The Community Needs Assessment Toolkit was designed to assist Pennsylvania community action agencies complete their needs community assessment process. It is the hope of the Needs Assessment Workgroup that this manual, along with the Data Demographic Tool, will allow agencies to spend more time doing data analysis and planning for their communities and less time gathering data.

Community Action Association of Pennsylvania:

Community Needs Assessment Toolkit

CAAP

Community Action
Association
of Pennsylvania

PURPOSE FOR THE PA COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT

The Community Action Association of Pennsylvania in conjunction with staff from a variety of Pennsylvania community action agencies formed the Pennsylvania Community Action Needs Assessment Workgroup to create a Data Analysis Tool and a Needs Assessment Toolkit that would enable community action agencies of all sizes and skill levels to perform a community needs assessment that is both effective for the future planning of the agency and meets the requirements of the Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) authorizing statute. The workgroup has been meeting regularly since 2011 and were dedicated to developing a tool that would be valuable to all community action agencies.

This toolkit provides information on the PA Needs Assessment Data tool (PANA), a tool designed to quickly gather the demographic data needed for the assessment as well as providing guidance on other areas of the needs assessment process. The workgroup hopes this tool will enable agencies to produce a high quality needs assessment while reducing the time needed to gather data so agencies can spend time where needed: **doing the data analysis.**

The needs assessment process will consist of several parts:

- Gathering quantitative demographic data
- Gathering qualitative data (such as surveys, focus groups and interviews)
- Internal scanning of current programs, staffing, and services
- Analyzing the data
- Creating the Needs Assessment Report
- Turning the report into action

Wherever possible, the workgroup has attempted to provide samples and examples that agencies can use as they create their own needs assessment. Those samples can be found in the Appendices of this Toolkit.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Why do a comprehensive community needs assessment?

A comprehensive Community Needs Assessment (CNA) is not only best practice, but it is required in the CSBG authorizing statute.

The following is taken from the CSBG authorizing statute (CSBG Act – Section 676(b) (11): "an assurance that the State will secure from each eligible entity in the State… *a community action plan … that includes a community-needs assessment for the community served,* which may be coordinated with community-needs assessments conducted for other programs…"

- In these ever changing and financially challenging times, how can an agency effectively address the problems related to poverty unless the agency has a clear understanding of the problems related to poverty?
- How can agencies step beyond operating services and become a catalyst for change in their communities?
- How can community action agencies within Pennsylvania assess the needs of a community to develop processes that will work toward moving people out of poverty *while* still providing needed services to those in transition?
- How can we ensure our time and funding is being used in the best way possible to meet the needs of the families and the communities we serve?

Each agency is struggling to answer these questions as we strive to quickly adapt to changing requirements and focus of funders. The CNA process allows us to get a picture of the conditions of our community and analyze how best to move forward, allowing us to be less "reactionary" and more "visionary and proactive" in our agency's future and the work we do in the community.

A multi-level assessment process can aid agencies in looking beyond the current status quo and help provide guidance in the planning process. A CNA can and should be more than just gathering and analyzing data; it can also be a basis of creating a plan to be a catalyst of change. It can provide important community information as to who may be working on issues and where gaps in community services exist. It provides an opportunity to meet and develop partnerships to strengthen services for citizens in their service area. It provides an opportunity to hear from constituents and clients and include their comments and concerns as part of the solution.

The Community Needs Assessment (CNA) should be completed every three years with updates made to the document in the two years between each assessment. The CNA is intended to provide a broad understanding of the whole community to identify new programming opportunities and service gaps. The CNA should not only review areas where your agency is already providing services, but rather all areas identified through the eleven CSBG service categories: Employment, Education, Income Management, Housing, Emergency Services, Nutrition, Linkages, Self Sufficiency, Health, Services for Youth, Services for Seniors. When developing a CNA consideration must be given to the three levels, namely family, agency, and community, as defined by the model of Community Action. Identifying a general need will often not provide enough information as to how the need can be address, therefore it is essential to understand the barriers that are perpetuating and causing the need. By understanding the root cause of the need, programs can be developed or altered to address them holistically.

In conclusion, a CNA helps the agency in its planning process by providing a foundation for effective strategic planning, assessing if the agency is meeting the needs of the community, determining what programs or projects are critical, which may have become obsolete, and what programs or projects may provide new opportunities for the agency. It is the beginning of a comprehensive strategic planning process.

GATHERING QUANTITATIVE DATA: THE COMMUNITY PROFILE

The typical Community Action Agency (CAA) Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) contains a statistical profile of the community the CAA serves or is likely to serve for the duration of the strategic plan. It includes the target population and its characteristics and similar indicators of need. The Pennsylvania Community Action Needs Assessment Workgroup, made up of staff from various community action agencies and the Community Action Association of Pennsylvania has worked with the Missouri Association for Community Action (MACA), University of Missouri Center for Applied Research and Environmental Systems (CARES), and the Pennsylvania State Data Center (PSDC) to create the PA CNA Tool. The tool allows Pennsylvania Community Action agencies to gather the demographic data needed to perform their CNA in a consistent and automated way. The data generated through the PA CNA Tool will form the basis of each CAA's Community Profile.

In order to create that profile, follow the steps listed below:

Go to http://www.thecaap.org/programs/fdc/. This link will bring you to the PA Needs Assessment Tool web page.
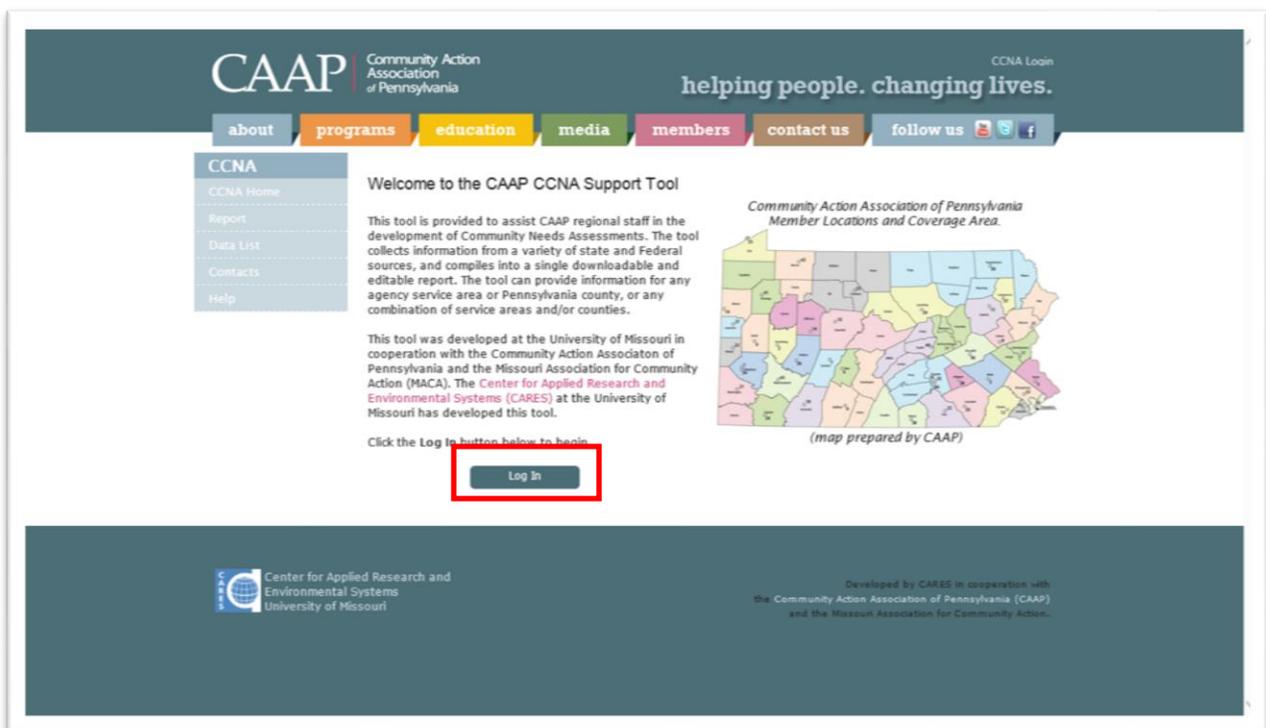
1. Click Log In to log into the Community Needs Assessment Toolkit. Your agency will have received a user id and password to log into the tool. If you do not have your

