

MCP²

Multidisciplinary
Collaborative Primary
Maternity Care Project

Projet de soins
primaires obstétricaux
concertés



The Multidisciplinary Collaborative

Primary Maternity Care Model

Module 1

Conducting an Environmental Scan

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Conducting an Environmental Scan

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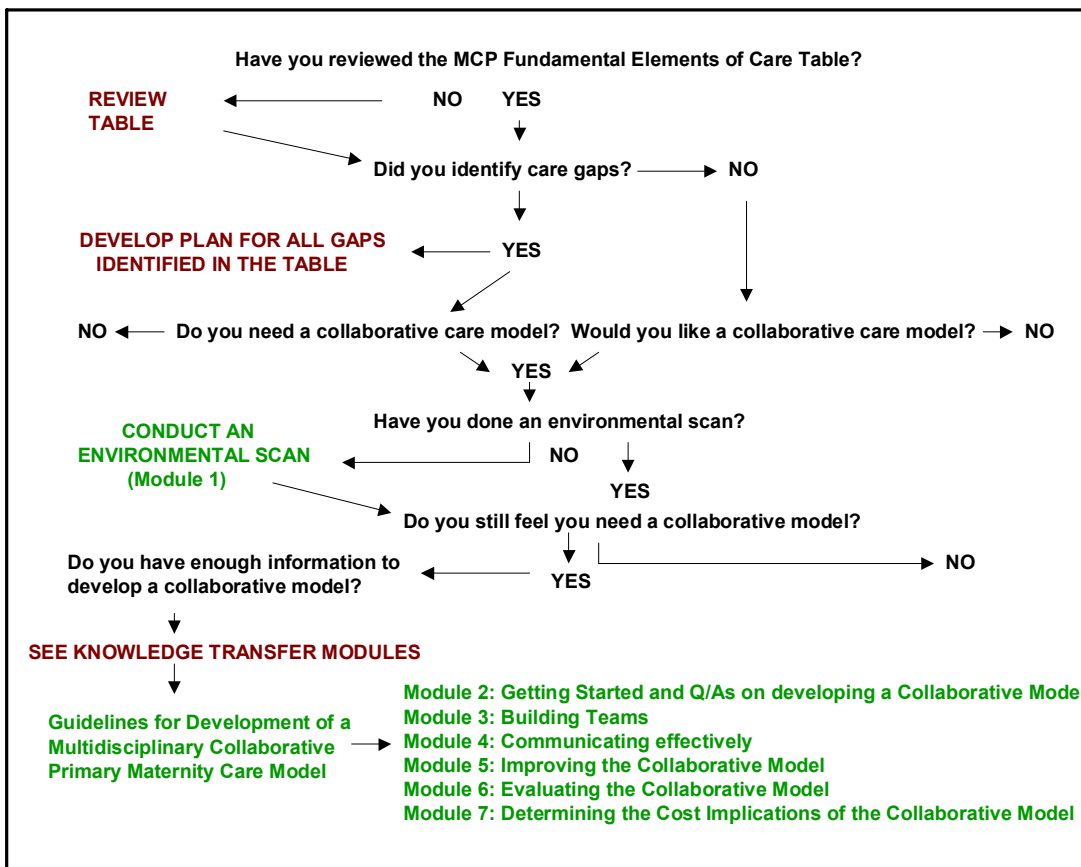
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Conducting an Environmental Scan

A Systemic Approach to Change

Systemic change is a cyclical process in which the impact of change on all parts of the whole and their relationships to one another are taken into consideration. The systemic change brought about by developing a MCPMC model offers an opportunity to enact change that moves beyond thinking about single problems and single solutions, or about specific individuals and individual organizations.

The logic behind this knowledge transfer module and the six other modules (shown in the diagram below) is that key stakeholders such as the professionals in the model and government decision-makers have a consistent frame of reference for the model's implementation in the respective communities.



The MCPMC model embraces systems thinking. Systemic change entails working with stakeholders throughout the system. Essential steps for systematic change are listed here.

