

Assessing Community Needs

Starting a Kin Caregiver Support Service



Learning Community Insights

TOPIC 2 OF 5

One key to developing a new program is assessing and understanding the needs of those you plan to serve. This resource describes steps to conduct a community needs assessment and shares tips for planning one.

Steps to Conduct a Community Needs Assessment

“Start with looking at assessments that are already completed by other organizations within the community to see what information you can use. Work smarter not harder.”

– Area Agency on Aging Professional

Define the community you want to assess and who the key supporters of the community are, and develop partnerships with the key supporters in the community.

- ▶ Define the community you want to assess, which could include:
 - Grandparents raising their grandchildren.
 - Other relatives raising children who are related to them.
 - Non-relative kin raising children with whom they have a family-like relationship.
 - Populations needing enhanced support, such as grandfamilies formed as a result of parental substance use challenges.
- ▶ Define the key supporters you plan to engage as part of the needs assessment, which could include:
 - Government systems that support kin caregivers (e.g., aging services, child welfare, education, housing providers, etc.).

- Community-based and grassroots organizations supporting kin caregivers.
- Faith-based organizations.
- People with lived experience (i.e., kin caregivers and young adults previously raised in kinship/grandfamilies).
- ▶ Develop partnerships within that community.
 - Partner with organizations and collaboratives that already support kin caregivers in your community.
 - Partner with those with lived experience (i.e., kin caregivers and young adults previously raised in kinship/grandfamilies), and involve them in all phases of the community needs assessment.

Collect, analyze, and store data.

- ▶ Select data-collection categories and questions that prioritize the needs of kin caregivers and their families, with input from those with lived experience and other involved parties.
- ▶ Seek existing sources of data and identify data gaps.
- ▶ Choose where to store collected data (e.g., virtual storage, physical space for hard copies, etc.).
- ▶ Collect data using a variety of means (e.g., interviews, focus groups, surveys, etc.).
- ▶ Select analysis methods consistent with the type of data collected (e.g., use qualitative analysis methods to analyze qualitative data, etc.).

Draft a community needs assessment report.

- ▶ Seek input from those with lived experience and other involved parties at all stages of the writing process.
- ▶ In the report, include:
 - Recommendations for how your organization can better support kin caregivers and their families.
 - Suggestions that reach beyond your organization, like ideas for how community partners can collaborate to better support kin caregivers and their families.
 - A theory of change and a logic model (see [Topic 4](#)).

Create and implement an action plan.

- ▶ Use the recommendations from your community needs assessment report to guide your action plan.
- ▶ Seek input from those with lived experience and other involved parties throughout the creation and implementation process.
- ▶ Start with three to five priority areas to implement.
- ▶ Broadly advertise the action plan and related services in your community.

Monitor and engage in quality improvement during implementation.

- ▶ Gather feedback from partners and service recipients on an ongoing basis.
- ▶ Ensure your action plan is implemented as intended.
- ▶ Analyze data.
- ▶ Look for unintended consequences and adjust implementation as needed.

Tips for Planning a Community Needs Assessment

- ▶ It may be helpful to clearly define your goal(s) in conducting a community needs assessment.

“I want to ensure we are not duplicating services but finding gaps and adding value where able.”

– Area Agency on Aging Professional

- ▶ When deciding which method(s) (e.g., surveys, public forums, focus groups, etc.) to use to conduct a community needs assessment, consider which methods will allow you to obtain the information you seek and which ones are most convenient for the population you intend to support.
- ▶ When developing surveys, first research [how and when to conduct a survey](#) and [best practices in question development](#).
 - Examples of community needs assessment questions for people with lived experience:
 - ◆ What type of help would be most beneficial for you?
 - ◆ What items, resources, or support have you had trouble locating?

- ◆ What is your preferred way of receiving information?
 - ◆ When is the best time of day for you to attend programs or groups?
 - ◆ What community organizations are currently serving you and in what ways?
- ▶ Some kin caregivers may not self-identify as “caregivers.” To address this issue, consider prefacing questions by describing what a kin caregiver is. The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network offers [language](#) that you can use, or you can share this [video](#). Another alternative is to ask detailed questions that include a definition. The [Washington State Department of Social and Health Services](#), [Maryland Department of Human Services](#), and [Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota](#) offer examples of definitions in action.
 - ▶ If lack of transportation or distance is a barrier to participation in focus groups, consider providing transportation or holding focus groups virtually or by telephone.
 - ▶ If technology or literacy is a barrier, consider offering multiple opportunities and ways for people to be involved, including paper surveys and in-person or telephone interviews.

