

Early Childhood Family Education

..... **SIX**

**STEPS TO COMPLETING YOUR
COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT
ON TIME**

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GUIDEBOOK

m MINNESOTA
EARLY CHILDHOOD
LONGITUDINAL DATA SYSTEM



About ECLDS

The Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS) is a free tool that combines data collected by the Minnesota departments of Education, Human Services and Health into one online, interactive database. This data integration allows users to view data from a school district or county in relation to data from other public programs.

About ECFE

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) is a parenting education program for all Minnesota families with children between the ages of birth to kindergarten entrance (and up to third grade if the district has a PreK-3rd initiative). The Program is aimed at parents/caregivers in an effort to enhance their parenting abilities and strengthen their children's home environment. ECFE is offered through Minnesota public school districts often times in partnership with other community or early learning programs.

About Your Community Needs Assessment

Your community needs assessment will identify the strengths and resources available in your community to meet the needs of children, youth, and families in an effort to build a community that supports and nurtures them. The assessment will focus on the capabilities of your community, including citizens, agencies, and organizations.

The Opportunity for Improvement

By completing your community needs assessment you will learn vital information that you can use to enhance your programming and services to best serve the children and families in your community.

Learn

- ✓ Program participation
- ✓ Issues impacting families
 - ✓ Services needed
- ✓ Other current programs

Act on

- ✓ Providing direction to your program
- ✓ Setting priorities and allocating resources accordingly
- ✓ Aligning goals and desired outcomes with strategies
- ✓ Professional development and continuous improvement

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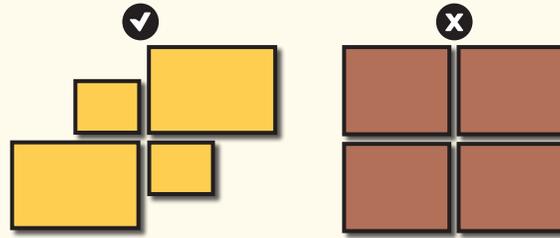
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1 + 2 = 3

STEP ONE: DECIDE YOUR APPROACH



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- Required components only
or
- Additional components

Your community needs assessment must address the required components mandated by state legislation, but it is up to you to decide which approach to take for completing the assessment. It is advisable to reflect on the added value of expanding your assessment to include other content and, if adding components, which additional information would be beneficial to your program/district.

1 **Required components:**

- Identify new and underserved populations.
- Identify child and family risk factors, particularly those that impact children's learning and development.
- Assess family and parenting education needs in the community.

2 **Additional components to consider:**

- Information on who participates in your program and how participants experience your program and/or services.
- Information on your community: geographic and demographic, in addition to how you are defining the community.
- Descriptions on how children and families are doing in your community.
- Information on other services and resources available to children and families in your community.
- Application of your community needs assessment on program planning and design, implementation and delivery, assessment and evaluation, etc.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

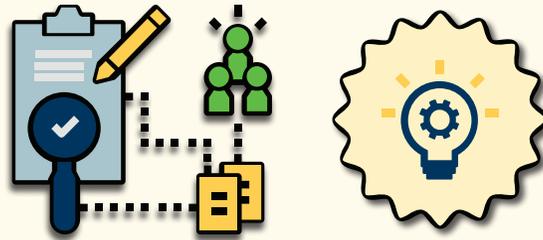
New populations in your community might be new families (e.g., a family with a newborn, a family that moved into the district).

Underserved populations may include families who share one or more of the following characteristics:

- Receive fewer services
- Encounter barriers to accessing services, such as economic, cultural, and/or linguistic
- Have a lack of familiarity with the educational system
- Face a shortage of readily available providers (child care, educational, etc.)

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STEP TWO: CREATE YOUR PLAN



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- Timeline
- Method: limited, expanded or mixed
- Team & responsibilities

The best way to ensure you will complete your community needs assessment on time is planning ahead and monitoring your progress through completion. Create your plan by answering the following questions:

1 What is your timeline?

Keep in mind that the deadline to submit your needs assessment summary to MDE is July 15 each year. You should consider creating short and long-term plans since the community needs assessment is an ongoing, constructive process. Make sure to give yourself enough time to complete each task, especially those that you have not performed before, and add milestones to ensure a timely completion.

