



Sexual Assault
DEMONSTRATION INITIATIVE
Enhancing Sexual Assault Services

LISTENING TO OUR COMMUNITIES

Fact Sheet on Community Assessments

This fact sheet is part of the *National Sexual Assault Demonstration Initiative Toolkit* on community assessment approaches to support the growth of sexual assault services within multi-service programs. It provides answers to frequently asked questions about assessment work.

What is assessment?

There are many ways to think about and approach assessment. The heart of assessment is listening to and understanding your communities. It is an opportunity to slow down, ask questions, and learn. It is a way to give voice to the experiences of people in your community and in your organization.

Why do a community assessment?

By listening to your community's experiences, hopes and concerns, you will be better able to design outreach and services that meet their needs and that connect with their values. This will make it possible for your work to become a part of the fabric of the community, rather than being separate from the community's day

to day life. It will also increase your chances for success.

Why do an organizational assessment?

By listening to your own staff, volunteers and leadership, you will be better able to design outreach and services that draw from your strengths. You may also identify areas where you struggle and find new responses to those challenges. This will make it possible for you to strengthen your organizational capacity for serving survivors of sexual violence. Building organizational capacity is not about any one individual, but rather about strengthening the organization as a whole and in ways that continue over time, even as staff change.

What skills do you need to do these assessments?

You need an open mind and the willingness to ask questions. You need to be curious about your communities and your organizations. You need to show respect for your communities, especially when their experiences and opinions differ from your own. You need to be interested in learning new skills. The rest of the toolkit provides tools to assist with conducting surveys, focus groups and reviewing the results.

What do assessments look like?

In this toolkit, we provide sample assessment tools. You are encouraged to adapt to meet your specific needs.

Who analyzes the data?

This toolkit provides some general guidance for analyzing data from community assessments. Some of you may choose to work with an external partner to help with analysis. Since you know your community and organization the best, we do recommend that staff are involved in the analysis process.

How can assessment be used?

- Findings can confirm what you already expected. In these cases, the confirmation can be useful because it allows you to move forward with more confidence and gives you data to use when seeking community support and funding.
- You can gain new insights and deepen your understanding of your community. This understanding can help you enhance your work with survivors, and better understand where there are gaps in systems and how to fill those gaps.



- Assessment can help you make unexpected discoveries. These may help you discover new partners and specific community strengths.
- Assessments can be seen as “doing the work” of serving survivors. They can strengthen and create relationships that will be critical to your work.

Community assessment methods

- Community member focus groups
- Community leader focus groups
- Faith leader focus groups
- Service provider focus groups
- Survivor interviews
- Community leader interviews
- Review of U.S. Census data

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