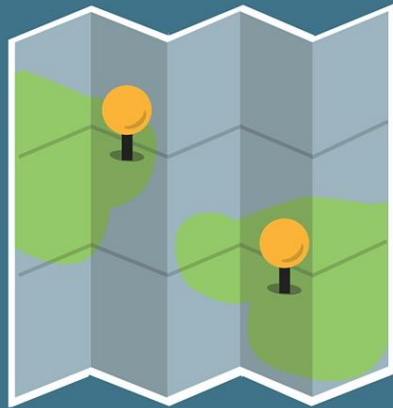


**ACTION TO IMPACT:**



**A COALITION-BUILDING  
ROADMAP**

# Action to Impact:

A Coalition-Building Roadmap





# Action to Impact:

## A Coalition-Building Roadmap

READY

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*Leveraging collective expertise for impact.*



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# Action to Impact: A Coalition-Building Roadmap



## READY

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**B**uilding a coalition is not a linear, one-size-fits-all process. Yet, if done well it can create real, lasting community change. At its best, a coalition is a catalyst stimulating debate, research, new investment and collective action. A coalition harnesses the expertise and drive of individual nonprofit, academic, public and/or private sector partners in pursuit of greater shared impact. Building a strong, effective and efficient coalition, however, takes a sustained, long-term investment. Questions to consider:

- How ready is your organization to join forces with other agencies - nonprofit, public or private - *and* commit human and financial resources for an effective coalition?
  - What are the essential factors you should assess to determine if a coalition is a good fit for the problem you want to address?
  - What are the key questions to ask to determine if you have the right combination of organizational, partner and community conditions in place to move forward to build a coalition?
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The information in this section guides you in assessing whether you have the basic requirements for an effective coalition, including how to ensure that you have a strong foundation from which to build, and how to conduct a community needs assessment.

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## ENSURING A STRONG FOUNDATION

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In community work, organizations are often called together to share information and to network, particularly when working on the same or complimentary issues. Information sharing and networking are critical activities for any organization. They can help address the common challenge of working in silos and focusing only on your work, rather than building a broader community understanding that can better advance your organization's mission. From this understanding can emerge a long-term goal to act together in coalition to fill a community service gap that cannot be solved by any one organization. And sometimes, coalitions assemble to start with this long-term goal. Either way, it is important to identify the purpose of the coalition early on. Further, it is important to clarify the coalition's scope of work and expectations to ensure that your organization's interests are well-aligned and that you are able to effectively participate. *Most importantly, if coalition meetings seem adrift, it is not enough to continue to attend out of obligation to a colleague or because you do not want to miss what happens when you are not present. Your time and your organization's mission are too important for you to be involved in a coalition that is not mutually beneficial.*

If you've decided a coalition needs to be created to achieve collective impact or you have been asked to participate in a coalition, there are three key assessments to consider: (1) you should assess the capacity of your organization to meaningfully participate, (2) determine whether a coalition is the right model to tackle the challenge and (3) evaluate the current community environment to determine readiness/openness to change. If needed, you should ready your environment to cultivate the partnerships that will help you create a strong coalition. Doing this analysis and relationship-building at the start will help you, your organization and the coalition be more efficient and effective over the long-term.

### ASSESS YOUR ORGANIZATION

### ASSESS WHETHER A COALITION IS THE RIGHT MODEL

### ASSESS THE ENVIRONMENT

### READY THE ENVIRONMENT

## **ASSESS YOUR ORGANIZATION**

Before you dive into coalition work, make sure you proactively assess your *organization's* readiness to fully commit to being part of a coalition. With your leadership team, map out: the purpose of any coalition engagement, determine coalition fit, ensure you have the time available to make coalition participation meaningful, assess staff capacity to participate, confirm board support and engagement, and think long-term about the commitment required and possible conflicts of interest.

*Even after you've answered yes to all of the above, remember this: you have to be willing and able to share – whether grant or financial resources or human resources – that may have in the past only supported your agency's direct service work. Working in coalition at times requires you to defer to a community-wide goal that may not directly align with your organization's current mission or strategy because of the opportunity to leverage all of the assets of the agencies and individuals in the coalition to achieve more than any one agency could accomplish on its own. It's this "more than the sum of its parts" goal that you have to keep front and center as you and others in the coalition face potential competition for time, attention, resources and community support. And that's not always easy.*

If you have not yet asked the questions below or answered "no" to any of them, we recommend you take the time to engage your organizational leadership in getting to "yes" before you join a coalition or begin to reach out to coalition partners. Giving due diligence to the assessment portion of determining your organization's overall readiness will create a more stable foundation for future impact.

**Figure 1:** Coalition Readiness Screen**Purpose:**

- *Are you able to clearly state what you hope to gain or improve through building the coalition? Will participating in the coalition help you... Better be able to achieve mission impact? Better serve your community? Strengthen your organization?* This is a necessary first step to evaluate fit. If you have not answered these questions, consider engaging your leadership team and board in outlining key requirements for your organization in investing in coalition work.

**Fit:**

- *Do these goals fit within your organization's strategy?* If so, you're more likely to be able to commit the time needed for your organization to be an active participant.

**Time:**

- *Do you have the time?* A coalition agenda may be a strategic fit, but your current workload may not give you or others in your organization the freedom to participate. Be honest about this, and reprioritize if needed so you can make participation in the coalition a priority for your organization.

**Capacity:**

- *Do you have the staff capacity for meaningful coalition participation?* Determine which type of staff members are needed – decision makers, doers, or both – and consider whether you can allocate staff resources appropriately.

**Support:**

- *Do you have board support? Does your board understand how the coalition work fits into the overall, organizational strategy? Can they advocate for the work and support you in allocating the resources needed to be a productive coalition member?* If not, you may want to consider a board retreat, board education or a collaborations strategy discussion to get your board engaged and invested.

**Perspective:**

- *Are you able to commit to the long-term coalition goal, even when it does not directly benefit your agency?* If so, you can better manage the inevitable moments of perceived or actual competition between the coalition and the agencies within it, including yours. And if not, it is helpful to discuss the issue of competition early and often with your coalition partners so that you build trust and navigate the needs of individual coalition partners to a positive result.





### Essential Resources to assess readiness:

- ✓ [Am I a High-Functioning Coalition Member](#) Checklist, CoalitionsWork

### ASSESS WHETHER A COALITION IS THE RIGHT MODEL

There are many different types of collaboration – from information-sharing to joint projects to shared administrative services to a coalition that comes together to improve community outcomes. An important starting point is to assess whether a coalition is the right collaboration model for what you want to accomplish. The coalition model outlined in this Roadmap - most commonly used to achieve collective impact - allows *multiple organizations across sectors* to work together on a *common agenda* to address complex, challenging and *specific* community issues that *impact a broad range of community members*. The collective impact approach works when there is a system that needs strengthening because of service gaps, a lack of communication among actors, or when there is a need for new policies or new solutions due to an inefficient or ineffective current system. Importantly, it must be clear that the challenge is bigger than any one organization can manage on its own, and therefore cannot be solved by any one sector or agency or leader within a community. The coalition whole must be bigger than the sum of its parts.

**Figure 2:** Essential Components for Collective Impact

It may be that you need to start by developing the collaborative muscle within your community by sharing information and engaging in joint projects among potential coalition partners. Through these activities you develop trust among key partners, cultivate leaders around the issue, articulate the community challenge that needs more coordinated problem-solving and start to build the case for collective action. There is no wrong door to get to coalition work, but naming what you hope to accomplish early on can help manage potential partner expectations and set you up for long-term success and impact.

