Conducting the Strengths and Needs Assessment

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INTRODUCTION

This document was created to help grantees of The Services, Training, Education and Policies to Reduce Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking in Secondary Schools Grant Program (STEP Program) develop and conduct a strengths and needs assessment to examine assets and gaps in prevention, intervention, and responses to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking to facilitate the development of effective and comprehensive programs for students. To assist schools and consortia through the assessment process, this document provides information about building a collaborative team, identifying and prioritizing assessment goals, developing and implementing data collection methods and instruments, and reporting assessment findings. **This document is a product of the STEP Technical Assistance Project and is not official guidance from The Office on Violence Against Women (OVW).** Additionally, this document is not an evaluation manual, nor does it provide legal interpretation or legal advice.

THE STRENGTHS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A strengths and needs assessment is a tool used to identify available services and gaps in services and assess the level of knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes of a target population. The assessment will help a school or consortia of schools collect information about existing policies, prevention and intervention; student's knowledge and perceptions of abuse; and resources and service available to students in schools and in the community. This information will assist the school or consortium in identifying strengths, gaps in resources and services, and highlight successes in order to leverage resources to achieve desired outcomes.

The strengths and needs assessment will provide important information to school or school district personnel and other community partners. School personnel will learn more about abuse that may be occurring at school and will have an opportunity to discuss ideas and concerns. The school district might be particularly interested in the findings of the needs assessment and may use the findings to support changes to the district's prevention, intervention, treatment, and response to abuse. Community members and other schools in the community might also want to hear about the findings of the assessment. In order to effectively develop a comprehensive response to these forms of abuse, schools should first understand the key issues students face.

PREVENTION

During middle school, many students start engaging in romantic and/or sexual relationships for the first time. These are the years when the transition from childhood to adulthood begins, new peer and social influences come into play, and jealousy, anger, and pressure to conform are felt in more powerful and personal ways. Attitudes and behaviors learned at home, from peers, and from popular culture take root and manifest in adolescents' relationships.

Early adolescence is a critical time when prevention – including policies to promote healthy relationships and prevention, intervention, treatment, and response to unhealthy or abusive relationships – must begin. Abuse, along with other risk behaviors, rarely occurs in a vacuum. These behaviors almost always take place within a relationship. Promotion of healthy relationships can prevent abuse when it teaches adolescents the skills they need to negotiate

relationship issues, communicate assertively, and respond to pressure to participate in risk behaviors. [1] A multi-dimensional comprehensive prevention approach to promoting healthy adolescent relationships is necessary for changing social norms, socially accepted behaviors, and attitudes among students that contribute to abuse.

INTERVENTION AND RESPONSE

Young survivors of abuse often face great obstacles in seeking help and protection. They struggle with confusion about the law and must overcome the barriers of limited access to transportation, shelter, money, and services; fear of social stigma; and distrust of authority. Students, unlike their adult counterparts, are often unable to access victim support services, including health care, without parental consent. Underserved communities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning students (LGBTQ) and students with physical, mental, or developmental disabilities, may face a number of added barriers that compound the impact of abuse. Child protection mandates may pose additional challenges for students when deciding whether to report incidents of relationship abuse. Young survivors of abuse, and students who have been exposed to domestic abuse, may be hesitant to disclose abuse because of a fear that these incidents will be reported and they will be subject to subsequent interventions.

Students victimized by other students often face additional challenges in a confined school environment. For example, the abusive student may attend the same school and continue to hurt or threaten the victimized student. A survivor who wishes to remain anonymous may find it virtually impossible to do so in such an insular environment. Similarly, a student who experiences stalking may find it difficult to escape when the student who has been stalking him or her has a seemingly "legitimate" reason for remaining in contact with, or in proximity to, the victim. Even changing class schedules may not eliminate the threat of encountering the abusive student in school. Finally, the use of social networking sites has increased the danger for students as abusive students may use this medium to monitor victims' whereabouts and further victimize targeted students by sharing information with the intent to harm, embarrass, or threaten them.

Many students do not want to involve adults in their personal relationships. Instead, they choose to preserve their privacy and handle problems on their own. In some cases, adults are not readily available to provide the assistance that students need. Students may have little confidence that adults can help and may fear that adult intervention will only make matters worse. The provision of services to young survivors is complicated by the fact that there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution to abuse prevention and intervention. Comprehensive strategies are needed to address the obstacles young people face in seeking and receiving help and to reduce and prevent incidents of abuse from occurring. These strategies include school policy development, classroom education, student leadership opportunities, staff and parent training, as well as specialized counseling and support services for students exposed to, or involved in, abuse. It is vital that all services and programs developed take into consideration the specific population they aim to serve in the context of the broader challenges and special needs that pertain to addressing abuse.

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[1] See Wolfe, D.A., Jaffe, P.G., & Crooks, C.V. (2006). *Adolescent risk behaviors: Why teens experiment and strategies to keep them safe*. New Haven: Yale University Press

TERMS

The following terms will be used throughout this document:

Support services – This term includes services that support student safety and prevent abusive behaviors. Support services need not only respond to the needs of survivors; they may serve a wider audience including non-abused peers and students who are participating in abusive and/or criminal behaviors, including dating abuse, sexual assault, and stalking.

Abuse – The term "abuse" is used in place of "domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking" throughout this document to address a full range of hurtful and controlling behaviors including verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. This term is commonly used in the field of domestic violence/sexual assault when working with youth populations.

Student – The term "student" is used throughout this document to include youth, adolescents, and young adults. Where necessary, we have used the term "minor" to differentiate young people under the age of 18.

Collaborative Team – Each school or consortium will build a collaborative team ("the collaborative") that will plan, develop and conduct the strength and needs assessment. Collaborative team members may be responsible for forging relationships with key partners within the school, the school district, and the community to gain buy-in for the needs assessment; conducting the assessment activities; and participating in the assessment activities.