agency's user id or password, contact your executive director or the Community Action Association of Pennsylvania.
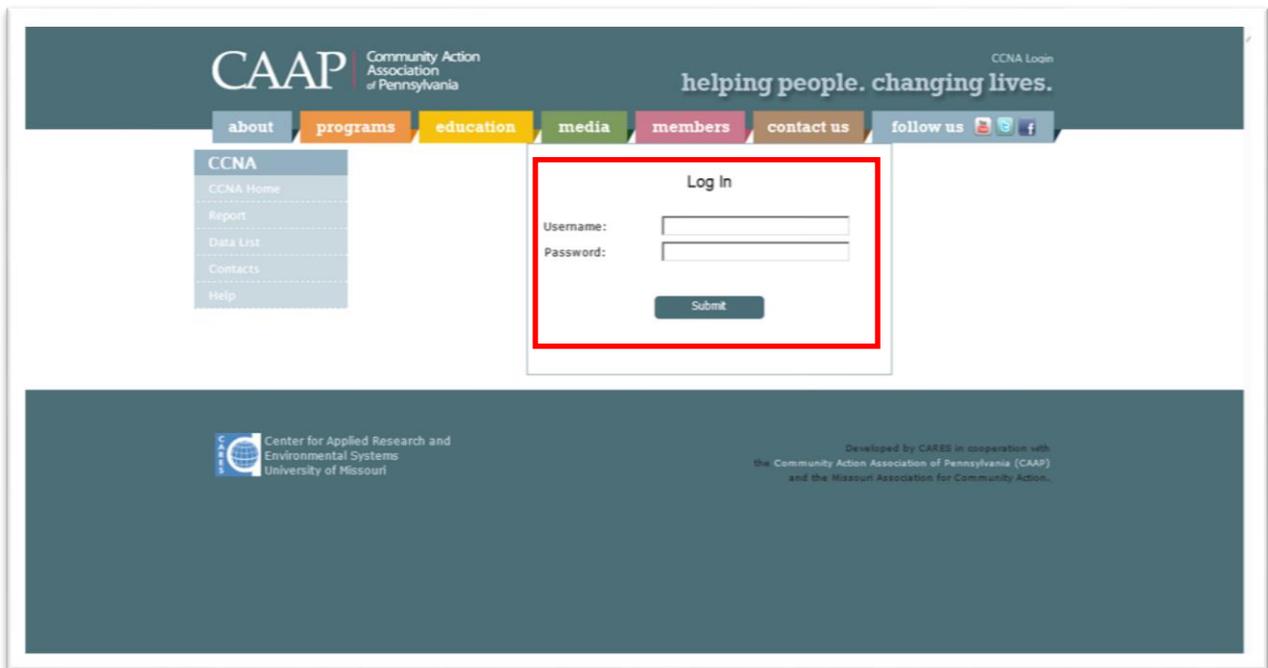
2. Enter your User ID and Password

3. Click Submit
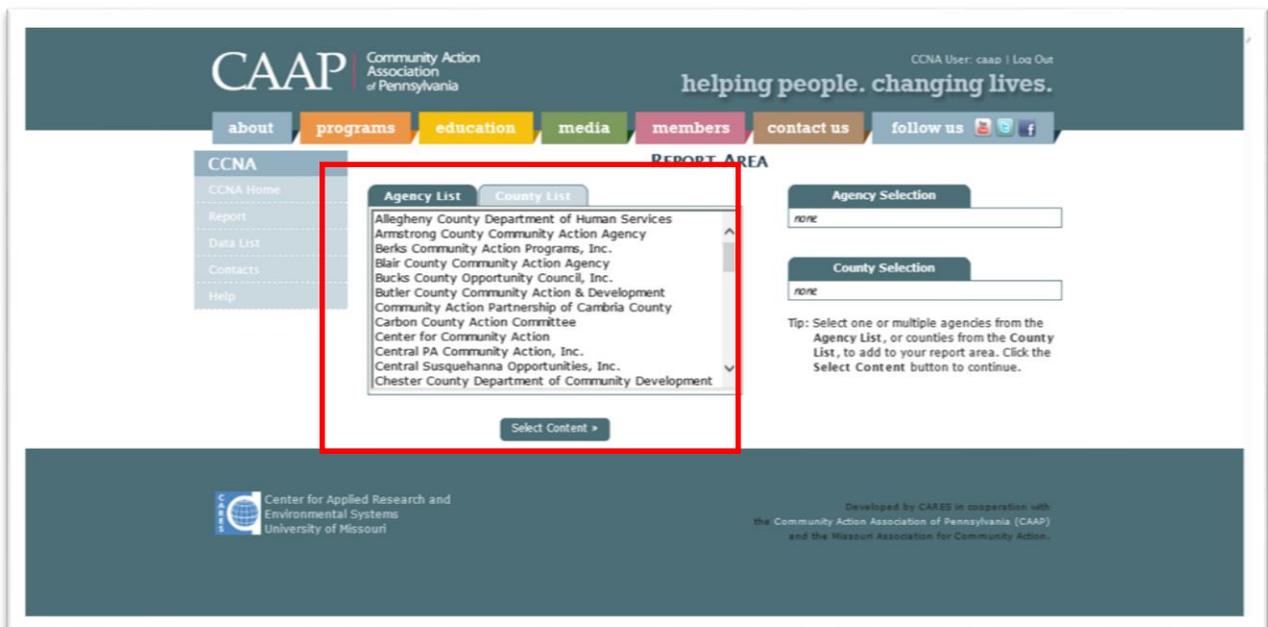
4. Reports can be run by "agency" or by "county(ies)". For the purposes of running the

agency Community Needs Assessment Report, select the CAA by name.