**Figure 3: The Many Faces of Collaboration**

THE MANY FACES OF COLLABORATION
<p>While not the focus of this Roadmap, information on additional types of collaboration - including joint ventures, shared administrative services, co-location and consolidation - can be found at the following links:</p> <p><a href="#">What are the Different Ways to Collaborate?</a>, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) Knowledge Base, Grantspace</p> <p><a href="#">The Partnership Matrix</a>, LaPiana Consulting</p> <p><a href="#">Which Type of Collaboration is Right for You?</a>, Harvard Business Review</p>



**Essential Resources** for more information on the value of creating coalitions that collaborate to achieve collective impact:

- ✓ [Channeling Change](#), Stanford Social Innovation Review
- ✓ [Practitioner Insights, Why Collective Impact?](#) Video, Collective Impact Forum
- ✓ [Collective Impact: A Refresher](#) Podcast, Collective Impact Forum
- ✓ [Embracing Emergence: How Collective Impact Addresses Complexity](#), Stanford Social Innovation Review
- ✓ [Collective Insights on Collective Impact](#), Collective Impact Forum, Stanford Social Innovation Review

**Essential Resources** for understanding different types of collaboration:

- ✓ [Collaborative Map](#), LaPiana Consulting
- ✓ [Meeting Your Match: How to Identify, Assess and Engage a Potential Merger Partner](#), LaPiana Consulting
- ✓ [The Difference Between Collaboration and Collective Impact](#), Strive Together
- ✓ [Is a Coalition Right for You?](#) Checklist, CoalitionsWork
- ✓ [Before you Build Your Coalition](#), CoalitionsWork
- ✓ [Readiness Assessment](#), Collective Impact Forum



**Local Spotlight:** To illustrate the different paths that coalitions take to emerge, and how much time can be involved in starting a coalition, examples of *how several local coalitions got started* are presented here:

- ✓ [Community Mental Health and Wellness Coalition](#) (CMHWC). The CMHWC evolved out of an emerging local imperative to close the mental health care gap for people with moderate mental health needs. This gap was first identified in a 2007-08 Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP) community health status assessment, and was reinforced when Region Ten Community Services Board (RTCSB), a primary mental health provider in the region, narrowed its focus to the Seriously Mentally Ill (SMI) population, decreasing the availability of its moderate mental health/adult outpatient services. This shift in RTCSB’s mandate followed the April 2007 Virginia Tech massacre by a mentally ill student and subsequent findings by a state-appointed review panel on gaps in mental health care.

In November 2009, RTCSB’s Executive Director, Robert Johnson, convened a meeting of agencies providing mental health services to discuss a specific issue – that of mental health patients receiving “ping pong” referrals due to the lack of a coordinated mental health system of care in the community. Out of this meeting, the CMHWC was formed. Steering Committee members included Robert Johnson of RTCSB and Erika Viccellio, at that time the Executive Director of the Charlottesville Free Clinic, both of whom had served on the MAPP steering committee.

Through this leadership from the Charlottesville Free Clinic and RTCSB the coalition really took form. An initial planning grant from a private donor also helped jump start the work.

- ✓ [City of Promise](#). City of Promise was originally started in response to a grant opportunity from the [United States Department of Education](#) (USDOE) to create a [Promise Neighborhood](#). A first grant was written in 2010, which created the initial energy to pull a small group of stakeholders together. When that grant was not awarded, the stakeholders came together again to figure out what they could do locally to (*cont.*)

address the achievement gaps in Charlottesville even without the grant funding. They focused in on the Westhaven and 10<sup>th</sup> and Page neighborhoods as areas very much in need of resources to promote children’s success. Upon writing a second successful grant proposal in 2011, neighbors were formally brought into the process. The grant application required a comprehensive community needs and strengths assessment, which was co-funded by the USDOE and [Youth-Nex, the Center for Positive Youth Development](#) at the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. City of Promise is funded through a combination of grants, local support and private donors. [ReadyKids](#) and the [City of Charlottesville](#) are the fiscal sponsors who provide staff funding. City of Promise partners with numerous contractors, interns and volunteers who round out their programming capacity.

- ✓ [Gang Reduction through Active Community Engagement](#) (GRACE). The former County Police Captain Steve Sellers and former City Police Chief Tim Longo knew there was a growing gang problem and that they needed the buy-in and partnership of the whole community to address it. They knew that addressing gang activity started with prevention and could not be managed by the police alone. The two leaders applied for funding from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment, in order to define and bring awareness to the local gang problem, and to fund a coordinator position to solidify the efforts of the brand new coalition. A grant from DCJS has been funding the hourly Gang Prevention Coordinator position and programming for youth in the following areas: Employability, Afterschool and Training. A summer camp, separate from GRACE, was started by the Albemarle County Police Department and funded by the Virginia Attorney General’s Office. For more information, contact Sean Reeves at [reeess@albemarle.org](mailto:reeess@albemarle.org).

*The evolution of local coalitions for children:*

- ✓ [Partnership for Children](#). In 1998, the Charlottesville and Albemarle governments created and funded the staff for the Commission on Children and Families (CCF) that would work to strengthen and build a healthier community for children (*cont.*)

and their families. The first work group to come out of CCF was the Partnership for Children, which was charged to develop an early childhood strategy for Charlottesville/Albemarle. A state grant from Healthy Families to Children, Youth and Family Services (now ReadyKids) funded a part-time coordinator. This was our community's first collaborative, coordinated effort to unify children's services.

Specifically, the Partnership for Children tracked community indicators related to early childhood well-being. The Partnership also coordinated and strengthened early childhood health strategies across agencies through joint planning efforts and resource-sharing. Specific activities included: creating the local Seal of Quality Child Care (the precursor to [Virginia's Quality Rating and Improvement System](#)) developing literacy tools that have now been shared and implemented across agencies; implementing regular trainings for agency staff to learn about early childhood and other partner organizations' services; sharing public awareness materials highlighting the importance of early childhood; and unifying two home visiting programs under one umbrella. As the local governments phased CCF out, the United Way spearheaded the local branch of the state [Smart Beginnings](#) initiative, and the work of the Partnership folded into Smart Beginnings.

- ✓ [Smart Beginnings](#). In 2007, the United Way launched the regional [Smart Beginnings](#) initiative (with partners from both the private and public sectors) with the support from the [Virginia Early Childhood Foundation](#) (VECF). Smart Beginnings had many accomplishments, including making initial proposals for partnering with the [University of Virginia](#) (UVA) for data sharing. As the Smart Beginnings efforts started to morph into the United Way Early Education Impact Team, the United Way led another effort to build a data sharing system that could be used to understand the strengths and challenges facing the continuum of early care and childhood education services (e.g., home visiting and prekindergarten). It wanted to get permission from parents to link data from home visiting and prekindergarten to later school performance. However, the potential partners were concerned about privacy and confidentiality, the potential role of UVA, and whether (*cont.*)

parents of current elementary school children would be able to accurately recall services they had received five to ten years earlier. It was not until the Superintendent of [Albemarle County Public Schools](#) prioritized linking Bright Stars to later school performance that the energy and leadership around this issue coalesced.