STRENGTHS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT ACTIVITY FLOWCHART

School or Consortium: Chooses Collaborative Partners

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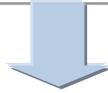
Collaborative Team: Plans and Conducts the Needs Assessment

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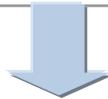
- ✓ Decide Leadership Structure for Assessment Process
- ✓ Develop Policies/Procedures for Assessment
- ✓ Create the Goals for Assessment Process

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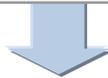
Plan the Needs Assessment

- ✓ Develop Goals of Needs Assessment
- ✓ Decide Scope of Needs Assessment – school and/or community
- ✓ Select Target Population
- ✓ Decide How To Measure Strengths and Needs
- ✓ Hire Outside Assessor/Evaluator (if necessary)
- ✓ Create Timeline

→

Develop Partner Buy-In

- ✓ Hold Partner Meetings
- ✓ Develop Resources Describing Purpose of Grant and Assessment

Conduct the Assessment

- ✓ Research Existing Data
- ✓ Select Assessment Method and Instrument
- ✓ Assess the Instrument
- ✓ Create Questions for the Instrument
- ✓ Develop Instrument Procedures

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Complete the Assessment Summary

- ✓ Draft and Edit the Assessment Summary
- ✓ Develop Plan for Sharing the Summary

SECTION 1 – DEVELOPING THE COLLABORATIVE TEAM

Each school or consortium will build a collaborative team ("the collaborative") to plan, develop, and conduct the strengths and needs assessment. Collaborative members will be responsible for:

- Forging relationships with key partners in the school, school district, and community to gain buy-in for the strength and needs assessment.
- Planning the assessment.
- Participating in and documenting the assessment activities.

SELECTING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

The collaborative may be comprised of representatives of the school or consortium plus other relevant partners; or, the collaborative may be a completely separate body. While collaborative membership will depend on the needs of the school or consortium, the collaborative should benefit from a broad range of perspectives and represent the school and community demographics. Young people should play a meaningful role in the collaborative, as well. Selected partners may contribute specific skills, may be well-connected in the community, or may have a background in a substantive area that will enhance the assessment.

The schools or consortia should already include the following representatives:
- A non-profit non-governmental sexual assault, domestic violence, or dual domestic violence/sexual assault victim service provider/organization
- A local law enforcement agency or relevant state, tribal, territorial, or local court
- A school principal or administrator
- A teacher
- A parent representative

To better inform the assessment process, the school or consortium could also draw from a diverse range of relevant community partners to form the collaborative team, such as:
- District or other legal counsel
- Researcher from local college/university or other expert experienced in conducting needs assessments
- Municipal, tribal leadership, or state representatives
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Rural Practice Establishment Grant (RPEG) grantees
- Adolescent pregnancy program staff
- Social services or child welfare employees
- Public and private healthcare service providers
- Drug and alcohol prevention programs staff
- Victim support staff
- Law enforcement agency representatives and/or school resource officers
- State, tribal, territorial, or local court staff
- Community organizations or representatives from nontraditional meeting places (e.g., community centers, faith centers, fathers groups, local businesses)
- Students and student organizations (e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs, Girls Scouts)

- LGBTQ student advocacy groups
- Prevention educators, school counselors, health teachers, social workers, and/or nurses
- Parent organization representatives

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

When deciding who to invite to join the collaborative, each type of school or consortium should consider a different set of factors as outlined below.

SINGLE SCHOOLS

Single school sites will be assessing their school's specific responses to abuse. These sites should identify partners within the school and school district, beyond those already representing the school, such as:

- School district administrators and district-level employees
- Members of the Board of Trustees or school board members
- Educators and school staff

COMMUNITY CONSORTIA

Community consortium sites will be assessing community specific responses that include collaboration with neighborhood schools and community resources when addressing abuse. These sites should identify school and community-based partners who are active in the community, beyond those that are already part of the consortium, such as:

- School district administrators and employees from neighboring districts or communities
- Principals, Assistant Principals, educators, and school personnel from other schools

These sites can also consider the following individuals from the community:

- Victim service providers
- Local law enforcement
- Healthcare providers
- Child welfare staff
- Community organizations, coalitions, or representatives from nontraditional meeting places

SCATTERED SITE CONSORTIA

Scattered site consortia will be assessing both school specific and system-wide responses to abuse. These sites should identify school-based partners at the district level, such as:

- School district administrators and district-level employees
- Principals or Assistant Principals of other schools in the district
- School personnel within district schools

These sites should also consider the following individuals in the community:

- Victim service providers
- Local law enforcement
- Healthcare providers
- Child welfare personnel

Some schools will be pilots for their school district; these schools may wish to include school administrators, staff, or educators from other district schools who might be interested in the lessons learned or strategies developed from this project.

For more information about developing a collaborative partnership, see **Appendix G.**

SECTION 2 – THE STRENGTHS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

PLANNING THE STRENGTHS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The information gathered from the strengths and needs assessment will help the school or consortium set goals that will be met during the implementation phase. This can be a complex process and involves several layers of decision-making. The following section will guide the collaborative through these steps in the assessment planning process:

- Identify Assessment Goals
- Prioritize Assessment Goals
- Obtain Approval to Conduct Strengths and Needs Assessment
- Identify Stakeholders and Build Support
- Determine Assessment Timeline
- Assess Existing Data and Resources

IDENTIFY GOALS FOR THE ASSESSMENT

As a first step in the assessment planning process, the members of the collaborative should agree upon and prioritize the goals for the strengths and needs assessment. To determine these goals, the collaborative should examine the prevention strategies, intervention, school responses, resources and policies that exist at the **school, school district, and community levels** to gain a better understanding of available resources and to identify unmet needs. In developing assessment goals, the collaborative should consider the following four focus areas:

- **Prevention Strategies and Programs**
- **Existing Policies**
- **Intervention, Treatment, and Response**
- **Existing Resources in Schools and in the Community**

The four focus areas are broken down more specifically below to provide examples of what could be included in the assessment.