5. Click Select Content
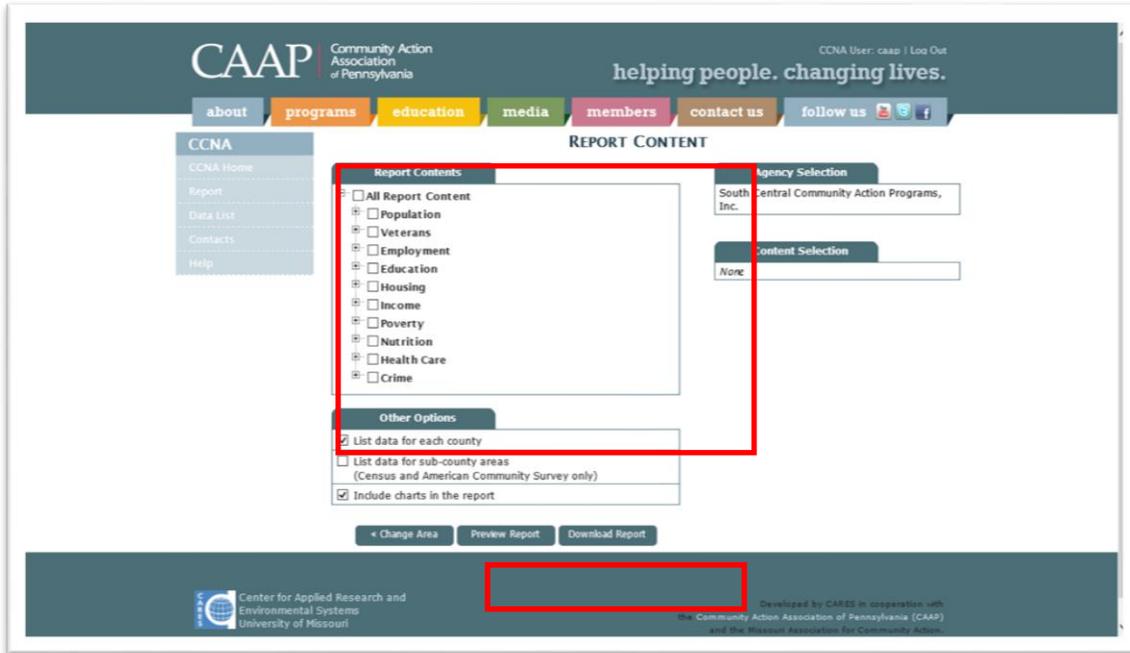
6. Individual data sets can be selected by clicking the check box next to a section of Report Content. Specific data sets can be accessed by clicking the + sign next to a section of report content. To select the standard Community Needs Assessment Report, click the check box next to Standard Report.   (More on the standard report following these steps.)
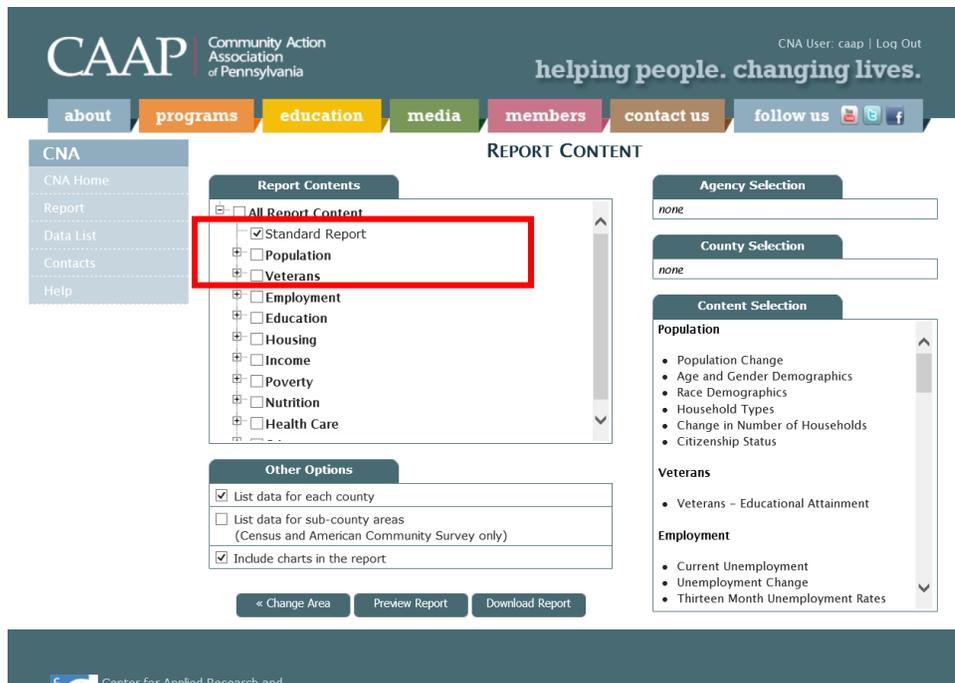
7. To preview the report on the screen, click Preview Report. In most cases, though, you will want to download the report into a Word Document, so it is recommended you simply click Download Report.
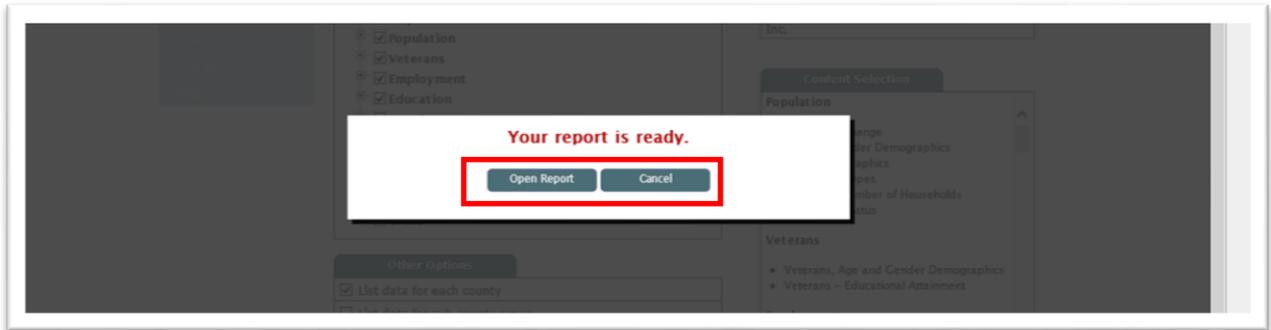
8. Click Open Report
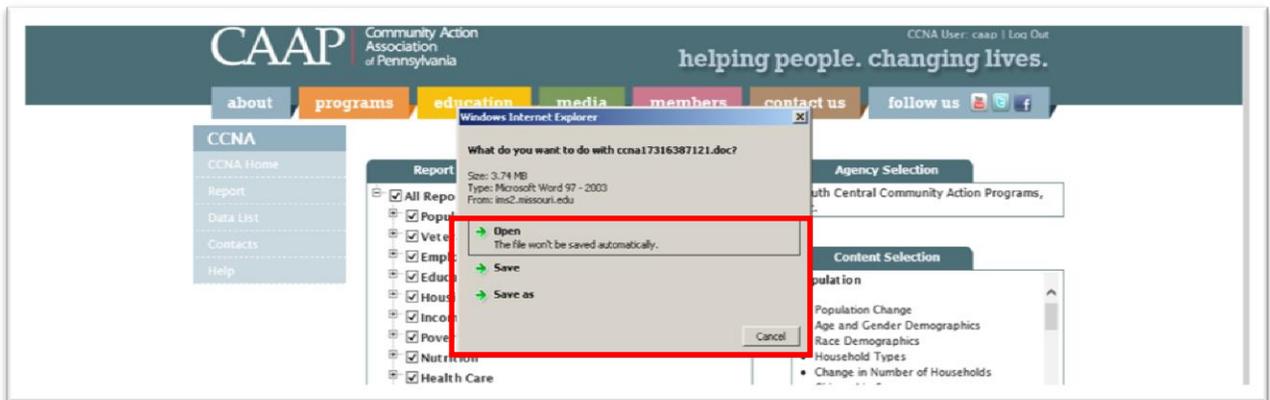
9. Click Open to open the report or Save to save the report to your computer. Be certain that the Type of Document is Word Document; the system sometimes suggests Rich Text Format which takes up more memory.
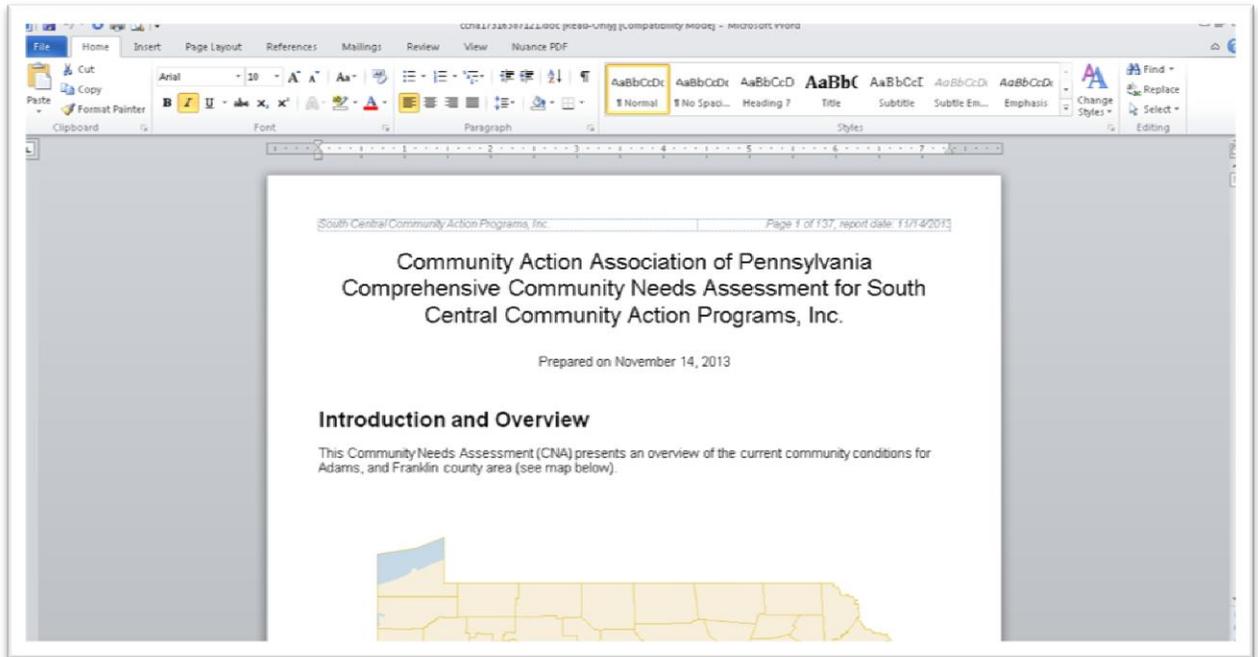
10. The report will download into Word and can be updated and modified as needed. We suggest you Save the report prior to making any modifications.