- ✓ The United Way partnered with the [Charlottesville Area Community Foundation](#) (CACF) to fund a project to approach parents currently receiving home visiting and/or prekindergarten and ask them to allow their child’s service records to be shared with the United Way and later merged with their public school records. The United Way spent months talking to potential partners, working with the Albemarle County Public Schools attorneys and solving issues related to securing data before both local home visiting programs, both public prekindergarten programs and both public school systems signed a Memorandum of Understanding in the Spring of 2016, thus forming the Outcome Collaborative.
- ✓ [Charlottesville-Albemarle Early Education Task Force](#). Formed in April 2015, following a [community pre-K summit](#) co-hosted by the United Way and Charlottesville Tomorrow, the Early Education Task Force – a new public/private coalition – is made up, in part, by the partners from Smart Beginnings and the Outcome Collaborative. The Early Education Task Force is charged with identifying high quality pre-kindergarten slots for local, under-resourced children, and the United Way provides backbone support.

Eventually, the efforts of the United Way’s Early Education Impact Team, Smart Beginnings, the Outcome Collaborative and the Early Education Task Force may be encompassed by only one or two of those umbrella coalitions. Each entity was created for a slightly different reason, though, and while they are all working towards similar goals, and share many of the same stakeholders, their paths have not yet fully merged.

- ✓ [Thomas Jefferson Area Coalition for the Homeless](#). While TJACH was formed in 1998, it existed primarily as a forum for information-sharing and community connections for *(cont.)*

direct service providers until 2004, when a community-wide conference called ‘Homelessness in a World Class City’ was held by the coalition’s then-host, the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission. At that conference, a wide variety of community stakeholders gathered to discuss the rising number of people experiencing homelessness in the area, assess the existing service provider continuum and brainstorm ways to address any gaps in the service array. The Task Force on Homelessness was created as a direct result of this gathering. The Task Force determined that the coalition would benefit from formalization and accountability in the form of a full-time executive director and a work plan, called the Plan to End Homelessness.

This plan outlined 5 broad goals for the coalition, established expectations for membership, and outlined governance. An advisory board was formed that worked to establish formal IRS 501(c)3 designation and executive director recruitment. During this intensive developmental phase, TJACH was approached by the First Street Church Project, now The Haven, which was working to establish a day shelter and community center for the homeless about a merger. Merging with The Haven provided TJACH with a practical, direct service focus and a physical location to establish collaborative efforts to address homelessness. The first executive director was hired in summer 2009 and The Haven opened for service in January 2010.

Motivational energy for TJACH was provided by the 2004 conference and the 2009 merger. Having both community stakeholder expectations and a practical service focus pushed the coalition to move quickly and definitively. It was critically important for the coalition to take action to take advantage of these opportunities.

### **ASSESS THE ENVIRONMENT**

Once you have determined your own *organizational readiness*, and confirmed building a coalition is the *right model* to achieve your community goals, the next question is whether the *environment* is ready to benefit from a coalition. Effective collective impact coalitions require considerable, long-term investment by partner organizations – all of whom are already deeply



focused on their own missions. Economic, political and environmental factors will play a large role in the level of the investment that partners are willing to give to any coalition effort.

To understand whether this model of collaboration is feasible to achieve your goals, consider whether these key factors exist:

**Figure 4:** Essential Environmental Factors for Collective Impact



If these necessary factors are present, there are a variety of catalysts, in addition to the issue itself, which can help provide the energy and resources needed to build a sustainable collective impact coalition that moves from ideas to action to impact. Here are a couple of questions to ask to help identify catalysts:

1. Can you secure a *commitment among stakeholders* to act on the results of the planning process?
2. Is there a *neutral convener*, respected by the stakeholders, who can bring the group together effectively to address the issue?
3. Is there a funder that will agree to provide a *planning grant* to galvanize the work?
4. Is there a *commitment from elected officials* to support, financially or otherwise, the coalition's planning or implementation activities?

If these catalysts don't yet exist, part of getting ready would be to identify, educate and recruit key stakeholders – whether agencies, conveners, funders or officials – to invest in the work required to build a healthy coalition.

In some cases, the collaboration train has left the station – perhaps because funding has been awarded or the planning process is well underway. If so, some key conditions still can evolve with the process. If financial or staff *resources* are not yet committed, the coalition can develop a realistic plan to obtain them. If *urgency* is not driving all partners, it can be intentionally generated through: partner education, asking and listening to what the partners feel is important right now and what they bring to the table, elevating the voice of a champion, new funding opportunities and/or a compelling community change vision. The key is to shore up the coalition effort by ensuring that it has a strong foundation for impact. In this case, the equivalent of building the train while driving it!



**Essential Resources** for assessing the environment for readiness to collaborate:

- ✓ [Collective Impact Feasibility Framework](#), FSG
- ✓ [Effective Partnerships](#), Saphira M. Baker, Stanford Social Innovation Review
- ✓ [Facilitation for Community Change<sup>1</sup>](#), Bridging RVA
- ✓ [The Dawn of System Leadership](#), Stanford Social Innovation Review
- ✓ [What Makes a Good Lead Agency?](#), CoalitionsWork
- ✓ [Am I a Transformative Leader?](#), CoalitionsWork
- ✓ [Is This Group Really a Coalition?](#), CoalitionsWork
- ✓ [Putting Community in Collective Impact](#), Richard Harwood, Collective Impact Forum

## **READY THE ENVIRONMENT**

If catalysts are not present, take time to put them into place before launching your coalition. There are many creative and productive ways to begin to cultivate partnerships and the sharing of resources in your community, as well as to begin the necessary conversations about collaboration and coalition-building.

Creating a sense of urgency is a critical catalyst to launching any effort. A sense of urgency can be built by attending to the following factors:

- **Define the Challenge**: If other organizations are not sure that they are working on the same problem (or if the problem is not well-defined), you can convene groups of potential partner agencies to *jointly define the community challenge* and identify opportunities for strategic partnership that could lead to more formal collaboration. If the community needs additional information on the scope and/or nature of the problem, consider [CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT](#) to specifically articulate the scope of the problem, including what community “dial” the coalition will seek to move. Once the challenge is identified, the solutions are not technical and often not yet known; rather, they must be adaptive, joint efforts on the part of coalition members, which require continuous learning and evaluation to ensure that the coalition is pointed in the right direction. Two local coalitions formed after a community challenge was defined are the [Community Mental Health and Wellness Coalition](#) (CMHWC), developed in response to

lack of access to services for adults with mental health needs, and [City of Promise](#) created to provide a cradle to college and career pathway for children in neighborhoods with the most economic need. Read more about these coalitions in the [LOCAL SPOTLIGHTS at the end of this section](#).

- **Build the Case:** If other organizations have not considered formalizing collaboration or the merits of building a coalition to address a known community issue (or if they are waiting to see someone else take the first step), act as a resource to potential partners on the issue. Share your strategy, your programs and your challenges as a learning tool. Build or strengthen one-on-one relationships with leaders of partner agencies through regular check-in meetings. *Identify community champions* among elected or community leaders to assist you in advocating for a coordinated response to the challenge you seek to address.



**Essential Resources** to assess readiness:

- ✓ [Cultivating Influential Champions](#), Collective Impact Forum
- ✓ [Creating Urgency](#), Collective Impact Forum

- **Develop the Scope of Work:** If other organizations are not sure that building a coalition would be beneficial or worth the time and resources, propose informal cooperation among partner agencies as a starting point. In order to continue to *build trust and reciprocity* among agencies, suggest sharing information about programs or develop short-term joint projects.

