

Navigating the Community Assessment Update

Community Assessment

Updating your community assessment accurately is vital in planning for program viability and in justifying requested changes in your program design models. These tips are meant to provide insight that helps you achieve your organizational goals.



1. Use Common Data Sources: Whenever possible, make sure to use the same data source that was used in the original community assessment. This is easy if your comprehensive community assessment cited its data sources accurately. If not, use the community assessment update as a way to revise your data links so that it can serve as a starting point when you complete your next update or comprehensive assessment. The best way we have found to cite information is to place the link to the data source in the document footnotes and include the relevant details about the sections or files used for your community assessment.

2. Use the Appropriate Data Source: There is an array of data available about community needs. One of the most important aspects of the researcher's job is to determine the most valid and relevant data. Using different data sources, reports, and studies that are only produced one time is usually the reason that data is not consistent across the community assessment cycle. When you utilize this information, make sure to also include other data from sources such as county and state data that is updated annually. Also, do not use the American Community Survey and 2010 Census interchangeably. The American Community Survey offers estimates of yearly population changes, while the Census provides the best count of the population currently available for the states and counties on a 10 – year cycle. If you are serving a rural area, Census tracts may be your most accurate count of children and families.

3. Use Comparison Tables: As you are updating your information, consider using a table that shows the results from the prior year in one column and the results from the new year in another. Add a third column that shows the extent of any changes that occurred. This will save time as you often will not need to update your narrative if you can create a visual display.