Before going forward, you should understand some of the attributes of this report:

Standard Report

Upon completion of the tool's many data sources, the Work Group realized there is more data than may be necessary for a basic community profile. The Work Group selected certain quantitative data they believe should be in a basic Community Needs Assessment. This basic set of information can be obtained by simply selecting "Standard Report" as noted in Step 6 above. You may desire to have more data from the website or elsewhere, or even less data, for your own report- the choice is yours.

Not Just Needs Assessment

Keep in mind that this is website is regularly updated for all sets of data. It is a resource for any and all of the data for you to query a report at any time. If you are doing a grant for education, housing, population, poverty – any of the categories – this is a great resource for you.

ACS v. SAIPE Data

The U.S. Census Bureau reports data using two methodologies. The American Communities Survey (ACS) is a survey performed each year that statistically replaces the percentage of the population who completed the previously-used long form census form during past decennial censuses. However, the data is collected each year and may be reported in a single-year, 3-year or 5-year format. The ACS is constructed for optimal performance when reporting five years' worth of data. The Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) produce single-year estimates of median household income and poverty for states, counties, and school districts. SAIPE estimates combine ACS data with administrative and other data, and this can mean slight variations that allow the sum of all counties to be different from the state total. The ACS data is not modified and so the Work Group decided to use ACS data in the Standard Report, while keeping SAIPE data on the website to reference and use. Many Title 1 programs require the use of SAIPE.

State Data Variations

For some data provided by Commonwealth of Pennsylvania departments, there is an unknown county component, data of service that is not attributable to a particular county source. In this case, the sum of the counties may not equal the Pennsylvania total. The Pennsylvania total is greater than the sum of the counties to account for the unknown county records.

Page Numbering

We suggest you number pages on this lengthy report; it will help your reader to locate the pages of interest. Page numbering style is a preference; we chose to leave it alone. There are guides with Microsoft Word as well as many internet resources on how to number pages and populate Tables of Contents (or you can call one of your peers or CAAP staff, who are glad to help).

Executive Summary

We suggest you add a summary up front to your document. It will help orient the readers and guide them in reviewing the report.

Your report document is ready for your additional input and analysis. The next step is gathering Qualitative Data.

GATHERING QUALITATIVE DATA

The Purpose of Gathering Qualitative Data

Along with the community profile detailing the quantitative data about your service area, the Community Needs Assessment (CNA) should include both internal and external scans to understand the complex balance between resources, partnerships, and community support within your agency.

Internal scans are evaluations of programs that should engage staff, Board of Directors, and any Advisory Councils (including volunteers), and include analyzing the current programs and resources to ensure all programs are addressing the documented community need(s) in a cost effective manner generating customer, community, and economic impacts. The key question to ask during an internal evaluation is, "Are we operating programs only out of legacy or is there a real need for them?" In addition to being involved in the internal evaluation, staff, Board of Directors, and Advisory Councils must play a role in the CNA by completing the survey and potentially participating in a focus group on the current needs in the community.

The external scan should involve: clients, partners/stakeholders, elected and appointed officials, and general community members. Like the individuals involved in the internal scan, the external scan groups should be engaged in both surveys and focus groups. Sometimes a personal interview will be most beneficial as there may be insights the interviewee may not want to share in front of others or put into writing. By coupling the written survey information with in-person focus group data, gathering both qualitative and quantitative data, your agency will get a complete view of what is happening in the community at a specific point in time.

Is it necessary to use every method we are about to discuss? No. We do encourage your team to consider at every step whether they have uncovered all resources, partnerships or other community support available to implement your programs. If not, you may well consider trying an additional method. And understand, this is a guide and there are more methodologies than what is suggested in this document.

Asking Why: The Root Cause or 5 Why Strategy

As you and your team embark on gathering qualitative data, keep in mind we want to go further than just gathering data – that was done in the Community Profile. When using surveys, interviews, and focus groups we will be endeavoring to find out "why" problems are occurring or "why" they are so pervasive – we want to get to the root of the problem. This will help make the data you collect more usable during the analysis.

For example, the data may show that there are more homeless families in your community. If we just look at the top level data, we will identify that we need more homeless shelters or we need budgeting classes. But we really need to get to the root of the problem – "why" are there more homeless families?

The 5 Whys is a simple problem-solving technique that helps you to get to the root of a problem quickly. Made popular in the 1970's by the Toyota Production System and in Six Sigma Tool, the 5 Whys strategy involves looking at any problem and asking: "Why?" and "What caused this problem?". Very often, the answer to the first "why" will prompt another "why" and the answer to the second "why" will prompt another and so on; hence the name the 5 Whys strategy

Benefits of the 5 Whys

- Help identify the root cause of a problem.
- Determine the relationship between different root causes of a problem.
- One of the simplest tools; easy to complete without statistical analysis.

