

Guidance: Conducting a Needs Assessment

The needs assessment is a deliverable for the RCORP-Planning award and the foundation for your strategic and workforce plans. To support your effort in completing this assessment, we have included a guide that comprises five worksheets and a sample needs assessment template.

There are multiple ways to write and organize a needs assessment. The elements identified in this guide reflect what are generally viewed as necessary ingredients of a needs assessment. The guide is organized to assist you and your team in identifying strengths and possible challenges in completing the needs assessment early on so that you can take steps or seek TA to strengthen your planning process capacity.

As a reminder, your needs assessment should exclusively cover HRSA-designated rural areas, as indicated in your approved application. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to your PO or your TEL for further assistance.

Finding and Accessing Data

The engagement of consortium members and community stakeholders is a necessary process that encourages individuals from the community, stakeholder organizations, and service systems to collaboratively identify needs that are most important to local residents and to pursue meaningful strategies to address those needs. Establishing a strong spirit of collaboration among community stakeholders fosters joint ownership for the process. Community stakeholders, including persons with lived experience, such as: individuals who actively use drugs, individuals in recovery, individuals who engage in sex work, and formally incarcerated people, should be engaged throughout the assessment, planning, and implementation processes.

Needs assessment is a systematic process that involves the community in identifying and analyzing community needs and assets, prioritizing those needs, and then implementing a plan to address significant unmet needs. The process of mapping community assets and needs emphasizes available community resources and is not purely a deficit-based process. The needs assessment process can be dynamic and can identify unexpected stakeholders or partners to engage in the planning or implementation process. Community assets include human, physical, informational, political, and existing service resources.

The needs assessment should include both quantitative population data and qualitative descriptive data.

- Quantitative population data can establish a benchmark for the prevalence of, demand for, impact on, and gaps in services.
- Qualitative descriptive data are based on personal experiences, opinions, and perceptions that can illustrate priorities and values; these data are typically gathered from interviews, focus groups, photovoice, or town hall meetings.

IN SHORT...

A needs assessment is a picture of where you are now and what's available to help you get to where you want to go.

Readiness Tools

To complete the needs assessment, it is important to develop an overall data strategy and to decide which data to include.

The five readiness tools in this guide were developed to support your efforts to successfully assess, plan, and identify emerging consortium needs. These brief tools emphasize (1) planning consortium engagement (motivation), (2) determining necessary tasks and activities, and (3) identifying specific capacities (abilities) to carry out these tasks for the RCORP-Planning initiative.

Elements of these worksheets have been extracted and adapted from multiple sources including HRSA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, RAND Corporation, World Health Organization, and Wandersman Center. The five separate (but interrelated) worksheets address project implementation, consortium member and stakeholder involvement, needs assessment of populations of focus, needs assessment of the service systems, workforce needs assessment, and priority setting.

These worksheets are devices to raise awareness of the necessary tasks and associated capacity needs of the project team and/or consortium members. There are no right answers, and they are not intended to evaluate current performance. Share these worksheets with selected consortium members and your TA provider for review and discussion. These focused discussions can support project planning, decision-making, and identification of possible TA needs. When reviewing and discussing elements of these readiness tools, consider the following discussion questions:

- Which areas are currently your organization's greatest challenges and why?
- Which areas are your organization's greatest strengths and why?
- What differences might exist between your consortium members or stakeholders and your organization?
- What TA would be useful to your organization's efforts?
- Are there challenges preventing you from moving forward?
- How will you continue to track and update data?

In addition to the five worksheets, a basic needs assessment template is included to help you determine whether you have completed all the elements for the needs assessment.

Please be aware as you submit your detailed analysis to your PO, you must include the following:

- Opportunities and gaps in OUD prevention, treatment (including MAT), and/or recovery workforce, services, and access to care within the target rural service area
- Existing federal, state, and local OUD resources that could be leveraged within the rural community

If you have any questions, please reach out to your PO or TEL for further assistance.

Template: Readiness Assessment

Readiness Screening Framework adapted (with permission) from works by the Wandersman Center.