Seven Essential Steps for Making Systematic Changes

1. Determine the “*to be*” state: create a vision of what you want the future to look like
2. Take stock of the **current situation** – define the “as is” state
3. Determine what is working and what is not working – identify strengths and weaknesses of the current system in light of the vision
4. Select the “*vital few*” – target several priority items for improvement
5. Create a project plan to address priority items and to measure success
6. Evaluate the plan on an ongoing basis to assess progress and revise actions as needed
7. Continuously take stock and use feedback to revisit the vision and begin the cycle again when the action cycle is completed (celebrates successes and review and adjust).

An environmental scan examines the current situation and seeks to determine what is working and what is not – the ‘*as is*’ state above. It can take in a variety of different viewpoints but should be objective and impartial to fully determine the extent to which needs are being met in the community. Balanced with this is the sense of the ‘to be’ state. Operationalizing this *To Be* state are the mission, vision and values underlying the model. We describe these briefly before getting into the details of environmental scans.

Conducting an Environmental Scan

An environmental scan is an important part of any change strategy because it provides essential contextual information for charting a future course of action. The purpose of the scan is to obtain important contextual facts and any new relevant information to assist in planning and model development.

An understanding of the maternity care environment is gained from a scan of internal and external factors and trends that may influence the organization or individuals developing the new collaborative model. A typical scan culminates in a report that captures a view of the environment around the individuals or organization developing the MCPMC model.

The scan can be as broad or as deep as the team decides. The key thing is to be sure that all aspects of the maternity care environment have been looked at in an objective, systematic way.

The scan:

- ☞ fosters an understanding of the potential effects of change on organizations
- ☞ obtains information that can be used in forecasting needs
- ☞ starts to develop expectations as to how the changes will contribute to improving the primary maternity care environment.

Definitions

An environmental scan is an information acquisition activity (see Aguilar 1967).

There are many definitions of an 'environmental scan'. For example:

'An environmental scan is an analysis and evaluation of internal conditions and external data and factors that affect the organization.'

www.gov.sk.ca/finance/accountability/2006/keyterms.htm

An environmental scan 'is when you develop 'an understanding of the current environment in a particular field or subject area by identifying and obtaining information from key informants and other resources. The aim is to identify trends, gaps and issues as a basis for future planning'. www.rwjf.org/reports/npreports/hcrig.html

'Environmental scanning is the internal communication of external information about issues that may potentially influence an organization's decision-making process. Environmental scanning focuses on the identification of emerging issues, situations, and potential pitfalls that may affect an organization's future. ... In essence, environmental scanning is a method for identifying, collecting, and translating information about external influences into useful plans and decisions'.

(Kendra S. Albright, "Environmental Scanning: Radar for Success", *Information Management Journal* 38, 3, May/June 2004:38)

Nine Steps for Conducting an Environmental Scan

1. Decide which level of scanning commitment is best suited to your needs.

Scans can be irregular, periodic, or continuous. Irregular or periodic scans address the immediate needs for information about the primary maternity care environment. If you were to choose to create a continuous scanning system it will require much more effort and resources compared to a periodic environmental scan.

2. Identify the key individuals that should be interviewed (ideally the interviews should be conducted face-to-face).

It is important to get as many different viewpoints as possible as this will create a stronger information base and will be politically expedient. Often a quick way to get started with a periodic scan is to interview key decision-makers and other knowledgeable individuals regarding their views of the most critical information, trends and developments that affect the primary maternity care environment.

3. Develop a set of generic questions that will be consistently asked when doing the interviews.
4. Identify who will be conducting the interviews.
5. Establish a time frame in which the interviews will be conducted.

Ensure some degree of flexibility for unexpected changes in interview scheduling and the fact that other individuals may be strongly recommended by those who are first contacted for interviews.