Suggested Readings

Conducting Community Needs Assessments

- ▶ [Chapter 3. Assessing Community Needs and Resources](#), from the Community Tool Box available from the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas
- ▶ [Journey of Change: Conducting a Community Assessment](#), from the Capacity Building Center for Tribes and the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- ▶ [Sticky Figures: Using a Needs Assessment](#), from ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center

Survey Design

- ▶ [Questionnaire Design Tip Sheet](#), from the Harvard University Program on Survey Research
- ▶ [Writing Good Survey Questions: 10 Best Practices](#), from the Nielsen Norman Group

Secondary Data Finding Tools

- ▶ [Census Reporter](#) – shows local, state, and national data on a variety of topics, including demographics, economic wellbeing, housing, access to services, and family composition; links to data tables on grandparents responsible for their own grandchildren can be found [here](#) (scroll to the bottom of page)
- ▶ [County Explorer](#), from the National Association of Counties – shows county data on a variety of topics, including county revenue, county expenses, housing cost burdens, and internet access; also shows state data on beneficiaries and expenses related to certain federal funds, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Child Care and Development Block Grant
- ▶ [Kids Count Data Center](#) from the Annie E. Casey Foundation – shows data about children on a variety of topics, including demographics, economic wellbeing, housing, access to services, and family composition; some data can be found at the local level; [data on children in kinship families](#) (both numbers and percentages) is available at the national and state level

Community Provider/Resource Finding Tools

- ▶ [50 State Afterschool Network](#) – Afterschool, summer school, and before-school programs (collectively called “out-of-school programs”) can provide much-needed respite for kin caregivers. This website provides links to state afterschool networks, whose memberships include individual out-of-school programs. Some state networks list individual out-of-school programs on their website, including those in [Idaho](#), [Illinois](#), [North Carolina](#), and [Ohio](#). Even those state networks that do not list individual out-of-school programs may offer guidance on finding individual programs. Some state associations also provide funding.
- ▶ Community Schools, as described by the [National Education Association](#), provide wrap-around services for both students and their families by partnering with community-based organizations. The model is new enough that it hasn’t been adopted nationwide. As recently as 2023, the U.S. Department of Education provided grant funding for the development of these schools. Some state education agencies also support the development of community schools, including those in [Kentucky](#), [Ohio](#), and [Virginia](#).
- ▶ [Family Resource Center Services and Supports for Kinship/Grandfamilies](#) – This fact sheet, from the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, describes services available to kinship/grandfamilies from Family Resource Centers. The fact sheet also includes a [link](#) to the National Family Support Network’s list of members.

- ▶ [Finding and Paying for Childcare](#) – Childcare can provide needed respite for kin caregivers. This tip sheet, from the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, provides resources for finding childcare providers nationwide.
- ▶ [GrandFacts](#) – These fact sheets, primarily produced by Generations United and available through the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, provide state-specific links and contact information for key programs and organizations supporting kinship/grandfamilies. Fact sheets are available for every state and some territories and Tribal nations.
- ▶ [Kinship Navigator Programs Around the United States](#) – Like the Information and Referral or Information and Assistance services offered by the Aging Network, kinship navigator programs help kinship/grandfamilies navigate local resources. This list, from the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, provides links and contact information for kinship navigator programs nationwide. Please note that not every state has a kinship navigator program, and some kinship navigator programs are only available to kinship/grandfamilies involved with the child welfare system.
- ▶ [Legal Services Corporation](#) – Though the [Older Americans Act](#) (OAA) provides for legal aid, the legal issues handled under OAA funding often are not the same issues as those needed by kinship/grandfamilies (e.g., guardianship/adoption of children). Another source of federal funding for legal aid is the Legal Services Corporation. Its grantees (which are listed on its website) can help with many areas of law not covered under the OAA. Find more no-cost legal aid providers via the American Bar Association’s [Directory of Law School Public Interest & Pro Bono Programs](#).
- ▶ [National Diaper Bank Network](#) – Many kinship/grandfamilies need assistance acquiring necessities for the children they are raising. On the National Diaper Bank Network website, find member diaper banks that offer no-cost diapers to the public. Grantees of the [Diaper Distribution Demonstration & Research Pilot program](#) from the U.S. Administration for Children, Office of Community Programs may also be good contacts. Additionally, a [demonstration Medicaid program in Tennessee](#) covers diapers, and others may do so, as well.
- ▶ [National Respite Locator Service](#) – This tool, from the ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center, provides links and guidance for finding respite providers nationwide. Note that not all respite resources listed are for kin caregivers.
- ▶ [OJJDP Mentoring Opportunities for Youth Grantee Geo-Map](#) – Adult mentors for children in kinship/grandfamilies can provide much needed-respite to kin caregivers. Use this interactive map, from the National Mentoring Resource

Center, to find grantees of the [U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention \(OJJDP\) Mentoring programs](#).

- ▶ [Resource Guides for Kin Caregivers and Those Who Work with Them](#) – This resource list, from the Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network, includes links to kin caregiver resource guides developed by some states and counties.
- ▶ Social Clubs for Children/Youth – When supervised by adults, social clubs for children and youth can provide much-needed respite for kin caregivers. Find social clubs in your area, like those offered by the [Boys & Girls Club](#), [Camp Fire](#), [Girl Scouts](#), [Scouts BSA](#), and [4-H](#).

The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center (Network) helps government agencies and nonprofits in states, Tribes, and territories work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries to improve supports and services for families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents are unable to do so. For more information, please visit www.GKSNetwork.org.

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