1. Consortium Member Readiness–Project Implementation and Consortium Member and Stakeholder Involvement

| Motivation | Degree to Which Stakeholders Want to Complete the Needs Assessment Process | Strength | Challenge |
|---------------------------------------|--|----------|-----------|
| Relative Advantage | Does this project seem better than what we were doing? | | |
| Compatibility | Does this project fit with how we do (or should do) things? | | |
| Simplicity | Does this project seem adequately understandable? | | |
| Ability to Pilot | What is the degree to which this project can be tested and adapted? | | |
| Observability | Is there the ability to determine that this project leads to desired outcomes? | | |
| Priority | What is the importance of this project compared with other things we do? | | |
| Task-Specific Capacity | What Is Needed to Complete This Task | | |
| Project-Specific Knowledge and Skills | Determine abilities needed to engage essential stakeholders; access, assess, and analyze data; negotiate priorities with stakeholder concurrence; and draft a set of plans. | | |
| Consortium Membership | Identify individuals from the community and stakeholder organizations who can work collaboratively to determine the needs that are most important to local residents and to pursue meaningful strategies to address those needs. | | |
| Champions | Activate well-connected persons to support and promote the importance of this effort. | | |
| Supportive Climate | Determine needed supports, processes, and resources to enable this project. | | |
| Interorganizational Relations | Establish relationships with organizations that support this project. | | |
| Population Representation | Identify persons with lived experience who have encountered inequity to be fully involved in this project. | | |
| Intraorganizational Relations | Establish relationships with individuals in the organization who support this project. | | |
| General Capacity | Our Overall Functioning | | |
| Culture | The initiative is consistent with norms and values of how we do things. | | |
| Climate | Participants are engaged in this process. | | |
| Innovativeness | Stakeholders are open to change. | | |

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| Resource Utilization | This project can acquire and allocate resources, including time, money, effort, and technology. | | |
| Leadership | Leaders can effectively engage, motivate, plan, and direct activities. | | |
| Internal Operations | This project is effective at communication and teamwork. | | |
| Staff Capacities | Staff comprises enough of the right people who can get things done and have specific technical knowledge to complete the necessary tasks. | | |
| Process Capacities | Meeting facilitators and interviewers are culturally competent and speak the language(s) spoken by interviewees. Facilitators and interviewers are trained in moderating interviews, including keeping participants on topic, facilitating concurrence, and maintaining neutrality. | | |
| Summary of strengths, challenges, and action items: | | | |
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1a. Needs Assessment–Populations of Focus: This worksheet helps you clarify the scope of the issue, important cultural factors, and demand for services. Reflect and consider whether the areas below are challenges or strengths for your initiative. Discuss your rationale with colleagues and your TEL.

| Task-Specific Capacity | What Is Needed to Complete This Task | Strength | Challenge |
|--|---|----------|-----------|
| Existing Data Sources | Identify and access state and county data (e.g., Treatment Episode Data Set, Statewide Epidemiological Outcomes Workgroup, emergency department [ED]/hospital records, criminal justice involvement). | | |
| Relevant Local Quantitative Data | Review data and estimate prevalence of and demand for services. Use data to support/inform possible community-level approaches and identify gaps in data. Take steps to avoid bias. | | |
| Relevant Local Qualitative Data | Use focus groups and key informant interviews to fill in where quantitative data may be unavailable. Use focus groups and key informant interviews to better identify and develop a profile of diverse populations, increase understanding of quantitative data, and minimize bias. | | |
| Essential Stakeholders | Obtain perspectives on the scope of the problem, its priority, and level of collaboration to define the cultural makeup of communities. | | |
| Persons With Lived Experience (including | Obtain input for a comprehensive profile of diverse populations and their needs. | | |