6. At the same time as conducting the interviews be looking for any other sources of information that can be integrated into your environmental scan (e.g., local, provincial or federal government reports or data, reports from community organizations, recent annual plans from various health organizations and so on).
7. While conducting this first round of the environmental scan, begin planning for conducting focus groups with different stakeholder groups.
8. Once all the information is collected prepare a report to bring the various strands of data together.
9. Disseminate the report and make presentations to affected parties to seek further input and to encourage further discussions on the potential model development.

Tip! Be transparent and open with the whole process. Be sure to engage all affected parties.

Things to consider – Collecting Information – the ‘data’

Interviews and focus groups are an integral component because they provide an opportunity for the model development team to gain first hand input from affected groups (e.g., expecting mothers, those who have recently had babies, specific cultural or ethnic groups, different health professions and provider organizations, government representatives, hospitals, and so on).

The list of stakeholder groups could be quite significant. There may have to be consideration of striking a balance between a comprehensive face-to-face consultation and more fiscally pragmatic approaches to obtaining the same information (e.g., letters requesting input or responses on several questions). If such decisions are required the team developing the model should establish criteria for determining who should be consulted face-to-face and who should be asked to submit information. There are always politics in any such situations.

Another method for collecting information is through a survey, which could be administered by mail, over the telephone or through email or an Internet website.

There are many different options and advantages and disadvantages with each. Like the development of the interview questions, the survey questions should be directly relevant to your own information needs. There are proven approaches for conducting a survey and many websites providing advice on how to construct and analyze surveys (see, for example, the list of websites at end of this module).

Conducting a Needs Assessment

An important component of the scan is conducting a needs assessment. While an environmental scan is essentially an information acquisition activity, a needs assessment is much more specific; collecting information that will support decision-makers to identify and respond to the **needs of populations or groups of individuals requiring care**. In our case this refers to women requiring primary maternity care services in the community.

This section describes the key elements of a Needs Assessment. Needs assessments:

- ☞ Contribute to policy development
- ☞ Support resource development or allocation
- ☞ Achieve consensus among different stakeholder groups
- ☞ Develop a knowledge base about need for services.

Definitions

There are many definitions of a Needs Assessment: Good examples include the following:

Evaluation of the requirements or demands for health services by a population or community. www.tricare.osd.mil/mhsophsc/mhs_supportcenter/Glossary/Ng.htm

A systematic process to determine the service needs of a defined population; a definition of the extent of need, available services, and service gaps by population and geographic area. www.hivportland.org/resources/acronyms.html

A formal process – which is the first step in a community health improvement process – of identifying problems and assessing the community’s capacity to address health and social service needs. Examples include Assessment Protocol for Excellence in Public Health, Planned Approach to Community Health, Healthy Cities, and Model Standards. www.phdatastandards.info/knowresources/tutorials/glossary.htm

‘The process of determining, analyzing and prioritizing needs and in turn, identifying and implementing solution strategies to resolve high-priority needs’ (Altschuld and Witkin, 2000: 253)

There is no single or preferred approach to conducting a needs assessment. A needs assessment is typically thought of as a **three-phase process** which includes **preparation, implementation** and **reporting**. When beginning a needs assessment, the following questions can be considered.

- What are the purposes of the assessment?
- What are the resources available?
- What is the political context in which the assessment is undertaken?
- How will the assessment information be used?

Preparing to do the Needs Assessment

The preparation stage lays the groundwork for the collection and use of information. There must be a clear understanding of how the proposed assessment fits with other planning and resource development activities in the area, including the broader political context.

Tip! Approach the assessment with a clear rationale and understanding of the resources that will be required to carry out the initiative.

Your Preparation phase for the Needs Assessment involves two prime types of activities, **Planning** and **Communication**. Tasks to be performed in each area are listed.

Seven Steps for Preparing a Needs Assessment

Although preparation involves several distinct stages, they may not necessarily occur in chronological order.

1. Define the Need
2. Identify the Audience and the Target Population
3. Identify the Purpose
4. Identify the Resources Available
5. Identify the Public Sentiment Regarding the Issue
6. Identify the Competing Issues or Concerns
7. Consider the Political Timing

1. Define the Need

The term “need” is basically a social concept based on viewpoints that are held at a given time. Typically, there are conflicting viewpoints on what “need” means, based on personal values, training and life experience. You should be aware of the many views held by the key players in the needs assessment process. Develop a shared perspective, or, choose one or more points of view to integrate into your needs assessment process.

