

NEEDS ASSESSMENT TOOLS

1. Surveys

Surveys are usually in the form of a questionnaire. Planning a comprehensive survey questionnaire begins by outlining the following: 1) who will use the information (administrator, office staff, counselor, etc.), 2) what types of information are sought (factual, interviews, file review, etc.) 3) who to survey (patients, community, staff, etc.), 4) who will be responsible for gathering the data and 5) who is responsible for writing the report.

Other surveys may be on a more narrow aspect of service. Examples might be: satisfaction with the current awareness of services (do all of your customers know all of what's available at your agency?), the desirability of a change in treatment hours, and satisfaction with a specific program (Relapse Prevention, for example).

2. Interviews

Interviews may be formal or informal. Formally, you may interview staff, patients or community resources to ask if your agency is currently meeting their needs and how things could be better. Informal interviews are often done as you greet people entering the agency or during an established program service. More formal focus groups can also be used.

3. Standards

National accreditation bodies present hundreds of standards with which to measure your agency. But, do you have your own standards by which you measure performance. For example, do you have a standard for something simple like answering your phone? Is having the phone ring seven times before it's answered meeting your own standards for customer service? What about a model for legibility of your files?

4. Analysis of statistics and records

Establishing benchmarks is essential: how do we know where we're going if we don't know where we've been? After deciding what to measure, time must be taken to measure actual performance before deciding on benchmarks. Perhaps existing data can be used, such as file completion rates from your quarterly file reviews.

5. Suggestion box

A suggestion box is a very basic needs assessment tool. A box set in your reception area is a simple way of gathering information that customers (or staff) might not otherwise feel comfortable submitting.

6. Complaints

Whether received through a suggestion box or not - can fall into the category of needs assessment tool. Do you have a way of gathering and analyzing complaints?

7. Meetings, reports, newsletters

Attending community meetings, reading local news, and getting on as many community distribution lists as possible can bring useful information. It is beneficial to find out about new programs and services and new directions the community is taking in order to anticipate community needs.

With all of the above needs assessment tools, it is important to document how you measured need for knowledge-based information and how you responded to the measured need. Documentation can take the form of meeting minutes, memos or formal reports.

Adapted from "Needs Assessment Tools" by Peggy Sleeth, Health Sciences Librarian, Matthews-Fuller Health Sciences Library, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, Lebanon, NH