THE 'FIVE WHY'S' METHOD APPLIED TO CAA INQUIRY ABOUT THE POVERTY CONDITION 'LACK OF EMPLOYMENT'
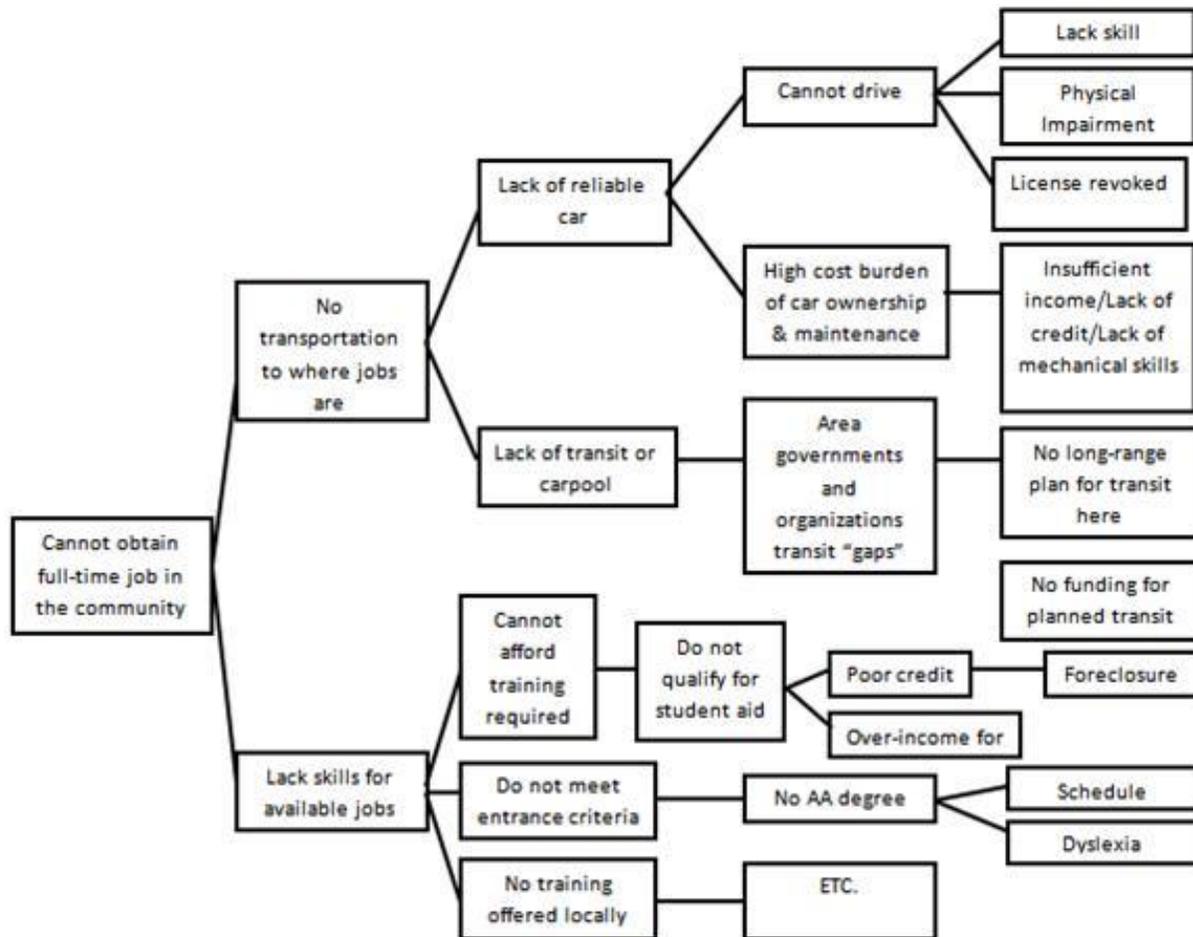
Figure 1: A diagram of the "5 Why's Method" and the possible outcomes when we look for a root cause to the situation.

When Is 5 Whys Most Useful?

- When problems involve human factors or interactions.
- In day-to-day business life; can be used within or without a Six Sigma project.

How to Complete the 5 Whys

1. Write down the specific problem. Writing the issue helps you formalize the problem and describe it completely. It also helps a team focus on the same problem.
2. Ask Why the problem happens and write the answer down below the problem.
3. If the answer you just provided doesn't identify the root cause of the problem that you wrote down in Step 1, ask Why again and write that answer down.

4. Loop back to step 3 until the team is in agreement that the problem's root cause is identified. Again, this may take fewer or more times than five Whys.

Back to our example – there are more homeless families in the community and let's try the 5 whys:

1. Why are there more homeless families?
    Because more families are being evicted.

2. Why are more families being evicted?
    Because more families can't afford their rent.

3. Why are families unable to afford their housing?
    Because the number of low income/affordable housing units is decreasing in the community.

4. Why is the number of low income/affordable housing units decreasing in the community?
    Because a much needed revitalization project is taking place in town and many homes are being sold and rehabbed, increasing their market value and attracting a different tenant base that can pay twice what past rent cost.

5. Why is the revitalization project not helping the former tenants?
    Because the job market easily accessed by the former renters did not pay a wage that supports better housing. The displaced renters have had to move out of town and away from the job market, now also requiring transportation to find employment to afford housing.

So while we might need to build more shelters, the real issue is that families now need transportation in order to access jobs – which might bring about a whole other set of "why's" they need licenses, vehicles, public transportation to the outskirts of town, etc.

It also helped us see the connection with something great happening downtown – revitalization, which brings about a new vitality in town but has caused larger problems for individuals who used to live there. It may allow us to partner with developers and businesses to find solutions to the larger problems. The 5 whys exercise provided meaning to the data.

This portion is clearly part of the analysis you will do later in the process, but as you formulate your survey questions, or as you prepare for a focus group, keep this technique in mind. We don't want the surface answers. Everyone knows, for example, that there are issues in our community with Housing, Jobs, and Transportation. But in order to see how best we can work to remediate the issues, we have to fully understand them.

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION: SURVEYS

Using Surveys

In local communities, there may be other organizations or community groups that perform CNAs, community action agencies are encouraged to partner with others when gathering needed data or to use other data that has been collected in the recent past. For example, Hospitals, United Way, Office for Aging and Head Start are all required to perform CNAs, some may even be purchasing those services from the Data Center of a College or University, utilizing that data or adding specific questions related to poverty may assist the agency in gathering valid data as well as assist the entities in working toward mutual goals. For example, one community worked with their hospital's needs assessment process to add questions to their phone interviews related to poverty, stress from economic difficulties and depression as it relates to lower income families; as well the information provided health indicator data based on economic and racial breakdowns. This data showed the direct relationship of poverty on health and enabled task forces to work on strategies related to depression and stress management for lower income families. The CAA was able to see statistically valid data on the high incidence of depression in lower income families as well as the impact of stress and depression on individuals' employment. Caseworkers believed there was a high correlation but now they have the data to prove it. Together the health system and CAA are working on depression and health screenings and ways to implement strategies to help families dealing with excessive stress and depression.

Look out for words like "client," "self-sufficient," "benefit,"

- *Drop professional jargon.* "case-management."

- Test the survey tool on one or two people from outside the agency and the field of social services.

- *Drop or restate controversial or complex concepts that have to be explained.* "Poverty" is one such concept. When Americans hear the word "poverty" they associate it with negative personal qualities. An important exercise, **"Poverty: Does the 'P' Word Belong in Data Collection Tools?"** in the Resources Appendix for Part III, offers some solutions for language that works.

- *Use an "appreciative inquiry" style whenever possible.* To accomplish this, the CAA

should design opinion-based and community-related questions with balanced response choices to make sure positive impressions can be recorded among the answers offered. **"Identifying and Measuring Individual, Agency and Community Assets"** in the Resources Appendix for Part III offers more suggestions about an appreciative inquiry approach to the design of survey questions. It also suggests approaches to assess the resources and strengths of individuals, community institutions and economically important organizations.

Missouri's Toolkit includes a database of hundreds of scaled questions about community conditions. The document will be located with the toolkit on the CAAP website where the CNA link is noted.

Customers are a terrific resource for reporting on the realities of life in the low-income community, including community assets and how those improve their situation. The CNA, by contrast, must engage many community residents other than customers and ask many different questions about agency assets. The community assessment is not the best vehicle for collecting customers' reaction to their experience with the CAA.

SURVEY MANAGEMENT TIPS

Who to Survey

- *Former and current clients or customers* are a primary source of information for the majority of CAA assessments today. Surveys can be mailed to clients, hosted online, provided to clients who come to the facility or a combination of options.

- *Other residents of the low-income community* can inform you of needs that they are dealing with in other ways and can assist in your definition of community assets. Agencies that want to reach many community households not associated with the CAA can make mailings to low-income census tracts and/or housing developments and enlist other neighborhood organizations, including faith organizations, to distribute to their clients or members.

- *Individuals in the community at-large* provide information from those who are not low-income to allow a comparison of opinions and help the agency gauge community-wide potential for supporting particular solutions. Involving them also builds the CAA's name recognition and may attract new volunteers and supporters.