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| people who use drugs, people who engage in sex work, individuals in recovery and formally incarcerated people) | | | |
| OUD Consequences | Document incidence of overdose, child welfare and criminal justice involvement, communicable disease transmission, and other consequences. | | |
| Social/Environmental Factors | Identify risk and protective factors to determine and target underlying conditions (e.g., social, economic, environmental) that act as detriments or assets (e.g., transportation, employment, literacy). | | |
| Data Analysis | Analyze data from the perspective of prevention, intervention, treatment, and/or recovery. Identify prevalence, severity, and impact of needs, as well as demand for services. Take steps to avoid bias. | | |
| Summary and Communication | Summarize quantitative and qualitative data that are unbiased, understandable, and actionable and present them to stakeholders to support a common understanding of the problem and an approach to solutions and actions. | | |
| General Capacity | What Is Needed | Strength | Challenge |
| Knowledge and Skills | Staff and others have adequate skills to complete the above tasks. Staff have access to specific technical knowledge to complete their tasks. | | |
| Key Informants and Stakeholders | Key informants and stakeholders have been identified and are available. | | |
| Resource Utilization | Grantee has the ability to acquire, allocate, or leverage necessary resources, including time, money, effort, and technology. | | |
| Quantitative Data | State, county, or regional entity collects and shares relevant data. | | |
| Summary of strengths, challenges, and action items: | | | |

1b. Needs Assessment–Service Systems: This worksheet helps you determine whether the areas below are challenges or strengths for your planning process. Discuss your rationale with colleagues and your TEL.

| Task-Specific Capacity | What Is Needed to Complete This Task | Strength | Challenge |
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| SUD Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) | Identify access to care, current capacities, waiting lists, available levels of care, funding, institutional arrangements, assets, strengths, opportunities, gaps, constraints, and access to specific technical knowledge. | | |
| SUD Prevention | Identify existing prevention efforts, current capacities, strategies being implemented (direct or environmental), institutional arrangements, assets, strengths, opportunities, gaps, constraints, and access to specific technical knowledge. | | |
| Peer Support | Identify existing peer support networks or efforts, current capacities, institutional arrangements, assets, strength, opportunities, gaps, and constraints. | | |
| MAT | Identify access to care, current capacities, waiting lists, available levels of care, funding, institutional arrangements, assets, strengths, opportunities, gaps, constraints, and access to specific technical knowledge. | | |
| Primary Care | Identify access to care, institutional arrangements, assets, strengths, opportunities, gaps, and constraints. Determine the need for specific services, such as universal screening (e.g., SBIRT); targeted screening of vulnerable populations (e.g., pain patients, patients with comorbid conditions); and specific settings, such as patient-centered medical homes (PCMHs) or primary care and behavioral health integration (PCBHI). | | |
| Pain Care | Describe access to care, institutional arrangements, assets, strengths, gaps, and constraints. | | |
| Hospitals | Describe access to care, institutional arrangements, assets, strengths, opportunities, gaps, constraints, targeted services (e.g., universal screening, SBIRT) for all populations, and targeted screening of vulnerable populations (e.g., those in PCMHs and PCBHI). | | |
| ED and First Responders | Describe access to care on discharge, institutional arrangements, assets, strengths, opportunities, gaps, and constraints. Specify services such as first responder and ED OUD intervention, engagement, peer recovery (e.g., Anchor Model), universal screening (e.g., SBIRT) for all populations, and targeted screening of vulnerable populations (e.g., pain patients). | | |
| Mental Health | Identify access to care, current capacities, waiting lists, available levels of care, funding, institutional arrangements, assets, strengths, opportunities, gaps, constraints, and access to specific technical knowledge. | | |

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| Financial Resources | Identify existing federal, state, and local resources that could be leveraged and maximized. | | |
| Gaps in Needed Services | Estimate prevalence of and demand for OUD services. | | |
| Dissemination of Findings | Identify assets for and gaps in the service systems and summarize information. Consider service systems asset and need mapping. | | |
| General Capacity | What Is Needed | Strength | Challenge |
| Knowledge and Skills | Staff and others have adequate skills and specific technical knowledge. | | |
| Key Informants and Stakeholders | Key informants and stakeholders have been identified and are available. | | |
| Quantitative and Qualitative Data | Regional entities share relevant data and experiences. | | |
| Summary of strengths, challenges, and action items: | | | |
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1c. Needs Assessment–Workforce: This worksheet helps you determine whether the areas below are challenges or strengths for your workforce needs assessment and planning process. Discuss your rationale with colleagues and your TEL.