Developing the scope of work can be a short or long-term process. It may take multiple attempts, depending on how ripe your community is for the action. In some cases, new leadership among key stakeholders or evolving partner relationships can be the trigger that leads to long-discussed collective action.



**Lesson Learned:**

- ✓ It can take years, and several tries, to ready the environment for collaboration. Staying with the overall vision while listening carefully to where the sense of urgency is, and what people are liking and not liking about the collaboration is key. There are many ways to get to the same goal, and sometimes it just takes leadership evolution, the right wording, and the right timing to bring an effort to fruition.

➤ **Generate the Resources:** No matter how engaged coalition partners are or how urgent the problem, a lack of resources can stymie any initiative's effort. Make sure that part of your coalition strategy work involves a plan to obtain and sustain the *resources* needed to get the job done, including: *human, financial and infrastructure resources*. All coalitions need funding to support basic operations and to power the strategic work to achieve community goals. Raising money to support operations can be challenging for any individual agency, much less for a coalition. Therefore, the more transparent you can be about the coalition resource needs and the earlier you engage key funder prospects in the project to create long-term funding partnerships, the higher the likelihood of success. Suggested tactics to create transparency at the start include:

1. Develop a *coalition budget* to clearly articulate the cost involved in achieving the collectively defined goals.
2. Brainstorm with the coalition partners all of the existing, *in-kind resources* that can be brought to bear in support of the work. Such resources could include: shared office space and equipment, donated staff hours for coordination or data collection, pro bono consulting services, or individual agency funding that can be applied to the coalition.
3. Identify *new sources of funding* that the coalition might seek as a result of its collective work beyond the funders that already give to individual coalition partners (for example: local, state or national government, regional/national foundations, individual donors).

4. Consider who in the coalition will be the *best coalition advocates or champions*, depending on the type of funds sought, as well as what their limitations might be given their commitment to raising funds for their own organizations.
5. Be sensitive to the importance of *expanding the philanthropic dollars going to the issue* rather than contracting or competing for them. For example, make sure to strategize about new funders that might invest in coalition work - who might not otherwise support individual agencies - because of the scope of the stakeholders engaged and the potential for increased impact. Or consider whether any current funders of coalition partners might offer new, “special project” funds to the coalition because of the potential of the coalition to leverage impact. Be intentional about making this case with both coalition and philanthropic partners.
6. Wherever possible, when fundraising, *make the case for funding both the coalition activities as well as the programs of coalition partners in order to leverage the impact.*

More information on raising funds to support the work of the coalition can be found in *PLAN FOR RESOURCES* in the SET section of this Roadmap.



**Essential Resources** for how to secure funding and resources for your coalition work:

- ✓ [How to Secure Funding for Your Backbone Organization](#), FSG
- ✓ [Funding for the Backbone Organization in Collective Impact Efforts](#), Strive Together
- ✓ [Facilitation for Community Change](#), Phase I, Bridging RVA
- ✓ [Collective Impact Feasibility Framework](#), FSG
- ✓ [Funding the Backbone of Your Collective Impact Effort](#), Ready by 21
- ✓ [Early Matters Uses a Collective Impact Approach to Improve Early Childhood Education in Houston, Texas](#), A Case Study, FSG
- ✓ [For Staten Island Organizations, Collective Impact Was the Key to Focusing Their Efforts](#), A Case Study, FSG



### Local Spotlight:

- ✓ [Community Mental Health and Wellness Coalition](#) (CMHWC). The initial coalition problem statement emerged out of the data and findings of the MAPP project, a community-wide assessment and strategic planning tool for improving health spearheaded by the Department of Health. The problem identified was a lack of access to and services for adults with moderate mental health needs. In response, the coalition incubated a direct services program for the target population with a focus on coordinating care among service agencies. This direct services initiative was called the Coalition Services Project (CSP), which was funded by the coalition and managed through [Partner for Mental Health](#) of Charlottesville/Albemarle. As part of the CSP, coalition members who were direct services providers began to come together weekly with the goal of better coordinating care needs for clients across the community. After year 1 of coordination via CSP, the coalition developed a more complete understanding of the challenge: client retention and engagement was as much a problem as actual access; there were also gaps in health care coverage for seriously mentally ill patients. These findings reinforced the need for coalition partners to come together to foster collaboration, create a better system of care, and advocate for increased funding, all of which became coalition priorities.

As it formed, the [Community Mental Health and Wellness Coalition](#) (CMHWC) was able to source initial seed funding of \$50,000 from a local donor for the planning efforts, which ultimately led to the creation of the Coalition Services Project (CSP), a coordinated effort on the part of the coalition to ensure there was *no wrong door* for moderate mental health services. Subsequently, it applied for and received a Collaboration Initiative grant of \$100,000 from the local [Charlottesville Area Community Foundation](#). This grant allowed the coalition to move forward with the CSP initiative. Initially, coalition partner Thrive, via a federal substance abuse and mental health (SAMHSA) grant, provided a part-time coordinator to the coalition and took the lead as the fiscal agent and home to the coordinator. Additionally, in the founding charter for the coalition, partnership was conditioned on the payment of organizational partnership dues in (*cont.*)

support of the collective effort. During years two and three of the CSP, the coalition sought and received additional private donor support totaling approximately \$100,000/year.

Today, CMHWC is sustained through funds raised from private donors, the collaborative efforts of the partners, as well as by the City of Charlottesville which for several years funded and housed a part-time coalition coordinator. In July 2017, the coalition shifted the position to Region 10 Community Services Board and upgraded it from a part-time coordinator to a full-time director with some of the director's time dedicated to Region 10 work in alignment with the coalition.

- ✓ [City of Promise](#). When the [United States Department of Education](#) (USDOE) issued requests for proposals in 2010, the initial stakeholders, led by City Councilwoman, Kristin Szakos (who was seeking to close the local academic achievement gap and disparities in the distribution of resources across the City), brought together publicly available data from sources such as the public schools, police and department of social services to demonstrate the need for grant funding to support under-resourced families across Charlottesville. When that proposal was not awarded, those same leaders re-reviewed the data to identify the parts of the City with the most need. The data pointed to the neighborhood including Westhaven and 10<sup>th</sup> and Page as having some of the greatest need for resources to help kids succeed. Once the data were brought together and understood, a successful grant to the USDOE was written in 2011. One year later, City of Promise sought additional USDOE funding, which required a comprehensive needs assessment to show the areas of greatest need and strength. City of Promise partnered with [Youth-Nex](#), the Center for Positive Youth Development at the Curry School of Education, University of Virginia who worked with neighbors and the City of Promise leadership to design a survey. Then, a small group of neighbors were trained to administer the survey to 100 households living in the City of Promise footprint. Additionally, data were gathered from the [City of Charlottesville Schools](#) (CCS), the [Charlottesville Department of Social Services](#) (CDSS), the [Charlottesville Police Department](#) (CPD) and the [U.S. Census](#).  
(cont.)



Once all the data were gathered and graphed, a series of community meetings were held to understand the story behind the data, to draw conclusions and to make recommendations for changes. These conclusions and recommendations were presented to the Steering Committee and led the charge for the initial City of Promise efforts and programming.