FOCUS AREA 1: PREVENTION STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS
- How a school is educating students, parents/caregivers, and adult influencers about:
  - Characteristics of healthy adolescent relationships
  - Warning signs of abuse
  - Bystander intervention skills
  - Impact of technology on relationships
  - Gender norms and the impact of media
  - How and where students, parents/caregivers, and other adults can obtain help
- Student-led communication and marketing efforts about abuse
- School-based and community-based primary prevention strategies, programs, and partnerships for the prevention of adolescent risk behaviors
- Research informed or evidence-based curricula addressing prevention of abuse

FOCUS AREA 2: EXISTING POLICY

- Current school, district, local, and/or state policies related to intervention, response, or treatment of abuse
- Procedures to respond to incidents of abuse at school
- School policies that promote healthy relationships or encourage students, administrators, teachers, and school staff to intervene when unhealthy behaviors are beginning in a relationship
- State, district, and local education standards promoting healthy teen relationships

FOCUS AREA 3: INTERVENTION, TREATMENT, AND RESPONSE

- Prevalence and types of abuse, frequency of exposure to abuse
- Availability of victim services for students
- Accessibility of counseling, health, and education services for students exposed to abuse or involved in unhealthy or abusive peer or dating relationships
- Availability of culturally-specific services for students
- Availability of services responsive to the safety needs of students, parents/caregivers, and others

FOCUS AREA 4: RESOURCES IN SCHOOLS AND IN THE COMMUNITY

- Informational material at school about services for students and families in the community
- Evidence-based curricula currently being used in the classroom or after school programs
- Abuse prevention resources, guest speakers, and professional training opportunities
- Informational materials that promote healthy relationships, respect for individual differences, etc.
- Training for parents/caregivers, school personnel, and community service providers to better work with students experiencing abuse and related issues
- Student, parent, or teacher survey data, such as school climate surveys, substance abuse surveys or surveys related to safety, bullying, sexual harassment, positive peer relationships, etc.
- Culturally-specific agencies that can meet the diverse needs of students

PRIORITIZE GOALS

Each collaborative should determine which elements of the four focus areas are specifically relevant to the project goals. Single schools, scattered site consortia, and community consortia should respond to each of these considerations to the extent necessary to implement their assessment plan effectively. Each collaborative should consider the following:

Single School – These sites s should focus on collecting information about students, staff, and administration of the school. Limit the information collected about community resources and services to those that directly impact the school response to abuse.

Community Consortium – These sites s should focus on collecting information relevant to the students, staff, and administration of the local school, district, and community. These grantees will have the broadest scope of information collection of the three types of grantees.

Scattered Site Consortium – These sites should focus on collecting information relevant to the individual schools and the school district as a whole. These sites should limit the information collected about community resources and services to those that directly impact the individual schools and the school district response to abuse.

OBTAIN APPROVAL TO CONDUCT STRENGTHS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

All collaborative teams should obtain approval from school or district administration, school boards, or organizational leadership to conduct all strength and needs assessment activities. Every school or organization will have a different process for securing this approval, which may include presenting information about the needs assessment to an Institutional Review Board (IRB) or other similar body. Depending on the scope of the needs assessment activities, the collaborative may need district-level approval.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL BASICS

Schools may be required to obtain institutional review board (IRB) approval for program evaluation including all information collection at the school level. The primary goal of an IRB at the school district level is to review proposed research that will involve human subjects to minimize any risk exposure to those participants. Even if the type of assessment method that a collaborative is using does not implicate human subjects research, an IRB may still wish to review the instruments and methods the collaborative will employ.

An IRB may review everything from research methods to surveys and focus groups to informed consent procedures and documents. Most IRBs will evaluate a research proposal based on the following elements:

> IRB review processes vary across institutions but can add several months to a strengths and needs assessment timeline.

- Whether the research design unnecessarily exposes participants to risk
- Whether risks to participants are minimized
- Whether there are appropriate safety mechanisms in place to protect students who may experience emotional disturbance or other problems as a result of participation
- Whether participant selection is fair
- Whether all participants or their legal representatives have submitted informed consent documentation
- Whether all participants' safety and confidentiality are maximized [2]

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[2] Utah State University (2012) "Institutional Review Board (IRB) Basics: Executive Summary of the USU Investigator Handbook." Last Accessed on April 26,2012 at URL: http://irb.usu.edu/htm/investigator-handbook/

Many IRB's have a list of required documentation that any proposal must include. These lists often include:

- Any informed consent document or participant permission slip
- A description of the proposed research, research methodology
- The assessment survey instruments
- The methods that will be used to conduct and collect the information
- Any advertising used to recruit participants for the research [3]

> For more information about confidentiality, see the "Methodology" section of this document. There is a sample informed consent document and participant permission slip included in **Appendix E.**

When the collaborative meets with principals or the IRB to propose the assessment, the collaborative should have developed a detailed plan for how it will conduct the assessment. To develop this plan, the collaborative should gather information such as:

- The teachers who will be assisting them (may also want to meet with teachers prior to data collection)
- The time period or class period they will be doing the assessments in (E.g., homeroom? PE classes?)

When applicable, collaborative teams should consider working with a local higher education representative to help determine which data collection tools would be the most useful when presenting the assessment to the IRB. By understanding and meeting the requirements for the IRB, the team may better prepare and develop a more realistic timeline for completion of the assessment.