Survey Methods

Most surveys are anonymous. Some CAAs have achieved substantial response rates by putting the survey online, such as in the "Survey Monkey" program; Google Surveys offers another simple tool that produces clear spreadsheets. To get the maximum number of responses, do not require that an online survey have every item filled in before it can be submitted. Most survey services allow you to also enter surveys manually and have an analysis functionality that is helpful in compiling data.

In a direct mailing to non-clients, you will likely be limited to the address lists your programs and partners own, unless the local government property tax officials will help you access and sample addresses from a full list of residences in target areas. Tracking the nine-digit zip code of respondents will enable you to judge how representative the answers may be. Other ways to reach more people with the survey could include putting a survey in the newspaper, handing them out at shopping centers or including them with utility billing mailings.

Avoid the Trash Can

Your survey cover letter or brochure must answer the question "Why survey me?" if it is to convince a potential respondent that it is worthy of their time and attention. A professionally formatted letter or graphic flyer can make these points:

[Our home CAA] is asking for the ideas of every resident of [community] about how to open more opportunities for economic advancement and security to everyone who lives here. Your answers to the questions on this anonymous survey are important to us.

Whether or not you or someone close to you has experienced the needs listed, we would appreciate your opinions on how to develop better resources and improve the entire community.

Tracking and Recording the Survey Responses

A coding system on the mailed surveys can let you know the characteristics and geographic area of respondents. For example, you can use different numbers or letters to indicate if the response is from an agency client, a client or member of another organization that supplied the CAA with mailing addresses (using a separate number for each organization), or from a member of the general public. Include an identifier for the zip code area to which the survey was sent.

The Survey as an Outreach Tool

Don't ignore the outreach opportunity associated with all the community contacts you are making! Even your anonymous survey can be packaged with a separate sheet or a post card to mail back

with the individual's name and address and a request to be on your mailing list or to be contacted about volunteering. A sheet or card for the recipient to *keep* can list the numbers to call for your services, state the agency mission, and, of course, tell them how to contribute.

Be sure to tell respondents where/when you will post the total results of the survey; this increases the likelihood of a response because it engages them further. When you post the Community Needs Assessment report on your web page, include outreach, contribution and volunteering information on the same page; it may be the only page your new contacts visit.

Elements of Good Survey Design:

- Preparing for the survey

    o Decide on the type of survey or combination of types of surveys. (mailed or online, telephone, or face-to-face interviews)

    o Select the survey's content, writing questions and trying out the form

    o Decide who should participate and how often

    o Administer the survey

    o Process the data

    o Analyze and interpret the results

    o Report the results orally or in writing using text charts, tables, and graphs

- Writing survey items

    o Avoid true – false questions

    o When asking both open-ended and closed answers, ask the open-ended question first then ask the closed questions. This will avoid biasing the respondent.

    o Utilize challenges and opportunities. Don't focus just on the good or just on the bad.

    o Avoid specialized words or abbreviations. Also avoid long confusing sentences.

    o Make questions concrete.

    o Avoid biased words and phrases. Certain names, places and views are emotionally charged.

- o Check your own biases. Have others review your questions to check for hidden biases.

- o Use caution when asking for personal information.

- o Ask 1 question at a time. Don't ask double-barreled questions.

  - NO: Rental housing in XXX City is affordable and safe.

  - YES: Q1 – Rental housing in XXX City is affordable. Q2 – Rental housing in XXX City is safe.

- o Be specific in option choices.

  - NO: Sometimes, often, etc.

  - YES: Monthly, weekly, daily

Survey Sample Size

Survey size can be difficult to gauge. For more information on survey size and statistical reliability as well as a free sample size calculator is found at www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm with some tutorials on statistics for survey administrators.

Customer Satisfaction and the Community Needs Assessment

If the agency has no other tool for monitoring customer satisfaction it may be necessary to collect some baseline data in the CNA. However, every CAA should have a routine and consistent way to gather consumer feedback.

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION: FOCUS GROUPS, COMMUNITY FORUMS, AND INTERVIEWS

Focus Groups

Focus Groups are tools to produce information on specific topics that can be combined with other results, including other focus group reports. Focus groups must follow a formal process in which open-ended conversation is structured into quantifiable and comparable output. When planning the data collection, choose clear and specific topics for the focus group to address. Invite discussion and utilize the 5 Whys to attempt to get feedback on what the root causes of issues are.

Location! Location! Location!

Focus groups can be developed in a variety of forms, but the essence of them is the same – to gather qualitative data from participants. In the CNA process, focus groups are used to supplement information gathered from surveys as well as delve in deeper to the barriers identified.

Moving Meetings

Moving Meetings is a type of focus group that allows for a wide array of community members to be engaged *anywhere* at an informal level. Moving Meetings works best when built into an already existing group meeting, e.g., being placed as meeting agenda items or scheduled as after-meeting exercises. General Moving Meetings should be held in various areas of service, with key stakeholders—partners, clients, community members, etc.—participating.

Meeting locations should be handicapped accessible and have ample parking. Facilities that are publically owned are good locations for meetings, since they are often less intimidating to participants. When the general public is invited, locations such as restaurants, private clubs, and churches are not the best locations.

General Moving Meetings should be scheduled midweek during evening hours. Meetings held Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays are often better attended than those scheduled for Friday or Monday. Meetings starting at 6:00 or 6:30 p.m. are often better attended than those starting at 5:00 or 7:00 p.m. It is best to avoid meal times, but think about providing light refreshments, as a courteous gesture for participants, since they are giving their time to the process. This small gesture is always greatly appreciated and will keep participants engaged.

Potential Moving Meeting Partners include:

- Social clubs, such as the Kiwanis Clubs, Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs;

- Community revitalization organizations, such as: Main Street Programs, Elm Street Programs;

- Municipal leaders, including counties, boroughs, townships, school districts, cities

- Community Partner, including non-profit organizations, business associations, coordinated taskforces, collaborative boards; and,

- Other types of involved citizens, including church groups and neighborhood associations.

As participants are entering the meeting, ask them to write down their name and email address. This will be very useful if there are questions you cannot answer during the meeting, so you will have a way to get back to them. This allows for the agency to generate email blast to inform participants of the completion date for the CNA and where they will be able to view results e.g. website, publication, e-mailed to participants, etc. Also, emails can be added to newsletter listservs.

Staffing the Focus Group

Dedicate a staff member to oversee the process of galvanizing community support for the CNA. This staff member should be very knowledgeable about the community and greater region, in order to maximize partnerships. Make certain that all management-level staff understand and support the process. Management-level staff may know of others within the agency who have contacts with various groups, and those contacts might be influential in getting a Moving Meeting approved on the agency's agenda. Since all information is packaged for ease of use, the staff member associated with a particular group can assume the responsibility for getting this information to them.

The versatility of Moving Meetings allows the staff member to easily provide the box to anyone, so that they can hold the meeting and provide the agency feedback information. For example, if two meetings are going on at the same time, one may have a large crowd, while attendance at the other is limited to a few participants. A staff member cannot be at both meetings; therefore someone attending the smaller meeting brings the Moving Meeting in a Box and accompanying

instructions. Since the Moving Meeting has been included as an agenda item as part of this smaller meeting (or scheduled as an after-meeting), information will be gathered, and the box will be returned to the appropriate staff member following the meeting.

Building a Moving Meeting in a Box

Through the preparation of materials related to all aspects of the topic prior to holding the first Moving Meeting in a Box, content provided for all meetings on the same topic will be consistent; hence same type of information will be gathered.

Materials Needed:

- Sign in Sheet – Name and E-mail Addresses
- Meeting Agenda & Talking Points on the Importance of Engagement
- Surveys and Survey Instructions if you will have participants complete surveys as well
- Additional Resources: Previous Needs Assessment Results, Agency's Annual Report, Agency Brochures
- Materials: Markers, Pens, Flip Chart
- Business Cards or Contact Information Sheet for Staff Person
- Easily Transportable Container

The agenda for the meetings should focus on gathering information from participants while educating them about the history, role, and importance of Community Action Agencies. The first part of the meeting provides participants with an understanding of the process, the second part of the meeting should engage participants to provide information about community needs and barriers. Always leave room at the end of the meeting for questions and answers and follow up to any exercises. Three examples of Moving Meeting agendas are in the Appendix.