- ✓ When the original partners of the [Community Mental Health and Wellness Coalition](#) joined together, their focus was on expanding services and better connecting adults with moderate mental health challenges to services. As the partnership expanded, the consensus over focus became less strong. These differences were highlighted in the *Coalition Health Survey* conducted in the fall of 2013 as part of the consulting work for this Roadmap with The Center for Nonprofit Excellence and Partnerships for Strategic Impact. The articulation, through the survey data, of the differences between partners in understanding coalition purpose and strategy led to the facilitation of a two-day strategic planning retreat and follow-up meetings to gather perspectives and build input, as well as to create an updated strategy and goals to refocus the effort. After the summer of 2015, when the coalition underwent substantial changes in leadership and backbone support, a new effort to build partnership and consensus about the direction of the coalition was initiated. The continuing evolution of CMHWC is typical of multi-sector stakeholder groups and demonstrates the importance of being clear about the problem you seek to address, but flexible about the means to address it. Only in this way can you successfully engage the interest and expertise of coalition partners along the way, and in the long term, to achieving the mutually-identified goals of the coalition.
  
- ✓ The United Way’s Outcome Collaborative, an outgrowth of the Smart Beginnings initiative, was formed to understand what constellation of early childhood experiences increases a child’s school readiness and success. Efforts began in 2010 to garner commitment and create a collaboration to ensure early childhood programs to have the information needed to understand what they are serving most effectively, as well as to be able to make informed choices about where to *(cont.)*

focus resources for improvement and growth. Work to build a collaborative and overcome privacy and legal barriers evolved into years of work, and a deep, unwavering commitment to ensuring high-quality early child care and education and family support programs that lead to school readiness. Finally, in 2016, local government, schools, and nonprofits signed an agreement to begin parent consent and the collection of data of children in home visiting and early childcare and education programming. The partners in the Outcome Collaborative are linking home visiting, early childcare and education programming and public school data to learn which, and what combination of, early childhood home visiting and preschool interventions result in the most school success in kindergarten through 12th grade by linking the data of individual children over time. For more information, contact Barbara Hutchinson at the United Way-Thomas Jefferson Area: [bhutchinson@UnitedjWayTJA.org](mailto:bhutchinson@UnitedjWayTJA.org).

## CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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A needs assessment can be an important tool to quantify the issues and create a sense of urgency around community action. For a coalition of any age, a needs assessment may be used to define priorities, assess changes in conditions, focus efforts and leverage funding and support.

You may *know* that a problem exists, but do you have numbers to back that up? How do you know that the numbers reflect the true problem? How do you build a case that the problem really needs to be addressed? A needs assessment will help you answer these questions.

[PURPOSE OF A NEEDS ASSESSMENT](#)

[SCOPE OF A NEEDS ASSESSMENT](#)

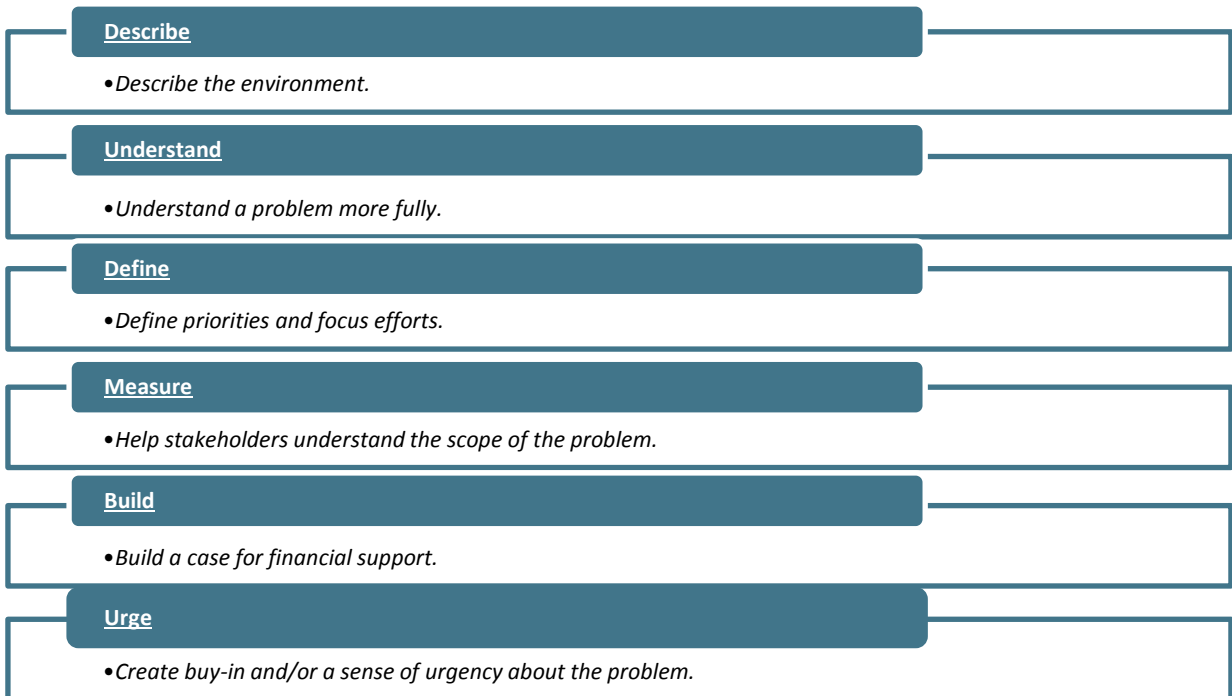
[TYPES OF NEEDS ASSESSMENTS](#)

[SAMPLING IN NEEDS ASSESSMENTS](#)

[HOW TO USE NEEDS ASSESSMENT DATA](#)

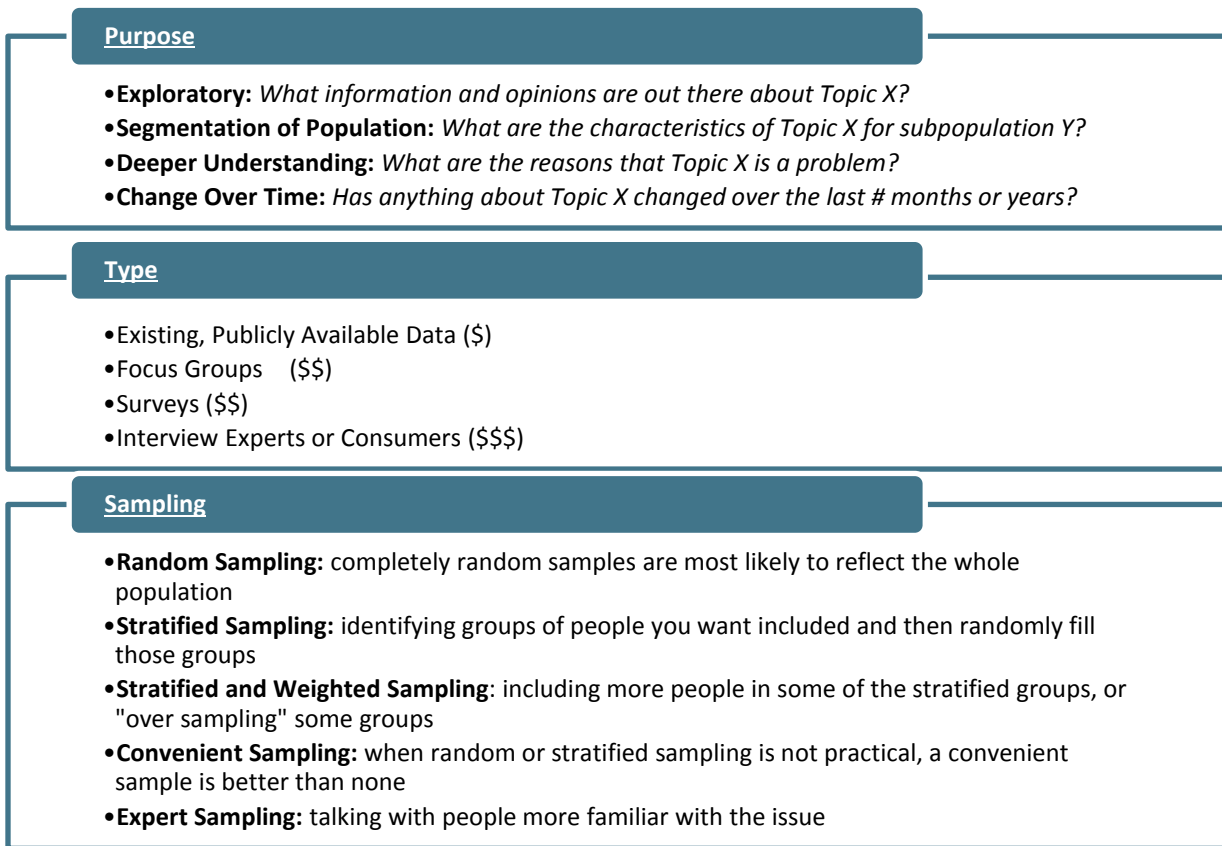
**PURPOSE OF A NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