It is possible that a collaborative will conduct an assessment activity that implicates federal human subject research and may fall under federal human subject research provisions. For more information about human subject research requirements and IRB procedures, see **Appendix H**.

IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS AND BUILD SUPPORT

The strengths and needs assessment is an opportunity to gather valuable information while also building support for the work of the school to reduce abuse. Beyond those in the collaborative, there are individuals who will participate in or be affected by the needs assessment and who should also be aware of the assessment activities. The collaborative should develop support among these stakeholders at the school, school district, and community levels.

To build this support, the collaborative should:

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[3] Utah State University (2012) "Institutional Review Board (IRB) Basics: Executive Summary of the USU Investigator Handbook." Last Accessed on April 26,2012 at URL: http://irb.usu.edu/htm/investigator-handbook/

- Develop relationships with students, parent organizations, and community groups to discuss and conduct the needs assessment.
- Highlight the importance of fostering healthy relationship knowledge and skill-building during middle school when many students start engaging in romantic relationships.
- Translate abuse research and policy into accessible language for all stakeholders. Provide statistics to help build support for the assessment.
- Schedule meetings with principals, teachers, school resource officers, counselors, and administrators. Talk to each group about their priorities and goals. Let each group know what the collaborative will be doing. Don't assume that administrators know what's happening in individual classrooms or vice versa.
- Bring together all stakeholders for a meeting of the minds. Include school staff and administrators, education activists, law enforcement, students, and community-based organizations.
- Allow time for each group to share its view of what is working in the schools and what areas need improvement, as well as time for the stakeholders to discuss agenda items in mixed-discipline groups.

> If no member of the collaborative team has assessment or evaluation experience, it is highly recommended that a professional evaluator be hired to help the collaborative conduct information collection and develop assessment instruments. The collaborative could also partner with a college or university to work with available research staff.

ASSESSMENT TIMELINE

Each collaborative will differ in the length of its assessment timeline. The amount of time that each collaborative will devote to the assessment will be determined by:

- The number of assessment instruments used (i.e., survey, focus group, etc.)
- The number and size of the target groups for the assessment instrument(s)
- Available staff and the amount of staff time that can be committed to the assessment
- Whether the collaborative hires an outside facilitator
- The complexity of the IRB review process
- Whether parent consent forms are needed

The implementation phase cannot begin until the planning phase is over, so it is important to balance time spent gathering information with efficiency in completing the needs assessment.

IDENTIFY EXISTING DATA SOURCES

After the collaborative has developed the objectives for the assessment, it must identify and explore existing data sources. Once the collaborative has researched existing data, it will know what data should be collected for the first time via the assessment.

Researching existing data is a prerequisite to using other assessment tools. It can help guide the types of questions a collaborative develops. For example, a school may already collect

information from their students on exposure to types of abuse. That information can be used and integrated into the assessment findings. Existing research can also provide baseline data about the community, school, or district.

Consider the following:
- Conduct an inventory of local data sources, such as newspapers, school newsletters, demographic reports, or district priority statements. Consider whether available data directly addresses issues pertinent to the school or community being studied.
- Collect information on relevant federal, state, county, and city laws and pending legislation, as well as pertinent governmental policies and procedures. This data collection can include reviewing laws and regulations, statements about funding priorities, or government initiatives with community groups.
- Identify and analyze relevant school policies and available school or district-level discipline or climate survey data.
- Identify federal, state, or local government studies or survey findings and gather information from researchers (e.g., at universities) who have conducted relevant studies.
- Collect information from community organizations who work with students.

For a list of helpful resources to assist with researching existing data, please see **Appendix A**.

SELECT DATA COLLECTION METHOD AND DEVELOP ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

At this point in the assessment, the collaborative team should have considered assessment goals, researched existing data, and cultivated partners to facilitate the assessment. The collaborative team should select the appropriate assessment method and create instruments to collect data.

This document is not an evaluation manual and it will not cover the many data collection and analysis concerns related to each data collection method. For more information about evaluation and data analysis, please see **Appendix F**.

METHODOLOGY

Each collaborative should:

- Select the data collection method that would best fit their assessment objectives
- Develop a new or modify existing assessment instruments
- Develop the implementation procedures for conducting the assessment

QUALITATIVE OR QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

Collaborative teams may choose the data collection method that best suits their site including quantitative or qualitative data collection and mixed methods. Understanding the difference between types of data collection can assist the collaborative in selecting the appropriate data collection tool. Generally, quantitative data are numerical and can be analyzed using statistics and qualitative data are words that help explain the story behind the information collected.

There are multiple techniques used to collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data:

Quantitative Techniques	Qualitative Techniques
Surveys/Questionnaires	Observations
Pre/post Tests	Interviews
Existing Databases	Focus Groups
Statistical Analysis	Non-statistical (methods vary)[4]

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[4] Public Health Institute, Center for Civic Partnerships (2007) "Quantitative and Qualitative Evaluation Methods." Last Accessed April 26,2012 at URL: http://www.civicpartnerships.org/docs/tools_resources/Quan_Qual%20Methods%209.07.htm

Quantitative and qualitative data have strengths and limitations, some of which are outlined below:

Strengths and Limitations of Quantitative Data[5]

Strengths	Limitations
Findings can be generalized if selection process well-designed and sample is representative of study population	Related secondary data sometimes not available, or accessing available data is difficult/impossible
Relatively easy to analyze	Difficult to understand context of program activities
Data can be very consistent, precise, reliable	Data may not be robust enough to explain complex issues
Data collection is usually cost efficient	

Strengths and Limitations of Qualitative Data[6]

Strengths	Limitations
Complement and refine quantitative data	Findings usually cannot be generalized to the study population or community
Provide more detailed information to explain complex issues	More difficult to analyze; don't fit neatly in standard categories
Multiple methods for gathering data on sensitive subjects	Data collection is usually time consuming and costly

SELECTING AND DEVELOPING THE DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Once the collaborative has decided what type of data to collect, it should select and develop a data collection instrument. A single method may be sufficient for some collaborative teams, whereas others may employ more than one method to gather the necessary information. Using mixed methods will provide more comprehensive data than using a single method. After the collaborative has selected the data collection method(s), the collaborative should develop the assessment instrument.