Importantly, keep in mind that you do not need to conduct the same needs assessment every year. For example, one year the design may focus more narrowly while more components are added the following year. Or, the direction or focus of your needs assessment may change based on the results of your initial needs assessment.

2 What is your scope and method?

A narrow scope might just focus on the three statutory requirements while a broad one would go beyond the requirements to address additional issues identified by your program/district. With an expanded scope, the school district and/or community may want to be involved in the process so that

WHAT YOU NEED TO CONSIDER

When creating your plan, you want to practice some foresight regarding how your short-term goals can shape long-term goals. Consider how you would plan next year's needs assessment and in the years ahead. Answer the following questions:

- What will you do with the data collected?
- What other components would you like to add in the future?
- How will your needs assessment next year build off of this year's needs assessment?
- How will your needs assessment be tied to other assessments?
- Will you need to add team members to your planning?

data generated would be beneficial to more than just the ECFE program.

In correlation, your methods of choice may be limited, expanded or mixed:

- **Limited:** utilize demographic data from census records, relevant survey data, and informal feedback from community partners.
- **Expanded:** include data from more assessments, including ones that you would conduct, like focus groups, interviews, surveys, etc.
- **Mixed:** A combination of both methods that fits your timeline and resources.

3 Who is responsible?

This question is related to the question above regarding the scope of your needs assessment. Is one person responsible for executing the needs assessment? Or, is a group/team responsible? If there is data or information that would be of interest to other groups, you will want to include them in the planning and design. Moreover, if you are planning a comprehensive needs assessment, then a formal planning team should be convened.

4 What are the main tasks for which your team is responsible?

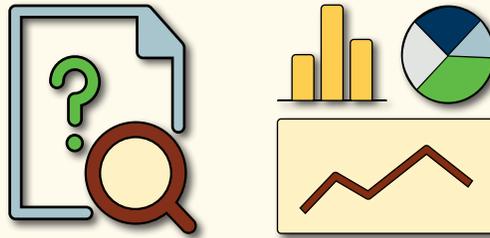
Be specific about the main tasks you are delegating to team members and their respective deadlines. Adding milestones to main tasks and sharing the timeline with your team will help you manage your plan throughout.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

A community assessment may be limited to a compilation of demographic data from census records, results of surveys conducted by others, and informal feedback from community partners. Or, assessments may be expanded to include information collected through focus group discussions, town meetings, stakeholder interviews, and telephone or mailed surveys to partnership members and the community.



STEP THREE: DEFINE YOUR SCOPE



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- What you need to know and why
- Key terms to define
- Data to collect

When it comes to designing and implementing programming and services, you must first understand the needs of the families and parents in your district/ community. In this step you will detail how you will get the information you need.

1 **Determine which specific information inherent to the required and additional components will be included in your assessment.**

Specify the information you need by making the right questions related to each component, such as:

Regarding participation:

- Are we serving a representative sample of our population?
- Who attends our program?
- Who seems to be most engaged in our program? Why?
- Who attends an event or class but does not continue with program?

Regarding your program:

- Are we providing targeted services where they are most needed?
- Are we tailoring our classes and services to meet the needs of parents and families in our community?
- How do parents and families experience our program (e.g. facilities, staff, classes, services, etc.)?
- What risk factors exist in our community that impact children's learning?

WHAT YOU NEED TO DEFINE

It is essential that you define key terms in your needs assessment, particularly those that have multiple meanings. For example, how are you defining the term “community?” Is this a city, school district area, neighborhood, group of people, etc.?

Other terms that may be beneficial to define include:

- Parent
- Family
- Needs assessment
- Targeted services
- Risks

- What risk factors have our kindergarten teachers found?

Regarding children and families in your community:

- Who are the children that struggle in our preschool, kindergarten, etc.?
- What puts a child “at-risk” in our community?
- What do parents and families want for their children?
- How does your organization determine how well children are doing?
- How do other organizations determine how well children are doing?
- What would help families in their role of educating and parenting?
- What do parents want to know? What are the most common topics?
- Where do families go for support and information?
- What types of support and resources do families want/need?
- What are the strengths of families in our community?