A solid needs assessment ensures the coalition’s mission and goals are specifically tailored to addressing a real, measurable, community-level problem. Ultimately, a needs assessment clarifies what community-level need the coalition is coming together to address. *Collective impact* is the current common term for the community-level impact being addressed by a multi-sector coalition (or any other collaborative). This is the “*dial*” the coalition is trying to move.

**Figure 5:** Purpose of a Needs Assessment**SCOPE OF A NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

Needs assessments can either be large, comprehensive and broad, or they can be focused and targeted. How do you know what is best for you? A needs assessment can be as simple as pulling together public health data, as deep as multiple interviews, or as extensive as a door-to-door survey. These section of the Roadmap is designed to help you be informed about what you are looking for, what resources will be needed and whether or not you will want to hire an evaluator to do the work.

A needs assessment can be conducted with several different purposes in mind. There are several different types of assessments and sampling methods, depending on the information you seek to gather:

**Figure 6:** Scope of a Needs Assessment

Each of these issues (Purpose, Type, and Sampling) are described in greater detail below.



**Essential Resources** for more information on designing and conducting needs assessments:

- ✓ [Comprehensive Needs Assessment](#), United States Department of Education
- ✓ [Guide to Conducting a Needs Assessment](#), Office for the Victims of Crime's Technical Assistance Guide Series, Office of Justice Programs, United States Department of Justice
- ✓ [Conducting Needs Assessment Surveys](#), Community Tool Box
- ✓ [Conducting a Needs Assessment](#), University of Minnesota
- ✓ [A Community Needs Assessment Guide](#), Center for Urban Research and Learning, Loyola University Chicago

## **Purpose of a Needs Assessment**

First, there are several different types of questions you can ask with a needs assessment. The design of your needs assessment should be informed, first and foremost, by the question(s) you want to answer. Ask as simply as possible: *What do I want to know?*

Each of the following types of reasons for conducting a needs assessment requires different types of data:

**Exploratory:** What information and opinions are out there about Topic X? In this case, there is little or no baseline data, and the needs assessment is gathering baseline data so that it can be analyzed. The design of this type of needs assessment may be a survey of the population or a focus group.

**Segmentation of Population:** What are the characteristics of Topic X for subpopulation Y? In this case, you have data for the larger population, but there is a segment of the population you want to understand better. The design of this type of needs assessment may be of a survey of a subpopulation, a focus group or an analysis of existing data.

**Deeper Understanding:** What are the reasons that Topic X is a problem? You may be asking this question for the whole population or for a subset of the population. In both instances, you want to know more about the nature of the problem. The design of this type of needs assessment may be a survey or interview of the whole population, a subpopulation, or experts.

**Change Over Time:** Has anything about Topic X changed over the last # months or years? In this case, you are interested in gathering data for a second time to see if there are any detectable changes in the data (maybe as a result of interventions or policy changes that were implemented in the intervening period of time). The design of this needs assessment may be a mirror of the original assessment design.

An initial needs assessment establishes benchmarks. In reviewing the data gathered in the initial needs assessment, you are likely to set goals or targets for improvement you hope to see when you collect the data a second time. Once you start collecting data regularly, you can start to identify and follow trends. You need at least three years of data to begin to look at trends over time; five years is better, and ten years is ideal. With at least ten years of data, you have the option to statistically analyze the trends in the data.

**TYPE OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

There are different types of needs assessments that range in expense and complexity. Several main types are discussed in detail below.

**Existing, Publicly Available Data (\$):**

Finding data that is already routinely collected as part of service provision is the least expensive and least resource-intensive way to collect data. These types of data are often referred to as “public health data.” These types of data are usually presented as rates (or percentages). Ideally, you want to get raw “numerator” data (e.g., the instances or people) and be able to create your own “denominator” data (e.g., out of how many possible instances or people) based on census (or other similar) data.

**Figure 7:** Challenges to Using Existing, Publicly Available Data

<p><i>Accessing the Data</i></p>	<p>Sometimes it can be hard to figure out whether the data exist, and if so, who owns or houses the data. Often you have to go through several people to find out who can access the data. You often need to get special permission to access more sensitive data (e.g., juvenile court records), or individual-level data.</p>
<p><i>Consistency in Data Collection</i></p>	<p>Be mindful that changes in leadership, funding and technology can all affect how data are collected. Sometimes there are changes in the definition of a specific data point. Sometimes electronic systems change and data cannot be merged between systems, and/or the definition of the data point changes a little. Sometimes there is a policy or programming change that resulted in data being collected differently or not at all. When asking for data you should always make sure you get the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How and by whom are the data collected?</li> <li>➤ When are the data collected?</li> <li>➤ Who records or enters the data?</li> <li>➤ How and in what format are the data stored?</li> <li>➤ What data points (indicators) are actually collected?</li> <li>➤ What is the specific definition of each data point (indicator)?</li> <li>➤ Have there been any changes in any aspect of the definition, collection or entry of any data point (indicator) over the time period of interest?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Utility of the Data</i></p>	<p>Even if the quality of the data is pristine, the data may not be useful to you. The following are some things to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Definition of the data:</i> Is the data defined in a way that is useful to you? For example, what if you want the rate of one, specific sexually transmitted disease, but the Department of Public Health can only give you the rate of all of them together?</li> </ul>

- *Population data is based on:* Does the data report on the population of interest? For example, what if you want the rate of sexually transmitted diseases in female teens, but the Department of Public Health can only give you the overall rate across the whole population?
- *Age of the data:* Does the data report on the time period of interest? For example, what if it is 2015 and the data available are from 2000 and actually reflecting data collected in 1998?