The most common and effective data collection methods are:
- **Focus groups**
- **Surveys**
- **Interviews with key stakeholders**
- **Observational data**

[5]Public Health Institute, Center for Civic Partnerships (2007) "Quantitative and Qualitative Evaluation Methods." Last Accessed April 26,2012 at URL: http://www.civicpartnerships.org/docs/tools_resources/Quan_Qual%20Methods%209.07.htm

[6] Public Health Institute, Center for Civic Partnerships (2007) "Quantitative and Qualitative Evaluation Methods." Last Accessed April 26,2012 at URL: http://www.civicpartnerships.org/docs/tools_resources/Quan_Qual%20Methods%209.07.htm

Below is a description of these methods as well as general guidance for developing and conducting data collection. Some schools or consortia may have previously developed data collection tools for other projects that the collaborative can modify for this strengths and needs assessment. For additional assistance, there are sample assessment instruments in the **Appendices**.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All collaboratives must use confidentiality measures that maintain victim privacy and support promising practices in ensuring victim safety.

For each assessment instrument discussed below, there are additional confidentiality considerations that the collaborative should address. Check each section for these important considerations.

Regardless of which data collection instrument is used, there are several ways to ensure that information is kept confidential, including:

> As a recipient of VAWA funding, grantees must adhere to VAWA confidentiality provisions while also following relevant tribal, state, and federal mandates (e.g., Department of Education mandates, federal human subjects research provisions).

- Keeping files of information gathered in a locked file cabinet.
- Password protecting any computer software that is used to record students' information.
- Clearly articulating limits of confidentiality to students when conducting data collection.
- Describing to students and adults what will happen to their information once collected.
- Restricting discussion about information gathered to the confines of the collaborative.
- Limiting access to raw data to key people who are primarily responsible for data analysis.
- Using aggregate data when informing the project team of data findings.

If a collaborative must submit materials to an IRB, these confidentiality measures will likely be included in the materials that the IRB will want to review.

In addition to discussing confidentiality measures, the collaborative should also discuss mandatory reporting requirements before selecting any assessment instrument. There is more information about mandatory reporting in the sections below.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups with individuals or agencies that are involved in victim services can help gather information about:

- Awareness of, and perceptions about, abuse in the school and/or community
- Student access to services
- Gaps in student services, particularly underserved communities
- Understanding of resources in the community
- Prevalence of abuse in the community
- Attitudes about how to improve the response to abuse
- Attitudes about who should be involved in improving response to and effectiveness of various entities to improve response

When determining whether to use a focus group, consider the following:

Benefits:
- Gather information about group beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about an issue
- Provide a record of participant input about or support for a program
- Build stakeholder support for work in the community through participation in focus groups
- Determine preferences of participants about a program or outreach method

Challenges:
- Requires training for the moderator and relies on skill of moderator
- When used alone, can only be used to gather qualitative data which means that findings cannot be extrapolated to broader audience
- Can be difficult to avoid bias, such as social desirability bias, in the group setting because of the format
- Can be time consuming to develop procedure, recruit participants, and train moderators
- Risk of participants sharing others' personal information outside of the focus group

DEVELOPING A FOCUS GROUP

TARGET POPULATION

The possible target populations for focus groups are students, parents, teachers or staff members, community members, and community-based organizations. To define the appropriate target population, the collaborative should consider the population of the school or school district, including the population size as well as accessibility of parents, teachers, staff, and students.

CREATING FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

- Create open-ended questions that build from general to more specific. This may help draw out the most information from participants.
- Order questions from the least to the most sensitive. This will allow the facilitator time to establish rapport with participants before asking the more sensitive questions.
- Create questions that are simple and easy to understand and answer.
- Create questions that are culturally-relevant.
- Do not change question topics frequently to avoid confusing participants.
- Develop questions that are unbiased and not leading. Avoid questions that assume the respondent shares the same perspective as the collaborative or pushes the respondent to answer in a certain way.
- Allow space for the participants to give more detailed answers to some questions so as to capitalize on the richness of the information being shared.

> Using the words *victim* and *perpetrator* with the general public can be alienating. People do not often identify themselves or their loved ones in these terms. Even describing the focus group as an opportunity to discuss abuse may be off-putting to some. Try to use "people first" language to create a more open atmosphere. For example, use the phrase "people who have experienced abuse" instead of the term "victim."

IMPLEMENTATION

- Conduct separate focus groups for students, parents, administrators and school staff, community members, and service providers. Individuals may not want to reveal their opinions in front of those with whom they are unfamiliar or with whom they do not share equal power.
- Use a skilled facilitator. The decision whether to hire an outside facilitator will depend on the scope of the focus groups and collaborative members' expertise in these issues.
- Focus group procedure should be consistent. The facilitator should identify themselves, the project, the focus group length, and what will be done with the collected information.
- Create a recording form to keep track of the collected information or a procedure for recording and transcribing the focus group discussion.
- All facilitators must obtain informed consent from students to participate. When conducting focus groups with minors, parental consent is required to participate.

FOR THE FACILITATOR:
- Explain the purpose of the focus group to all participants.
- Keep the focus group on topic. Sometimes participants will digress; it is up to the facilitator to rein in the conversation.
- Ask clarifying questions if answers are unclear or if there is more that the participant can add to a particular answer.

- Consider having an advocate present to handle disclosures of abuse or serious emotional reactions.
- Use group activities in addition to questions to draw out ideas or perceptions and to build on multiple participants' comments to more completely explain an idea or perception.