2. Identify the Audience and the Target Population

Audience: The ‘audience’ includes all those (people and organizations) who will be affected in some way by the needs assessment. Be clear on their different informational needs and perceptions. Increase the likelihood that they will be attentive (and hopefully responsive) to the results of the needs assessment. Not all audiences are likely to be identified at the beginning of the assessment. It is also possible that the views of the various audiences can change over the duration of the assessment.

Target Population: The ‘target population’ are those who require primary maternity care. It’s important that you clearly define and describe the population in relation to available information. Doing so clarifies the appropriate methodology for the design, sampling, data collection, and analysis of the information collected in the needs assessment.

3. Identify the Purpose

Needs assessments are undertaken for a number of reasons. When planning your needs assessment clearly determine the purpose of the assessment, and be transparent with the process you use.

Needs assessments have a number of positive purposes:

Develop a Knowledge Base about Need: Many needs assessments are intended to aid in the development of a knowledge base regarding a specific issue. Such needs assessments describe conditions or situations as they exist.

- What knowledge about the 'need' for primary maternity care currently exists?

Contribute to Policy Development: Needs assessments are intended to influence the formulation of social/health policy. These efforts move beyond merely a description of a social/health problem to a more determined focus on the actual addressing of specific issues.

- How will the needs assessment help to improve social/health issues in your area?

Contribute to Strategic Planning: The results of the needs assessment can also determine the direction and extent of action for long-term resource development within an organization, or in the new collaborative model. They help direct the action toward a desired future state through phased development efforts.

- Will the results be integrated into a strategic vision of an existing organization? If so, how?

Support and Inform Resource Development or Allocation: The results of the needs assessment can be used to justify requests for funding or to spell out the rationale for the development of a specific set of program resources.

- What is the degree of commitment by key decision-makers to the actual use of the results of the needs assessment?

- What are the 'information needs' of the key decision-makers?

Influence Public Sentiment and the Political Process: Needs assessments can be undertaken to generate public interest or influence public opinion. This may involve building a constituency to support change efforts or lobbying for additional funds or time.

- Plan to use or communicate the results of the needs assessment to influence public sentiment or political processes. How will you do this?

Achieve Consensus Among Constituencies: Needs assessments can be initiated to bring about a clear understanding of various viewpoints regarding the need, and to bring these different points of view together to achieve a shared viewpoint.

- Who are the stakeholders with whom you would like to achieve consensus? Are there any challenges you anticipate in attempting this?

Contribute to appropriate Program Planning: Needs assessments are often used to create programs that are appropriate for a specific locale or groups of clients (e.g., maternity care). Such needs assessments are usually based on the concrete day-to-day needs of the targeted client group.

- Do you have sufficient information regarding the target population? What additional information would you require?

But there are also other less constructive reasons for doing needs assessments. It is useful to at least be aware of these purposes and the potential views of some decision-makers considering needs assessments.

- ☞ ***To Diffuse Potent Political Pressure:*** Needs assessments are often set-up to “study” problems when there is a crisis or strong pressure to make rapid changes. The intent is not to make changes, but diffuse a situation, stall for time and avoid action.
- ☞ ***To Keep Citizen Boards Busy, and Co-opt Advocates:*** Needs assessments also serve to keep agency boards and advocates on task. They are not intended to be used for decision-making. The decision-making power is retained by agency management while board/advocates develop reports that will never be used.
- ☞ ***To “Back-Fill” Around Preset Decisions:*** Frequently decision-makers already know the course of action they intend to take. In these situations needs assessment are formulated and used selectively to justify pre-set decisions. Factors may even be re-weighted to create a formula that supports decisions, or findings are “highlighted” to create a set of data that concurs with the decision-maker’s agenda.