### Local Spotlight on examples of existing data available locally:

- ✓ Arrest Data: [Charlottesville](#) and [Albemarle County](#) Police Departments
- ✓ Census Data: [American Fact Finder](#)
- ✓ Birth Certificate Data: [Thomas Jefferson Health District](#)
- ✓ Child Welfare Data: [Charlottesville](#) and [Albemarle](#) Departments of Social Services
- ✓ School Division Data: [VDOE Statistics and Reports](#)

Below are local reports that use primarily publicly available data:

- ✓ [Stepping Stones](#), Albemarle County
- ✓ [Charlottesville Task Force Report on Disproportionate Minority Contact in the Juvenile Justice System](#), City of Charlottesville

### Focus Groups (\$\$):

Focus groups provide an opportunity to gather a number of opinions at the same time. If you already have publicly available data, focus groups can help identify what the numbers mean to your stakeholders, consumers, clients, etc. For example, let us suppose that the number of calls to Child Protective Services that are assessed by the Department of Social Services has been going down for several years. Does this reflect a reduction in child abuse, fewer reports coming in from the public, a change in leadership at the Department of Social Services that reinterpreted policies on which calls to assess, a change in child welfare funding that limited the number of staff to conduct assessments, etc.? The trends in the public data may only be truly understood by asking people working in the field who would know the answers to these questions.

*NOTE:* Transcribing is a time-intensive endeavor, even for the most experienced transcriber using high-quality recordings. Schedule *four times* the amount of recorded time for transcribing and checking the transcription.



**Figure 8: Challenges to Conducting Focus Groups**

<p><b>Cost</b></p>	<p>It is important to remember the true cost of a focus group. It includes several elements, including but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The time of the facilitator (scheduling and preparing for the focus group).</li> <li>➤ The time of the note-taker</li> <li>➤ The time it takes to transcribe and analyze the results and the value of the time of all the participants.</li> </ul> <p>Participant time may be particularly expensive if you are conducting focus groups of professionals who are taken away from work, or families who may incur costs of travel and child care.</p>
<p><b>Question Limitations</b></p>	<p>You can only ask a limited number of questions and you are often limited to the type of questions that you can ask. There are a few tips to keep in mind when asking questions in a focus group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Do not ask more than one question every 15 minutes.</li> <li>➤ Many people are not comfortable talking about sensitive information in a group. Therefore, you can only ask relatively non-personal questions in a focus group.</li> <li>➤ The questions need to be open-ended and phrased in such a way as to generate discussion. Yes/no questions are not appropriate for focus groups.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Critical Mass</b></p>	<p>Focus groups ideally include between six and twelve people, typically seated in a semi-circle. It can be difficult to gather a select group of people due to conflicting schedules. Often, you may have to conduct a focus group during an already existing meeting or at a gathering that is already occurring. This results in a <i>sample of convenience</i>. Be to be sure to capture the time and place of the focus group, who facilitated the focus group and the basic demographics of the participants (age, gender and race or ethnicity). You may be particularly interested in other aspects of the participants too, such as whether or not they are a parent, what neighborhood they live in, their annual salary, etc.</p>
<p><b>Facilitator Skill</b></p>	<p>It takes a lot of skill to facilitate a discussion and get <i>everyone</i> comfortable talking, all while not biasing the discussion! Nothing takes the place of being an energetic, charismatic, down-to-earth and open facilitator. There are several tips to ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to talk and feels heard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ In the introduction and throughout, invite quiet people to speak.</li> <li>➤ The first question you ask should either be easy to answer or the question that everyone is burning to talk about. Even though you may be inclined to start by asking people for the positives, generating negatives comes more easily.</li> <li>➤ Ask very concrete questions to start and then invite more discussion.</li> <li>➤ Ask follow-up questions. However, be sensitive to time and be careful not to ask too many follow up questions at the expense of planned, critical questions! You can never go wrong with the follow-up question: “Tell me more about that?”</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Call on specific people to ask if they have anything to add.</li> <li>➤ Ask talkative people to give quieter people a chance to add their insights.</li> <li>➤ Use a flip board to write down what people say. Write it as exactly as possible. If you paraphrase, ask if you still have their idea correct.</li> <li>➤ Create a “parking lot”—a separate list—for off topic ideas, suggestions and thoughts to keep the conversation on track.</li> </ul>
<b>Capturing Results</b>	<p>Capturing the results from a focus group is challenging. Several strategies include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Having a facilitator write notes on a flipchart.</li> <li>➤ Having a dedicated note taker.</li> <li>➤ Audio recording the session and transcribing it later.</li> </ul>
<b>Using Results</b>	<p>Once the results are captured, they need to be analyzed in a way that efficiently, effectively and authentically reflects the content. A <i>content analysis</i> can be conducted. This entails sorting all statements according to themes and then summarizing (and when appropriate, graphing) the results. Counting instances of particular statements is <i>not</i> usually recommended since each focus group (regardless of the number of participants) is likely only going to address a particular issue once.</p>



#### Essential Resources for information on conducting focus groups:

- ✓ [Survey Development Primer](#), Partnerships for Strategic Impact™
- ✓ [Conducting Focus Groups](#), Community Tool Box
- ✓ [Guidelines for Conducting a Focus Group](#), Office of Assessment, Duke University
- ✓ [Defining and Conducting Focus Group Interviews](#), Richard A. Krueger, University of Minnesota



#### Local Spotlight on a local report using focus group data:

- ✓ [Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships \(MAPP\) Assessment](#), Public Health Sciences, University of Virginia School of Medicine

**Surveys (\$\$):**

The terms survey and interview are sometimes used interchangeably. Here, however, *surveying* will refer to asking people to fill out questionnaires and *interviewing* refers to an interviewer meeting one-on-one with an interviewee to ask a series of in-depth questions. Surveys are generally tools for gathering data in the form of numbers, while interviews are generally used to gather data in the form of anecdotes and stories (note that it is labor intensive to turn stories into numbers that can be graphed, but it can be done!).

**Figure 9:** Challenges to Using Surveys

<p><b>Knowing What to Ask</b></p>	<p>To design a useful survey, you need to ask the right questions. This is especially important because respondents do not have the opportunity to express divergent thoughts and/or opinions. It can be helpful to hold a focus group before designing a survey to identify what people feel is important. Wording survey questions is critical to getting valid results. The questions must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Only ask about one thing at a time.</li> <li>➤ Be worded simply.</li> <li>➤ Be straightforward: ask exactly what you mean.</li> <li>➤ Reflect concepts or topics that people will be very familiar with.</li> <li>➤ Be efficient and concise.</li> <li>➤ Have answer options that make sense, are aligned with the question asked and minimize open-ended responses.</li> </ul> <p>It is a very good idea to design a survey and then pilot it with a sample group. After the pilot, ask for direct feedback about the length and time required to complete the survey, the clarity and individual interpretation of the questions and the appropriateness and thoroughness of the answer options.</p>
<p><b>Creating a Survey Key</b></p>	<p>Once you have a final version of your survey, take a copy and write out the numerical value assigned to each response (i.e., Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Agree=3, Strongly Agree=4; Male=1, Female=2; etc.). Including these codes on the survey itself will help limit response errors and help ensure accurate analysis of results.</p>
<p><b>Ensuring Valid Administration</b></p>	<p>Ideally, surveys should be given to all people in the same way each time. Respondents should have a private place to complete the survey. At times, it is critical that surveys are given by someone other than program staff. However, if there is no other reasonable way to collect the data, this may be unavoidable. Depending on the content of the survey, the person who gives out the survey may not be as critical of a detail.</p>
<p><b>Data Entry</b></p>	<p>Ideally, all surveys should be administered on a computer or tablet so that the respondents' answers are automatically and accurately entered into a database. However, this is not always possible. If data is to be entered by hand, the person doing so should be well-acquainted with the survey key, have an articulated system for dealing with</p>

	ambiguous data, know how to differentiate between blanks that are <i>not applicable</i> versus <i>skipped</i> and have a system for marking a survey as entered. Further, all surveys should be entered <i>twice</i> to ensure accurate and consistent data entry. If double-entry is not feasible subset of randomly selected surveys should be checked for accuracy to ensure the data is being entered consistently. If the random subset has numerous errors, all of the data should be entered again.
<b>Using Results</b>	Surveys are ideal for data analysis because the data can be coded numerically. In most instances, data is easily downloaded into Microsoft Excel or any statistical software package. This allows for easy calculation of summary statistics, such as total counts, means, modes, ranges, etc. From this numerical data, results can be graphed.