| Task-Specific Capacity | What Is Needed to Complete This Task | Strength | Challenge |
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| Workforce to Be Mobilized for This Effort | Identify the types of workers and areas of workforce shortage and surplus. | | |
| Necessary Core Competencies | Identify services to be delivered and necessary competencies for each type of worker. Estimate gaps in knowledge and skills. | | |
| Necessary Credentialing | Estimate service demands and gaps in the workforce (e.g., waived MAT prescribers). Estimate number of needed credentialed providers. | | |
| Adoption of Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) With Fidelity | Identify EBPs, identify necessary competencies, and estimate gaps in knowledge and skills. Identify necessary capacity building for sustainable EBP implementation. | | |
| Resources to Support Workforce | Identify training and TA resources that can support ongoing workforce development. | | |

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| Key Issues | Identify key workforce issues (e.g., no waived MAT prescribers, insufficient high-level staff, high turnover rate/low retention, inadequate delivery of EBPs). | | |
| General Capacity | What Is Needed | Strength | Challenge |
| Knowledge and Skills | Staff and others have adequate skills and specific technical knowledge. | | |
| Key Informants and Stakeholders | Key informants and stakeholders have been identified and are available. | | |
| Quantitative and Qualitative Data | Regional entities share relevant data and experiences. | | |
| Summary of strengths, challenges, and action items: | | | |
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1d. Needs Assessment–Priority Setting: It is important to recognize that priority setting is intrinsically political because it guides resource allocation. This worksheet helps you determine whether the areas below are challenges or strengths for your initiative. Discuss your rationale with colleagues and your TEL.

| Task-Specific Capacity | What Is Needed to Complete This Task | Strength | Challenge |
|-------------------------------|--|-----------------|------------------|
| Defined Scope of Priorities | Determine prevention, intervention, treatment, and/or recovery support. | | |
| Method for Priority Setting | Use a predetermined, priority-setting process and process facilitation. | | |
| Methodologies | Analyze quantifiable data. Use interpretive assessments based on views of informed stakeholders and data relevant to intended outcomes. | | |
| Values | Commit to equitable distribution of resources, transparency in the process, and stakeholder concurrence. | | |
| Concurrence | Use a defined process to facilitate consortium member concurrence. Include meaningful input from persons with lived experience and other community stakeholders. | | |
| Dissemination of Findings | Summarize priorities and present them in a manner that is unbiased and understandable and that supports actionable solutions. | | |
| General Capacity | What Is Needed | Strength | Challenge |
| Knowledge and Skills | Staff and others have adequate skills to negotiate this process. | | |

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| Key Informants and Stakeholders | Essential stakeholders participate in priority setting. | | |
| Resource Utilization | Grantee has the ability to acquire, allocate, or leverage necessary resources, including time, money, effort, and technology. | | |
| Summary of strengths, challenges, and action items: | | | |
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Needs Assessment and Priority Setting

A. Introduction/Background Information

Include a summary of the geographical areas addressed in this needs assessment, including community culture and history.

B. Vision/Mission/Planning Values

Example of your values may include transparency, community input, equity, and data-informed processes.

C. Needs Assessment Methodologies

Include strategies for collection and use of quantitative and qualitative data.

D. Overview of Results/Findings

- a. Assess findings for populations of focus, including a summary of quantitative and qualitative data from the perspective of prevention, treatment, and/or recovery. Identify prevalence and severity of needs, as well as impact on and demand for services. Summarize relevant context and conditions affecting populations of focus.

- b. Assess findings for service systems, including summary of existing efforts for prevention, treatment, and recovery; availability and access to care; assets and opportunities; and gaps

and constraints. Estimate prevalence of and demand for OUD services. Identify existing and possible federal, state, and local resources that can be leveraged.

- c. Assess findings for workforce, including assessment of available relevant workforce, areas of workforce shortage, necessary competencies to provide OUD services, estimated service demands, and gaps in the workforce. Identify proposed EBPs and necessary capacity building. Identify resources that can support ongoing workforce development.

- d. Priority setting will inform the strategic plan. Describe the strategy for building concurrence within the consortium and among stakeholders for setting priorities. Describe priority needs, issues, feasibility, and possible strategies to address these priorities.

E. Discussion/Conclusion