- ☞ **To Fulfill Paperwork Requirements:** Many needs assessments are undertaken because they are required as part of a planning or funding process. Such studies are done only as a “paperwork exercise”, and are then relegated to annual reports rather than being used for decision-making.

4. Identify the Resources Available

Select an appropriate needs assessment approach that will maximize your available resources. The following questions should be considered.

- Time:** How much time is available to conduct your needs assessment? Do circumstances suggest a “quick and dirty” approach or does time allow for a longer-term approach?
- People:** What human resources can be allocated to the process? What level of skill and expertise is available compared to the level required?
- Money:** How much money can be allocated to the process?

5. Identify the Public Sentiment Regarding the Issue

Consider how the public at large will respond to the needs assessment and whether strong public support or opposition can be anticipated. To ensure that your results have the maximum effect, the political context should be addressed. You should consider the groups which have a stake in the issue, the needs assessment process and/or the implications of the political findings.

6. Identify the Competing Issues or Concerns

Sometimes needs assessments do not lead to change because they are done at a time when other social problems are receiving more public, and/or government attention. Ensure that you consider any other potentially conflicting issues and identify the direction of public sentiment toward these concerns.

Important Things to Consider

Consider the Political Timing

The issue of timing arises with regard to matching the needs assessment information to the timetable of decision-making activities that are being enacted at the time.

Building a Team

Often a needs assessment is conducted as a team effort, with a number of individuals involved in the planning and implementation. These individuals would include some or all of those who will be part of the collaborative team and others that have the necessary skill-sets and contacts to obtain the information required. Individuals external to the organizations involved are also useful as they will instill real and perceived objectivity to the needs assessment process. Key attributes include: competence, perspective, availability, affordability, and credibility.

Creating an Advisory Group

This group brings a variety of viewpoints to the process, assuring that the assessment is relevant and useful. The advisors help develop a base of support from constituency groups, and help them to “own” the eventual results. Including key decision-makers is important for implementing the assessment findings. Spend time to carefully consider who would best be in your advisory group.

Selecting an Approach

There is no “right way” to conduct a needs assessment. There are many different approaches that can be used. The choice of methods, however, needs to match the available human, financial, and technical resources. The most popular and compelling approach has been the use of multiple methods of data collection. Any one method presents a unique perspective, but using more than one method can identify issues and solutions more fully. Using a variety of methods more accurately reveals issues and weakens biases.

There are several popular approaches widely used in needs assessments.

- ☞ Social Indicator Analysis
- ☞ Surveys and interviews: e.g., face-to-face, telephone, and/or mailed surveys

- ☞ Structured Groups: focus groups/task forces, nominal groups, Delphi technique, community forums, and public hearings
- ☞ Analyzing Use of Services/Resource Inventory: rates under treatment, waiting lists, client analyses

Please see Modules 5, 6 and 7 for more information on methods.

Whenever possible, the methods you choose should represent different perspectives of the need. For example, while using available social indicators may identify service needs, it is not a good way to generate details or ideas, for yielding information on solutions, or for involving different audiences in the analysis. By comparison, a survey of users – recent primary maternity care recipients – would be more complicated, but would yield detail and ideas, and involve an important audience. When an advisory group is used, its members should play a key role in determining the most appropriate methods.

Tip! Often, requesting of information achieves two very important purposes. It enables important information to be obtained and also provides groups and individuals an opportunity to express their views. Be sure to engage all those that have an important stake in the provision of primary maternity care in the community.

Conducting the Needs Assessment

Once a decision to proceed with a needs assessment has been made, a **procedural design** to guide the needs assessment should be constructed. This will provide a general design for the broad audience and technical plans for those individuals who will do the work.

Seven Steps for Developing the Procedural Design

1. Specify the sources of information to be used
2. Specify the general procedures for obtaining information
3. Determine the appropriate samples of information sources
4. Help select and develop the required surveys or procedures
5. Identify methods for data aggregation and verification
6. Identify methods for filing and storing data
7. Identify procedures for analyzing information

The procedural design should result from extensive communication with various groups.