**Essential Resources** for information on *conducting* surveys:

- ✓ [Survey Development Primer](#), Partnerships for Strategic Impact™
- ✓ [Conducting Surveys](#), Community Tool Box
- ✓ [Program Evaluation Tip Sheet: Constructing Survey Questions](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

For information on *graphing* survey results:

- ✓ [Using Graphics to Report Evaluation Results](#), Program Development and Evaluation, University of Wisconsin-Extension
- ✓ [Data Analysis + Visualization](#), Blog and Website, Ann K. Emery
- ✓ [Excel, PowerPoint, Visio & Word](#), YouTube Channel, Doug H
- ✓ [Creating Pictographs in Excel](#), Patricia Janann Nicholson



**Local Spotlight:** Examples of reports that survey key experts and consumers:

- ✓ [Albemarle Citizens Survey](#), Center for Survey Research and Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, University of Virginia
- ✓ 2012 [City of Promise Segmentation Analysis](#)
- ✓ 2016 [City of Promise](#) Comprehensive Neighborhood Data Report

**Interview Experts or Consumers (\$\$\$):**

When you are trying to assess complex, multifaceted issues and want to delve into what people think, *interviewing* a subsample of people is crucial. Paper and pencil surveys are built on the assumption that you know the most important questions to ask. Focus groups provide some opportunity for participants to discuss other things they think are important. However, interviews are the best tool to uncover what someone really thinks is important and why. This is why journalists do not use surveys to understand a story!

**Figure 10:** Challenges to Using Interviews

<i>Time Intensive</i>	Conducting interviews is not only costly because it takes substantial time on the part of the interviewer and interviewee to schedule and conduct the interview, but also because the results of the interview need to be captured, analyzed and presented.
<i>Interviewer Skill</i>	Although it is easier to have a one-on-one conversation than to facilitate a group discussion, it still requires a great deal of skill to conduct a good interview while not biasing the discussion. The interviewer must be comfortable with him/herself and be open and transparent. They must be professional, calm, curious and able to ask open-ended follow-up questions. They should also be able to manage the flow and length of the conversation.
<i>Capturing Results</i>	To ensure that you adequately capture the results from an interview, you should audio record the session and transcribe it later. Using a note taker can be done, but you risk missing information, bias in what is written down, and the ability to capture verbatim quotes that you may wish to use later.
<i>Using Results</i>	<p>Once the results of an interview are captured, they need to be analyzed and digested in a way that efficiently, effectively and authentically reflects the content. Ideally, each transcript should be read through at least two times:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ First, to see what themes and key information emerge in each transcript.</li> <li>➤ Second, to realign what themes are noted after having read all the transcripts.</li> </ul> <p>All the themes should then be catalogued and the transcripts should be reviewed a third time to ensure that all instances of each theme are clearly marked. The number of times themes were mentioned should be counted and described, and illustrative quotes should be pulled out. Often, theme counts and simple descriptions can be accompanied by a quote that shows more fully how that theme was typically articulated.</p>



**Essential Resources** for information on designing and conducting interviews:

- ✓ [Conducting Interviews](#), Community Tool Box
- ✓ [Conducting Interviews with Key Participants to Analyze Critical Events](#), Community Tool Box
- ✓ [Data Collection for Program Evaluations: Interviews](#), Evaluation Briefs, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



**Local Spotlight:** Reports that interview key experts and consumers:

- ✓ [Gang Reduction through Active Community Engagement \(GRACE\)](#), Partnerships for Strategic Impact
- ✓ Even though it is not a coalition, the [Thomas Jefferson Health District](#) periodically conducts a comprehensive community health assessment which is used to guide local and regional strategic planning. This process, called Mobilizing Action through Planning and Partnerships ([MAPP](#)) collects existing community-level data, conducts focus groups and some of its own surveys, and brings together a diverse group of stakeholders and experts to interpret the data and create action plans for moving forward. The reports can be found [here](#).

### **SAMPLING IN A NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

Sampling is a method of surveying some people rather than the whole population, and must be considered no matter what kind of needs assessment you conduct – unless you are using publicly available data collected on everyone receiving a service. Sampling can save resources, but there are trade-offs. Ultimately, you want to include enough people in your needs assessment so that you feel you are likely representing everyone’s perspective. Accidentally or systematically leaving groups of people out of your needs assessment reduces its validity and the likelihood that people will think it is a convincing assessment.

There is no rule-of-thumb for what percentage of a population is a “good sample,” however, the more people the better. When you look at the size of the sample, do you feel good about it? Do you feel like most (if not all) the perspectives are represented?

**Figure 11:** Types of Sampling

<i>Random Sampling</i>	If the sample is completely randomized (meaning that every person in the population has an equal chance of being included in the needs assessment), then the sample will likely reflect the whole population. This is the gold standard of sampling, but very hard to achieve in real life.
<i>Stratified Sampling</i>	When stratifying a sample, make sure that all the important groups within the whole population are represented in the sample. For example, maybe you plan to survey a certain number of students from each of the four high school grades, and then those who participate from each grade are random.
<i>Stratified and Weighted Sampling</i>	When weighting a stratified sample, all of the groups within the population are represented in proportion to the whole population. However, if there is a justified reason, some groups may be given more weight than would be expected based on the whole population. For example, maybe you want to find out what community residents think of the course offerings at the high school. In this case, you may divide the sample up into four groups (one for each grade level) and then talk to a certain larger proportion of financially under resourced families because they have little or no choice in where they go to school
<i>Convenient Sampling</i>	The cost of random or stratified sampling is often prohibitive. Therefore, a sample of convenience is often used and serves as a better gauge than no sample at all. For example, this is often the best sampling method for focus groups because it is so hard to get random groups of people together to talk about issues. Therefore, maybe you talk to groups of people who are gathered for another reason (e.g., bible study, scouting, PTO meeting, etc.). In order to help make sure you hear from a variety of people, perhaps you look for a variety of gatherings.
<i>Expert Sample</i>	An expert sample is made up of people most intimately aware of the problem. This type of sampling may stand by itself or be in addition to other types of sampling. For example, perhaps you talk to residents about how they feel about policy X, and then talk to City Council members about their perspective.

### HOW TO USE NEEDS ASSESSMENT DATA

After the needs assessment data is collected and entered, there are several steps to take to be able to use the data efficiently and effectively. The Go Section of the Roadmap details the steps in the figure below:

**Figure 12:** How to Use Needs Assessment Data