Please refer to **Appendix E** for an example of a moderator guide and focus group questions.

CONFIDENTIALITY CONCERNS

There are important confidentiality concerns when conducting a focus group, including disclosure, mandatory reporting, and keeping responses confidential. At the outset of the focus group, facilitator should:
- State that there may be someone in the room who has dealt with abuse personally and to be respectful of their experience.
- Be sensitive to the needs of survivors of abuse who are participants in a focus group and work to ensure that their needs are met. Have an advocate on site in case of disclosure or in case a participant has a serious emotional reaction or requires crisis counseling.
- Frame the focus group as an opportunity to have a conversation about supporting safe and healthy relationships.

DISCLOSURE AND MANDATORY REPORTING

For both adult and student focus groups, facilitators should be prepared to handle participant disclosures of abuse. A facilitator should:
- Explain what information can and cannot be kept confidential at the beginning of the focus group.
- Respond in a non-judgmental and supportive way if a participant discloses abuse.
- Gently interrupt the person and remind them of any mandated reporting that may apply before they disclose reportable information.
- Be prepared to take the student or adult aside to hear more about the situation after the focus group.
- Know about local resources and know where to refer the participant.

> When conducting focus groups with minors, facilitators must know the scope of their mandatory reporting duties and be prepared to discuss what would happen were a minor to disclose abuse. These duties vary from state to state and based on profession.

SURVEY

A survey is a set of questions to gauge:
- Awareness of and perceptions about abuse in school and/or community
- Student access to victim services
- Gaps in services, particularly underserved communities
- Understanding of resources in the school and/or community
- Prevalence of abuse in the school and/or community
- Ideas about how to improve the response to abuse
- Attitudes about who should be involved in improving response to abuse and/or attitudes about the effectiveness of various entities to improve response
- Suggested strategies for preventing dating abuse and promoting healthy relationships

When determining whether to use a survey, consider the following:

Benefits:
- Can collect responses to many questions from a large number of individuals
- Allows respondents to be anonymous or confidential
- If you have an appropriate sample size, can evaluate responses quantitatively and develop statistically valid results

Challenges:
- Challenging to collect information about group perceptions because responses are individualized
- Response rate may be low due to the way in which the surveys are disseminated and collected, including parent consent requirements for minors
- Little opportunity to build stakeholder buy-in, compared with other methods

DEVELOPING THE SURVEY

The collaborative should select target audiences, create questions, and develop a procedure for conducting the survey. Before developing a survey, consider the following questions:
- Who is the target audience?
- What is the content, scope, and purpose of the survey questions?
- What is the best survey format for collecting this information?
- How should questions be phrased in order to get the needed information?

TARGET POPULATION

- Consider whether it makes sense to survey the whole school or to survey a sample of students, staff, and parents.
- Explain why specific population was selected to ensure the survey collects reliable data.
- When gauging accessibility of victim services for students in a community, include students and parents as a survey group.
- Collect information from as representative a group as possible. The responses that are gathered will help determine next steps for the project.

CREATING SURVEY QUESTIONS

- Develop survey questions that are simple and easy to understand and answer.
- Begin with questions that are the least sensitive, such as demographic questions. Ending with the most sensitive questions may lead to more honest responses.
- Group survey questions by topic so that respondents are not confused by shifts in topic. For example, ask all questions about a student's perception of the prevalence of abuse in the same section of the survey.
- Maintain the same format for survey question responses to prevent confusion for respondents. For example, if one question is a question that ranks preferences from one to ten, ensure the ranking stays the same for the next question.
- Avoid including questions that assume the respondent shares the same perspective as the collaborative or pushes the respondent to answer in a certain way.
- When possible, select existing survey instruments that have been piloted with similar populations and, if necessary, tested for reliability and validity.
- Be mindful of the scope of the survey. Depending on the number and type of questions, it may take a lot of time to administer, collect, and interpret survey results.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Develop instructions for respondents completing the survey so that respondents are not confused when answering survey questions. There is a sample survey in **Appendix D.**
- Determine who will collect the information. This can be one person or many people, including individuals on the collaborative or volunteers. For more information on data collection see **Appendix F**.
- Be explicit when instructing those administering the survey. Include information about the time it will take to finish the survey and what will be done with answers.
- Develop and include parental consent procedures and forms.
- Consider how the survey will be disseminated and collected. A collaborative may increase response rates based on when and how surveys are conducted and gathered (e.g., providing the survey online). Take into account potential accessibility challenges for any collection method chosen.
- Provide contact information for participants who wish to speak with someone about any questions or concerns that arise from the survey.
- Questions about abuse may be a trigger for some participants. Include a trigger warning at the beginning of the survey. Create a process for students to be excused from taking a survey if they are uncomfortable participating. Have an advocate on site in case of disclosure or serious emotional reaction.

> In rural, less populated areas or in small populations of interest, the combination of demographic data collected could inadvertently identify individuals.
>
> Be aware that if the data that the collaborative collects and reports may still identify individuals, the report must be changed.