A management plan is also needed. While the procedural design indicates the overall approach to be taken to achieve the purpose of the needs assessment, the management plan relates tasks to resource and time considerations. The management plan must provide:

- ☞ An integrated schedule of the work to be done.
- ☞ Specifications of the financial, human, and material resources to be used in carrying out the assessment.

The management plan must be responsible for governing the assessment and providing the:

- ☞ Administrative arrangements
- ☞ Computer services
- ☞ Office space
- ☞ Equipment which will be needed in the assessment.

Using the Findings

Ongoing reporting of the needs assessment progress is essential for ensuring credibility, objectivity and transparency.

The reporting should be designed to include interaction between the ‘assessors’ and the affected stakeholders through formats such as meetings, conferences, and presentations.

The reporting must consider the following questions:

- Purpose:** Why report the information?
- Audience:** Who will get the information?
- Context:** What information will they get?
- Format:** How will they get the information?

Studies have identified patterns of use and factors which facilitate or inhibit the use of needs assessment results. Five conditions consistently affect the use of a needs assessment:

- Is it Relevant?** For example, does it address the needs of women requiring primary maternity care? Is the information timely?
- Is there effective communication between the Needs Assessors and the ‘Users’?** (i.e., direct communication of women’s needs to the assessors). **Are the potential users of the assessment fully understanding the relevance of the findings?** (i.e., sufficient awareness of relevance of findings. effective presentation of the information).
- Are the findings credible?** (e.g., concordance with other sources of information, preconceptions of users, credibility of the needs assessor(s), high quality needs assessment.
- Has there been user involvement or advocacy?** Have women requiring primary maternity care been engaged in the process?

A communication strategy for the Needs Assessment must recognize these factors in order to maximize the use of the findings.

Facilitating the use of needs assessment findings

A needs assessment is not complete until decision-makers act upon the identified priorities. As the needs assessor, you should consider the following checklist to facilitate the use of the report:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you clear about the purposes of the assessment?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you been critical of the needs assessment methods?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you included information needed for decision-making, such as analysis of inter-relationships and causes?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you involved key clientele and other participants in the needs assessment?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you identified the requirements for a systematic needs assessment?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you been judicious about doing assessments which consume significant resources?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you aware of real-world decision-making processes and the political aspects of developing a collaborative primary maternity care model?

Sometimes a needs assessment will be questioned as to its usefulness and applicability at a given time.

You should be aware that in the context of the model development this may be for a number of reasons:

- ☞ Apparent lack of effective solutions to meet the needs.
- ☞ Political nature of the decision-making process.

- ☞ Nature of the participation and involvement of those who identify and rank needs.
- ☞ Failure to account for factors, such as costs and staff, in order to effectively responds to the needs through a collaborative primary maternity care model.
- ☞ Lack of strong administrative support.
- ☞ Turnover of key personnel during the life of the needs assessment.
- ☞ No clear plans for subsequent use during the life of the needs assessment.
- ☞ Needs assessment use obstructed at the local level due to poor leadership, poor communication, feelings of intimidation, and lack of input by those affected by the assessment.
- ☞ A lot of effort having been put into the assessment itself, leaving little energy or motivation to implement the recommendations.
- ☞ Changes of administration and/or funding perhaps leaving no money for implementation.

Tip! There is a lot involved in conducting a Needs Assessment, and doing it well. If you don't feel you have the dedicated time available give some thought to hiring an external consultant who can conduct the needs assessment and who can also facilitate discussions with your group and other important stakeholders.

Evaluating the Needs Assessment

Your needs assessment will provide the basis for determining the scope and scale of the collaborative model. Needs assessments do use valuable resources, including time, and so it's important that they provide valid, useful information.

Ongoing reflection of the needs assessment process can provide valuable information for the current assessment and subsequent assessment processes. Ask the following:



Did you assess the Plan?

This involves evaluating the preparation phase and its resulting products – the procedural design, and management design. The evaluation should also assess the degree to which appropriate groups are adequately involved.



Did you assess the Process?