Community Forums

Large public discussions can be very helpful, but are not necessarily representative of a community and may not be able to provide an in-depth understanding of all of the issues. Sometimes a very vocal minority can dominate a community forum, and while this provides important input, it may not be as helpful in assessing the opinions of the community at large. Other times, the only people who attend the meeting are those who have a vested interest in what is to be discussed. It is important to know who is in the audience at a large community discussion, so the input received can be interpreted.

Prevent Misinterpretation and Confusion in Community Forums

Participants in your group meetings will offer problems or solutions that are not at the same "level" as another's remark. Many will describe a symptom of an underlying problem but not get to the need that should be addressed. The facilitator might want to either ask participants to collectively categorize statements recorded at the meeting as to whether they are descriptions of problems, identification of root cause of a condition and/or suggested solutions. You can make the discussion more action-oriented by following up a problem description with a probe to get the *cause* on your list. Using a form of the "But why?" or 5 Whys technique will help get to the root cause. (Example: "You mention too many kids are home alone after school. Can you go further and say why you think this happens?" then "Ok, thanks. But *why* do you think all their moms spend afternoons at the pool hall?"). Alternatively, your team will need to categorize the meeting input in order to use it in the analysis appropriately.

Listening Sessions

Listening sessions are community forums you can use to learn about the community's perspectives on local issues and options. They are generally fairly small, with specific questions asked of participants. They can help you get a sense of what community members know and feel about the issue, as well as resources, barriers, and possible solutions.

Interviews

At times, individuals who may have relevant information may not want to share that information in public forums. Individuals such as County Commissioners, Legislators and others may provide more feedback during a private interview than they would or could during a Community Forum

Interviewing Local Leaders

Perhaps a team member can interview agency leadership, elected officials, close partners, and the leaders of a potential future partner. Structuring conversations that address the same open-ended questions may be most appropriate for those in civic leadership positions and for current partners. Interviewers should be skilled in active listening techniques. Private sector leaders' hopes and goals for the future may require some additional probing; they manage assets that can contribute to reducing poverty, but they may be cautious about questions that suggest re-directing the way they use those assets now.

Don't Forget Your Board and Staff

Don't forget to both survey and gather qualitative input from your Board Members and staff, especially front line staff. They frequently have real-time, first-hand knowledge of needs for families and gaps in services or where systemic issues prevent families from either receiving services or moving forward. They may also be able to help identify the "whys" in the 5 Why process.

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION: INTERNAL AGENCY SCAN

Just as you are looking at the external community and different data sets, as well as, gathering qualitative data from external constituencies, it is important to look at the agency and the programs and initiatives you facilitate. Not only is this best practice, but funders are now expecting that agencies evaluate both the outcomes and return on investment, as well as participate in continuous quality improvements.

Performing a fiscal and impact analysis allows you to ensure:

- Programs are still adequately meeting community needs

- Program outcomes are appropriate for the program and needs

- Funding is spent in a manner that produces the best possible return on investment

- Programs are sustainable

Performing an Internal Scan of the Agency

Performing a Fiscal Analysis
It is important to take the opportunity to analyze the fiscal health of the programs the agency administers.
- Which programs are breaking even?
- Which programs are losing money?
- Which are being supplemented through CSBG funds?

It is important to look at each program on its own merits – remove discretionary non-designated support and CSBG so that you can get a true picture of the health of the program. This is not to say that because a program relies on CSBG or on Discretionary, non-designated funds that it is not an important program, but agencies should make a conscious choice as to where CSBG and discretionary funding is used.

Performing an Impact Analysis
An impact analysis is looking at the real impact of the program across a spectrum of impact criteria. This is done for all programs and helps the agency get a clear picture of the impact of the program. A spreadsheet is created and programs are rated against criteria using a numerical rating scale (such as 1 - Not Much Impact. 2 - Some Impact, 3 - Very Strong Impact, 4 - Exceptional Impact).Impact Criteria could include:
- Alignment with the Core Mission – how well does the program meet the mission?
- Excellence in Execution – how good are we at providing the service?

- Number of Clients Served – how many clients do we serve?
- Depth of Service (Band-Aid or addressing root cause) – Does this program fix a problem or only deal with a symptom? Does it have a deep impact on a family (is it life changing) or is it only a momentary benefit?
- Filling an Important Gap – Are there others providing the service or if we stopped tomorrow would this leave a significant gap in the community?
- Community Building – Does this program help bring others to the agency to help do the work or bring together diverse groups?
- Leverage – Does this program bring in other revenue, power, or support that helps us do the work?

Ratings can take place with leadership, program directors, and board members and can be done on paper before a meeting and then individuals can share their opinions or it can be done in advance and forwarded on so that a tabulated view can be presented to the group and discussed. Impact Criteria can be weighted if desired. For example, if 'Alignment with the Core Mission' is more important the numbering for that criterion could be 2 - Not Much Impact. 4 - Some Impact, 6 - Very Strong Impact, 8 - Exceptional Impact so that the scores will show weighting toward that criteria.

Once completed, the fiscal analysis or fiscal health of the program can be combined with the impact scores. Programs with low impact and a low fiscal health, may be programs the agency would want to take a closer look at to see if they really feel the program is one they should continue. Sometimes discontinuing a program frees up discretionary funding for new opportunities or allows other higher impact programs to stabilize.

An impact analysis is not a tool used to close programs, it does however, assist leadership and Boards of Directors to identify programs that deserve a closer look or may need more analysis to identify ways to either improve the fiscal health of the program or increase the impact. Basically, the impact analysis provides data that can be used to improve an agency.

To find more information on impact and fiscal analysis please see the book *Nonprofit Sustainability; Making Strategic Decisions for Financial Viability* written by Jeanne Bell, Jan Masaoka, and Steve Zimmerman

Looking at Customer Satisfaction Data

While completing the CNA, and integral agency scan including fiscal and impact analysis, it is also a good time to look at your customer satisfaction data.

- What are your clients saying about your services?
- Are there services that clients need that you are not providing?
- Are there improvements that can and should be made to programs to assist clients?
- Are there some programs that have a higher satisfaction rating?
- Are there best practices that could be shared based on feedback from customers?

Does your customer satisfaction survey allow you to answer the questions above? If not, your agency may want to look at revising the survey. A survey gathering data that provides insight into which programs and services are valued by clients will assist in your internal agency scan as well as the larger CNA.

Data, Data and More Data

Now that you have gathered both quantitative and qualitative data, it would seem as if your work is done, and yet, this is where the process really begins. It is not about gathering the data but about what we will do with all the data. Once you have gathered all your data, you are going to need to determine what it all means and answer these questions: How can we use it? How can it help us paint our own future?

Analyzing your quantitative data will require some basic statistical analysis. While we recognize that the average person probably will not have a lot of statistics training, there are some basic analysis methods which will prove beneficial at this point in the community needs assessment process. Determining per capita, percentages, percent change and ratios are just a few of the techniques you can use to paint a picture with your data. Thankfully there are a few great resources that are available to help if you haven't done this in the past. The Center for Rural Pennsylvania's *Stats for Scaredy Cats* is one publication. It can be found at: http://www.rural.palegislature.us/stats_2011.pdf.

ASSESSMENT MEANS *ANALYSIS,* NOT COMPILATION

A CNA is not about presenting the data; it is about sharing the story of what the data is telling you. It is about letting your agency, Board of Directors, state and federal agencies, funders, decision-makers, and the community-at-large get a picture of the needs and strengths of your community, while understanding the critical role your agency plays in it. Many CAA staff have shown concerns with what they must do with the results of their CNA.