Regarding other constituents:

- Who serves on our parent advisory council? On the district PTO/PTA?
- Who volunteers in our program? In the district?

Regarding other services in your community:

- Who else in your school district works with families?
- Who works with children and families in our community?
- What programs and services do parents and families access?

WHAT YOU NEED TO COLLECT

District-level data on:

Risk factors affecting families:

- First birth to unmarried mother
- Sole-parent families
- Parent under age 20
- Divorce
- Family violence
- Low parent education
- Rate of families with a member deployed in the military

Risk factors affecting your community:

- Mobility rates
- Crime rates
- Teenage pregnancy
- Health risks
- Drug and alcohol use

2 Determine the data you need to collect

For each question you generate, identify data elements that will need to be collected in order to address them. Some elements will require collecting raw information from direct sources by:

- Interviewing parents and families who are attending, or who have attended, your program to highlight the strengths of your program and identify weaknesses.
- Interviewing parents and families who have not attended your program to find out their needs.
- Interviewing parents on their parenting experience.

Other elements will require collecting data and utilizing data from community partners, such as district-level data (e.g. assessments, surveys, reports, student behavior, etc.).

Use data that tells you how children are doing in your community. This may be related to health, learning, school readiness, special needs, etc. The best data to use would be data you want to impact. For example, a district may have data on kindergarten attendance rates, finding that children who are frequently absent struggle with reading and math.

Finally, list community professionals/leaders who work with parents/families and collect information on other family resources in your community.

WHAT YOU NEED TO COLLECT

Who resides in your community :

- Race/ethnicity of families and children
- Number of immigrant families
- Number of teenage parents
- Number of mothers in the labor force
- Poverty rate for families
- Mobility rate for families in your community
- Child poverty rate
- Child health information
- Number of single-parent households
- Child maltreatment rates
- Number of children ages 0-5 living in the community
- Unemployment rates

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STEP FOUR: CONDUCT THE ASSESSMENT



- Gather data: use listed resources
- Review data collected
- Analyze data according to scope

Your data collection this year is a first step in what should be ongoing data collection and analysis. Next year, you may decide to revisit and update data you previously collected, or you may decide that you need to collect new information.

1 Gather data

There are multiple resources you can use to collect data for your assessment. Refer to the list on the right for your data collection and follow these tips:

- Use Minnesota Compass to find the profile of your city/cities.
- Use the Minnesota Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS) for district-level data and census data from the American Community Survey.
- Use Minnesota Report Card on the MDE website. Click on My School, add your school district, and then click on any of the reports to find information.
- Contact the local public health agency in your county as they are required to complete a Community Needs Assessment (CHA) and Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) once every five years.
- Contact your Head Start partner. Head Start programs are required to do community assessments every three years.

2 Review and analyze the data and information collected

Simply stated, the purpose of reviewing and analyzing your data is to investigate what your data means. For example, what does it say about the community, your participants, your program, etc.?

WHERE TO COLLECT DATA

Minnesota Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System (ECLDS)
ecls.mn.gov

Minnesota Department of Education - Data Center
education.state.mn.us/MDE/Data

Minnesota Compass
mncompass.org

American Community Survey
census.gov/acs

Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics
childstats.gov

Child Trends DataBank
childtrends.org/databank

Data.Gov
www.data.gov/education

When conducting your data analysis, keep in mind the purpose of ECFE, the goals of your district and why your program is analyzing information. Keep your analysis within the scope you initially selected and aim to provide answers to the questions you proposed. You may, for example:

- Compare the Minnesota Compass profile of your city to your ECFE participant data. Are there populations on the profile that you are underserving compared to your ECFE participants?
- Analyze population data to determine possible targets to your services.
- Analyze class offerings and services to determine if they are meeting the needs of parents and families in your community. Identify gaps.
- Analyze achievement comparisons for subgroups.
- Analyze early childhood screening data.
- Analyze children receiving special services.
- Analyze risk factors in your community.
- Review key information provided through interviews and focus groups to identify opportunities and risks.