Periodic checks should be made on how well the needs assessment is being conducted. These checks can include issues such as: is the assessment plan being carried out appropriately and on schedule? Are sufficient resources being invested in the needs assessment?



Did you conduct a summary evaluation?

This determines whether the needs assessment was deemed: useful, practical, proper, valid.

Summary

Your needs assessment is an integral component of your environmental scan. While the environmental scan looks at the needs, challenges, opportunities and expectations of the provider community, the more tightly focused needs assessment attends to the real needs of the users – women receiving primary maternity care.

By understanding the needs of both recipients *and the providers*, those interested in developing a collaborative model can see what configuration of service providers will be possible to provide quality primary maternity care in the community.

Appendix

The Needs Assessment Checklist

1. Preparing the Needs Assessment

- Identify and describe the client(s), other audiences, and target population.
- Clarify the purposes of the needs assessment:
 - Stated reasons
 - Unstated reasons
 - Defensibility
- Determine the scope and domain(s) of the needs assessment.
- Determine who will be involved in conducting the needs assessment.
- Develop and maintain the necessary political viability:
 - ☞ Involve key groups and individuals
 - ☞ Maintain ongoing communication
 - ☞ Identify and adhere to appropriate protocols
- Identify and describe information needs:
 - ☞ Setting
 - ☞ Service delivery variables
 - ☞ Cost variables
 - ☞ Philosophical and conceptual framework
 - ☞ Outcome variables to be monitored

2. Implementing the Needs Assessment

- Determine relevant sources of information.
 - ☞ Determine sampling plan(s).
 - ☞ Develop/select information collection procedures and instruments.
 - ☞ Specify an implementation plan for each observation procedure
 - ☞ Assess the available information for:
 - ☞ Technical adequacy
 - ☞ Substantive adequacy
 - ☞ Review analysis plan



Implement analysis plan:

- ☞ Specify type(s) of information to be analyzed
- ☞ Specify purpose of analysis
- ☞ Identify assumptions
- ☞ Select and implement analysis techniques
- ☞ Discuss the findings and formulate the conclusions

3. Using the Findings



Determine the report(s) to be submitted with regard to:

- ☞ Audience
- ☞ Purpose
- ☞ Content
- ☞ Format
- ☞ Media



Implement reporting procedures

4. Evaluating the Needs Assessment



Is the audience identified?



Is the needs assessor credible?



Is there the appropriate scope and selection of information?



Is the report clear?



How is the report to be disseminated?



Is the report timely?



What is the anticipated impact?



Are the procedures used practical?



Is the needs assessment politically viable?



Is the needs assessment cost effective?



Is the needs assessment objective?

- Is the needs assessment based on solid evidence?
- Are the information sources used 'defensible'?
- Are the measurements used valid?
- Can the conclusions be justified?
- Is the report of the findings objective?

Useful Web Linkages

<http://www.eval.org/Resources/onlinehbt.txt.htm>

Comprehensive list of online resources for research methods

The Community toolbox

http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/section_1042.htm

Knowledge Translation Program University of Toronto

<http://www.ktp.utoronto.ca/whatisktp/tools/needsAssessment/>

(note: for above site simply type in your name when asked)

Learning to Give

<http://www.learningtogive.org/papers/index.asp?bpid=16>

Example 1: The New Brunswick Community Health Needs Assessment

<http://www.gnb.ca/0601/pdf/CHCNBNeedsAssessmentEngNov201.pdf>

Example 2: United Way community needs assessment (1997)

<http://fch.evansville.net/unwaynofr.html>

Example 3: Promising practices in maternal and child health needs assessment

<http://www.mchb.hrsa.gov/programs/womeninfants/naguide.htm#2>

Recommended Reading

Altschuld JW and BR Witkin (2000). **From Needs Assessment to Action. Transforming needs into solution strategies.** SAGE. Thousand Oaks.

Witkin BR and JW Altschuld (1995). **Planning and conducting needs assessments. A Practical Guide.** SAGE. Thousand Oaks.