- If a need is identified, how can the agency add to what they are doing?
- How can CAAs close a program that fills an important need so that they can address a newly identified need?

In finically difficult times, how can an agency take on more risk? The questions posed are all very valuable and thought-provoking. It is part of the reason the workgroup has included the impact and fiscal analysis of existing programs within this toolkit. It is critical to take an in-depth look at our existing programs, particularly when we are identifying changing needs in our community. This allows CAAs to make decisions with facts, not just emotions. Also, this process allows CAAs to confirm they are operating the right programs in the correct manner to address an identified need and achieve the best outcomes Through this process, it is possible that a CAA will not need to change current programming, but is also possible that dramatic changes to programs will have to be made for the overall efficiency of an agency to improve. While the issues identified though the process may feel large and feel unmanageable, management must take action to do what is in the best interest of the agency and its ultimate goal of fulfilling its mission and reaching its outcomes. . The first step to understanding how to analysis all the data gathered, however, is telling the story with the data.

While analyzing your qualitative data it is important that you continuously ask yourself the following types of questions:

- What patterns and common themes emerge around specific items in the data?
- How do these patterns (or lack thereof) help to shed light on the community?
    - What story are they telling us?
    - Do they get to the root of an issue or are they a symptom?
- Are there any deviations from these patterns?
    - If, yes, what factors could explain these atypical responses?
    - If the deviation is good, is there a way to spread it?
- What interesting stories emerge from the data?
    - How can these stories help to shed light on the broader issues?

- Do any of the patterns/emergent themes suggest that additional data needs to be collected?

- Do the patterns that emerge support the findings of other corresponding qualitative analyses that have been conducted?

Identify the themes and patterns, but make sure to include the whys. It is not enough to say we have a transportation issues. That is just compiling data. What did you learn about transportation from the qualitative portion of the data collection – *What are the "whys" behind the data?*

It has more meaning and is more actionable to share the following:

"Transportation was shown to be a significant barrier showing up on surveys, in focus groups, and interviews. Not only does the community not have public transportation, but a significant portion of the low-income population does not have a working vehicle, and many of our participants stated they don't currently have or have never had a license, yet we found that most individuals had to commute more than 10 miles to work. In fact, all of the major employers are located in the eastern portion of the county while the census tract with the highest percentage of low-income families is in the southwest section of the county. In consultation with the County Transportation Department, there is no plan for public transportation because of the rural nature of the community and a lack of funding."

The agency can then state how, if at all, it hopes to assist in mitigating the issue or dealing with the root cause. Agencies have a number of options such as:

- Doing nothing because it is not part of the mission or scope of the agency
- Taking a leadership role in the development of a solution
- Formally partnering with another entity who has taken a leadership role in the solution
- Informally partnering with another entity who is working on the solution
- Advocating on behalf of the implications for low income folks as it relates to the issue
- Informally working with clients to reduce the implications of the issue

So while transportation is such a large issue that most CAAs could not solve it alone, they could:

- Research and then reach out to local employers to talk about share a ride programs that might help local families
- Join the task force on transportation to ensure the needs of low-income families is represented
- Raise the awareness with a public forum that shared the implications of the lack of transportation and have some families share their stories
- Hold classes to help individuals study for their permit and license test
- Make sure that their own programs did not disenfranchise individuals, who miss an appointment due to lack of transportation because they understand the substantial barrier that is for families
- Have a once a month satellite of programming in the community with the highest census of low income families to reduce the transportation issues

More often than not, it is about finding incremental ways to begin implementing solutions with engaging the communities and your partners to fight poverty. Sometimes that means adding a program, sometimes that means inviting others to join in developing a solution, and sometimes it means joining others as they search for a solution.

COMPLETING THE ASSESSMENT REPORT

Description: [Only] the First Step in the Assessment Report

The final Assessment Report must communicate the agency's judgments about what the data and opinions mean, and focus on choices for the next strategic plan. The Assessment Report should include the CNA, including all the data gathered through both the quantitative and qualitative methods, the internal agency scan, information gathered from customer satisfaction surveys, and the overall analysis of all the data. Pages of data collected should not be presented without being interpreted. Data are just numbers, not useful information, until they are analyzed. In fact, displaying data without interpreting them can undermine their interpretation by leaving readers free to choose explanations that fit their own preconceptions.

The Assessment Report

Refining the descriptive output is essential to giving focus and meaning to the information. Pick key findings to emphasize. Focusing on clusters of important related information is important to the analysis. Analyzing the conditions that are described adds meaning which is important to help the CAA's leaders, partners, and community accept and utilize the assessment.

Useful contrasts or similarities may include:

- Your community data vs. the same data for the state and nation.

- Your community data vs. benchmarks (such as: self-sufficiency income, affordable rent, grade-level achievements).

- Today's data compared to previous periods to describe trends or new developments

- The CAA client data (from CSBG-IS, ROMA) compared to the community at-large and to the low-income community.

- The demographic data on needs indicators (children of working parents, uninsured adults, low-income seniors living alone) vs. resources "needed" (licensed child care openings, community health centers and emergency rooms, elders with home visits or meal delivery).

- A subgroup(s) of people or communities compared to one another or to the general population.

Interpret

Consider all the information from the agency – collected surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. What does it show about issues that are foremost in the mind of residents and leaders?

Organize

Organize all the findings into the issues framework selected, and analyze the results related to needs, assets, and suggested solutions. The results should *not* include CAA plans for action.

Some CAAs feel they should put every piece of information into the body of the assessment report even if it wasn't significant enough for them to analyze. Some include raw numbers in paragraph after paragraph of data-heavy text instead of into graphs or tables. *Do not fall into this trap!* Raw data are user-friendly only when it is thoughtfully analyzed and shared within the context of the larger framework.

Caution: If a survey or group meeting result feels "wrong" to experts in the CAA after objective debate, it may not reflect reality. Remember that the survey responses are from a small population, and even a truly random sampling can turn up a non-representative group. Also, the questions may have been understood differently by the respondents than intended by the experts. Plan to do more research to validate results before implementing major changes in CAA strategies, especially if reliable staff disputes the information collected.

If the CAA staff and leaders are surprised about the findings, it may indicate that the CAA participant population whom the staff knows well is not representative of the low-income community as a whole. Does the agency primarily serve families with young children? Only some ethnic groups? Primarily elderly, long-time residents? Mainly English speakers? Unexpected results from the assessment should be brought forward and given special consideration.

How Does An Assessment Report End?

Readers and contributors will want to know how the information will be used; as they read about the identified needs, they may be thinking, *so what?* Or, *what next?*

The Assessment Report is primarily intended to inform CAA strategic investment decisions. It should be written to stand alone, ready for the CAA's leadership to act on the information it contains. While this report will be used by the CAA leaders as the basis for future strategic planning, it is not the vehicle for the CAA's suggestions or comments about strategies the agency

will initiate or maintain. The CNA report should not be a final source of recommendations to the community. Some agencies combine the CNA report with the final Community Action Plan that is based on its results.

Reasons to organize and publish the full CNA report before identifying priorities:

- The CAA can describe conditions, deficits, and assets that may be of interest to other partners or investors in order to build shared initiatives or even to "delegate" opportunities to others;

- Elected officials are generalists likely to be interested in all the findings;

- The many people and organizations who provided data can see the way it fits together;

- It forms the "backup" for the short, highly-structured presentations the CAA distributed to the public and the press.

The assessment can appropriately conclude with an explanation of how the CAA will proceed to create its long-term annual strategic plan which will, of course, be based on the CNA, internal agency scans, the consumer satisfaction analysis, and an analysis of indicators regarding national, state, and local performance goals.

Key Resources

- A Community Action Guide to Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment – NASCSP

- Missouri Community Assessment Toolkit - MACA

- Missouri Community Scale – Annette Backs Edwards (MACA) – database of survey and focus group questions