3 Identify where your program stands in comparison to other services:

This analysis will help you determine the capacity of programs, demand and need, the opportunities for planning the services and supports that are most needed by families and children, and potential partnerships for more comprehensive services.

WHERE TO COLLECT DATA

Data Quality Campaign
dataqualitycampaign.org

KIDS COUNT Data Center
datacenter.kidscount.org

Minnesota Report Card
rc.education.state.mn.us

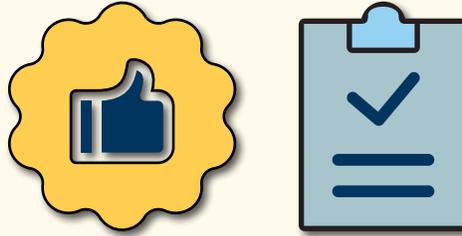
National Center for Education Statistics
nces.ed.gov

The Early Childhood Data Collaborative
ecedata.org

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
naeyc.org



STEP FIVE: TAKE ACTION



- Make specific recommendations to improve your program
- Propose action plan

Here are a few steps to turn your community needs assessment into an action plan:

1 Summarize your findings:

Create a brief summary that is easy to understand and will make excellent talking points when presented in bulleted or numbered form. A one-page executive summary can be useful for communicating with your constituents and provides a clear basis for your proposed recommendations.

2 Report your results:

Start by describing the scope of your assessment, what you aimed to measure and the tools you used to gather data and information. Be specific on the methodology for conducting quality research (focus groups and interviews) and sources of data used. External documents should also be referenced. No student/participant names should ever be used in reports.

Describe in simple language the results and conclusions of your assessment.

3 Make specific recommendations:

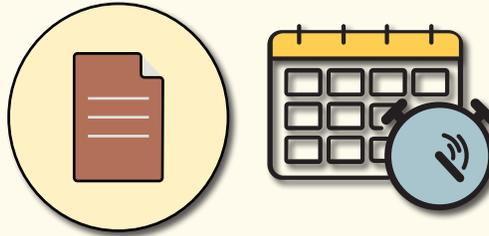
The content of your community needs assessment should reflect a structured decision-making process that allows for allocating limited resources in ways where they will have the most impact. Establishing priorities of recommended actions will guide you when designing an action plan for short, middle, and long-term goals.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

When creating your action plan, make sure to:

- Propose measurable goals
- Set up priorities
- Propose strategies to meet these goals
- Establish a timeline for action
- Manage your resources in terms of budget, time, and team capacity
- Describe a method for evaluating your strategies

STEP SIX: SHARE YOUR ASSESSMENT



- Submit your assessment summary to the Minnesota Department of Education
- Deadline: **July 15**

Communicating the results of your community needs assessment may take different forms depending on your audience. Keep in mind the following:

1 Your constituents have different priorities and relate with your program in different ways:

Talk to their needs and highlight what they may find the most important themes in your planning.

2 Identify which constituents matter the most to your program and why:

This will help you design your message regarding the results of your assessment and action plan.

Have you identified new partnerships and opportunities for delivering a solution to a need in your community? Think of how you would approach this new partnership.

Are you recommending a strategy to provide services to unreached populations? How are you going to frame the need for this service and the benefits for launching it?

3 Celebrate your successes:

Your work is important and hard to do. Just as you identify needs and communicate about them, take time to acknowledge your achievements and include them in your assessment summary.

YOUR DEADLINE

Submit your assessment summary to the Minnesota Department of Education by **July 15** each year.

- Districts submit narrative summaries demonstrating their completion of the assessment.
- It is recommended that you tie your needs assessment to broader initiatives (e.g. World's Best Workforce requirements, PreK-3rd Grade initiative, ECFE 2019-24 Enhancement Areas, community initiatives, etc.).
- If your school has been identified for targeted support, connect your ECFE community needs assessment work with your comprehensive needs assessment.



We are pleased to hear from you.

We hope this guidebook has been useful to you. If you have questions regarding your community needs assessment, please email Mike Brown to mike.p.brown@state.mn.us

Get in touch.

If you are interested in extending your data proficiency with an ECLDS presentation or training, please send us an email to ecls.support@state.mn.us



ecadmin.wikidot.com/ecfe-needs-assessment

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