CONFIDENTIALITY CONCERNS

Surveys can be conducted anonymously or confidentially. An anonymous survey means that there is no information identifying the respondent on the survey. A confidential survey means that while the names of the respondents are not shared, there is some way to determine who the respondent is.[7] For instance, each survey might have an ID number linked to a respondent's name. These ID numbers would not require that anyone but the researcher know who actually completed the survey.[8] The collaborative must have a system for keeping the respondent's name, date of birth, race, and ethnicity confidential and must explain the anonymity or confidentiality process to the respondents before administering the survey.[9]

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[7] Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape, Prepared by Stephanie M. Townsend, PhD (2009). "Technical Assistance Guide and Resource Kit for Primary Prevention and Evaluation," pp. 137.(Hereinafter PCAR Resource Kit). Last accessed on April 26, 2012 at URL: http://www.pcar.org/pdf/TAGuide_and_Resource_Kit_for_Primary_Prevention_and_Evaluation.pdf

[8] PCAR Resource Kit, at pp. 138-139. Last accessed on April 26, 2012 at URL: http://www.pcar.org/pdf/TAGuide_and_Resource_Kit_for_Primary_Prevention_and_Evaluation.pdf

[9] PCAR Resource Kit, at pp. 138-139. Last accessed on April 26, 2012 at URL: http://www.pcar.org/pdf/TAGuide_and_Resource_Kit_for_Primary_Prevention_and_Evaluation.pdf

INTERVIEWS

Interviews are structured conversations with individuals with relevant experience such as: health care providers, parent/caregivers, student group leaders, victim service providers, community leaders, school or district administrators, teachers, law enforcement officials who work with student, students, and parents. Prior to selecting interviews as a method for data collection, consider the following:

Benefits:
- Can be less expensive to conduct interviews compared with producing surveys
- Gather specific examples of preferences or input from a wide variety of individual perspectives
- Produce new or different ideas that would assist the collaborative
- Explain and clarify information shared in an interview when responses are unclear

Challenges:
- High potential for bias due to one-on-one nature of interviews
- May not provide the whole picture about the needs in a particular area
- Can be time-intensive to conduct due to busy schedules of interviewees
- Can be challenging for interviewers to keep track of the discussion
- Relies on the experience of the interviewer

DEVELOPING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROCEDURES

TARGET POPULATION

The collaborative should consider interviewing school district officials, educators, school staff members, parents, and students. The target population will look different depending on the scope of the interview.

CREATING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Because the collaborative will be interviewing individuals in various capacities within the school and community, the questions may vary accordingly, but the goals of the questions should be the same. Interviews can be fully structured, semi-structured, or unstructured, and can be conducted over the phone or in person.

Unstructured interviews: There are no questions that an interviewer is required to ask of the interviewee. The interviewer decides what to ask the interviewee in order to achieve the goals of the interview.

Semi-structured interviews: The collaborative creates a short list of questions that the interviewer is required to ask. The interviewer could add to that list during the interview.

Fully structured interviews: The interviewer asks a set list of questions that are identical for every interview. The interviewer does not vary from this list of questions. The collaborative should have other members edit questions beforehand to make sure that the interview questions will elicit appropriate information.

The collaborative can decide which type of interviews to conduct and how thoroughly to script interview questions. See **Appendix C** for more information about conducting interviews.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Train the interviewers. This training should include: why the collaborative is conducting the needs assessment, the methodology behind the assessment, interview objectives, risk of interviewer bias, the procedure for the interview, and interview timelines.
- Interview procedure should be consistent, regardless of the profession of the interviewee. The interviewer should always identify themselves and the project, state the length of the interview, state what will be done with collected information, and thank participants.
- Help the interviewers rehearse their questions before the interview, particularly for fully structured interviews. This will allow the interviewer to focus on listening and recording responses and thinking through follow-up questions.
- Create a recording form to keep track of the information that is collected or create a process to allow the interviewer to record and transcribe the interview.
- Consider the staff time and resources available. Interviews can be time-consuming to conduct and data can be more difficult to interpret than other types of data.

FOR THE INTERVIEWER:

- Keep the interview questions focused on the purpose of the interview. Sometimes interviewees will go off-topic or will digress.
- Ask clarifying questions. These types of follow-up questions should not be scripted, but will depend on the interviewee's answers.
- Think about how a victim of abuse would feel about the questions being presented. It is possible that the interviewee may be a survivor of abuse and may experience some type of adverse reaction to some questions.
- Capture all of the information discussed in the interview, including any clarifying questions that were not part of the original interview questions.

CONFIDENTIALITY CONCERNS

It is possible that an interviewee will disclose abuse during the interview. If an interviewee discloses abuse during an interview, interviewers should:
- Have a list of local resources they can share with the interviewee.
- Be prepared to respond in a non-judgmental way to the interviewee's experience.
- Be able to emotionally support the interviewee during the conversation.

If an interview is recorded, the interviewer must first ask the interviewee for his or her consent and must explain to the interviewee what will be done with the interview recording.

It is also possible to administer an interview in an anonymous or confidential manner, as was described in the survey section. Either way, the collaborative can use false names or "anonymous" when writing up the notes for the interview and reporting the results.[10]

INTERVIEWING MINORS

When interviewing minors:

- Interviewers must be aware of their mandatory reporting duties and should explain these duties at the beginning of the interview. Interviewers should discuss the scope of the interviewee's rights and that information they share may be reported to a child protection agency.
- Interviewers must have signed consent forms from parents or legal guardians.
- Interviewers should have informed consent from the minor interviewee.

If the collaborative must present interview procedure and questions to an IRB, the collaborative may have to create a distress protocol, adverse events protocol, and mandatory reporting guidelines to assist members of the collaborative conducting interviews with dealing with sensitive issues/events. For more information on adverse events protocols, see **Appendix H**.

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[10] See PCAR Resource Kit. Last accessed on April 26, 2012 at URL:
http://www.pcar.org/pdf/TAGuide_and_Resource_Kit_for_Primary_Prevention_and_Evaluation.pdf

OBSERVATIONAL DATA

Observational data collection is a way to gather information by observing and documenting the surroundings or the behaviors of others. There are multiple ways to conduct observational data collection, including a community or school-based safety audit. Please see **Appendix B** for safety audit resources.

GUIDING OBSERVATIONAL DATA COLLECTION

While there are several ways to collect observational data, structured observations are the most common method. To guide the collection of this data, the collaborative should develop goals for the observational data collection. These could be questions, such as:

- When abuse occurs, what are the responses of teachers, staff, other students, etc.?
- Are there differences in the way in which staff, teachers, other students, etc. react to acts of abuse?

