needs assessment approaches.
- 2) Results are easy to understand (i.e., words instead of statistical measures).
- 3) Community members have ownership of the process.
- 4) Focuses on the positives in the community.

Disadvantages:

- 1) Qualitative data analysis and reporting can be a challenge for some.
- 2) Can be hard to find common meeting times for all participants for multiple meetings.
- 3) Getting people to change their mindset to think more positively (assets) instead of negatively (needs) can be difficult.

References:

Altschuld, James W. (2015). *Bridging the Gap Between Asset/Capacity Building and Needs Assessment*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Altschuld, J. W., Hung, H-L., Lee, Y-F. (2014, October). *Getting Started in Asset/Capacity Building and Needs Assessment Effort*. Skill building session presented at the annual meeting of the American Evaluation Association, Denver, CO.

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