Once the guiding questions have been identified, the collaborative should consider the types of behavior about which they would like to collect data and define specific behaviors. For instance, if the collaborative is interested in learning about the frequency of verbal abuse, it should determine what constitutes verbal abuse, i.e., name-calling, put-downs, threats. Next, the collaborative should determine who will be observed and when observations will occur. For example, the collaborative could observe students in the hallways or at after-school activities.

> Before selecting this method of data collection, be sure to understand what observational data collection means in the school setting and how to ensure the safety of all participants and observers.
>
> To conduct observational data collection safely, the observer must know how to respond if he or she witnesses some type of abusive behavior.
>
> It is not recommended to use observational data collection unless a collaborative team member is familiar with this method.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Select a collaborative member to oversee the observational collection. This person will be responsible for coordinating the other observers and collecting data at the end.
- Prepare a form to help the observer collect data effectively and safely. This form should provide space for the observer to describe the observation location, who and what was observed, and to provide notes about the observation.
- Involve students in collecting the data. Train students on observational data collection and be sure that they know the scope of the data that they will be collecting.
- Understand that observation can be time-consuming and data collection can be complicated when managing multiple groups of participants.
- Prepare the participants emotionally for the types of behaviors they might see, especially if the team is tracking the frequency of abuse.

- Be thoughtful about how many observers are participating in one area or setting. Though more than one observer can improve the scope of data collected, the presence of more than one observer can make some participants uncomfortable.
- Prepare data collectors to respond to questions about what they are doing and why, as well as safety precautions.

FOR THE OBSERVER:
- Understand the goals of the observational data collection and the purpose of the needs assessment.
- Be familiar with the areas that will be observed, whether they are school hallways or local neighborhoods.
- Do not begin the observations before knowing exactly what to look for and how to record observations accurately.
- Know how to collect data without identifying others by name, judging others, or to intervening beyond the role as observer.
- Be aware of any safety concerns and know when to take precautions or to seek the guidance of the collaborative.

CONFIDENTIALITY CONCERNS

When collecting observational data, the collaborative must assure that the information collected will be kept confidential. The collaborative must take measures to ensure that anyone observed through this method will not be adversely affected. This may include assuring administration and school staff that the observations are solely for the strengths and needs assessment and will not be used for other purposes. Schools may be very reluctant to accept this method without such assurances. See **Appendix H** for information on human subjects research.

It is possible that an observer will disclose abuse or may be triggered by the process of observing. If a student observer discloses abuse or is triggered as a result of observing, the overseeing collaborative member should:
- Have a list of local resources they can share
- Be prepared to respond in a non-judgmental way to observer's experience
- Be able to emotionally support the observer in seeking support services
- Know the requirements of mandatory reporting
- Know any relevant school policies and procedures

COLLECTING AND ANALYZING INFORMATION

Because this document is not an evaluation manual, it does not cover the many data collection and analysis concerns related to each data collection method. Included below is some general information for the collaborative about conducting data collection and analysis.

As stated throughout this document, it is strongly recommended that the collaborative include a member or members with evaluation experience or hire an outside evaluator to conduct this portion of the assessment.

For paper or electronic surveys, the collaborative should send follow-up information to participants to improve the response rate. This follow-up can:

- Be via mail, electronic communication, telephone, or school announcement
- Explain when the results of the assessment will be disseminated

With all other data collection instruments, responses will have been collected by facilitators, observers, or interviewers. The collaborative should gather these responses, document them, and prepare them for analysis using a computerized database program or standard statistical program.

If the collaborative seeks to develop generalized statistical analyses from the responses collected, the collaborative should develop a database structure to organize and transform data into variables to be used in statistical analyses. The collaborative should also create a codebook to accompany this database which describes the data that is included, all variable's name, type, format, date collected, and location.[11]

When reviewing and interpreting responses, keep in mind what the respondent was trying to articulate with his or her answer. It is easy to underestimate the time it takes to interpret data. Finally, express the findings using methods that will help the collaborative (and any other audience) understand the results of the assessment. For instance, use graphs or charts to distill large amounts of data and select quotes illustrate themes that emerge from interviews and focus groups. For more information on statistics and analysis, see **Appendix F**.

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[11] Trochim, William M. The Research Methods Knowledge Base, 2nd Edition. Last accessed March 20, 2012 at URL: http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/

WRITING THE ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

Once the strength and needs assessment has been completed, the collaborative should write up a report of the results using the following format:

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
- Brief description of the project
- Purpose and objectives of the strength and needs assessment
- Brief description of the sections of the report
- Assessment tools used
- Key findings
- Priorities for strategic planning

II. DESCRIPTION OF COLLABORATIVE TEAM
- Individuals and organizations selected
- Process for getting team input

III. METHODOLOGY OF THE ASSESSMENT
- Explanation of selected tools and reason for selection

IV. BRIEF REPORT OF RESULTS/RESPONSES
- Survey Responses
- Focus Group Responses
- Observations
- Interview Responses

V. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS
VI. PRIORITIES FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING

DISSEMINATING THE SUMMARY

After the written summary is completed, the collaborative should create a plan for alerting all partners and stakeholders of the needs assessment outcomes. Look to the assessment objectives to determine with whom the collaborative would like to share the information gathered. Depending on the type of site and the goals of the assessment, the collaborative could share results of the assessment with the community, with the district school board, or with teachers, staff, and students. The collaborative may wish to share the information via newsletter or use a public forum to discuss the key findings.

This plan should at least address the following key questions:
- Who should see the needs assessment?
- How will findings be disseminated?
- In what format should the assessment be sent to various groups?
- Should it be shared with different groups in different formats?