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SEED'S Planning Solidarity Economy Districts for Social, Economic, and Environmental Sustainability

Module 11: Seeds Planning I

Center for Not-for-profit Law

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Introduction

Acquired skills and competences on how to:

- ✓ assess local needs
- ✓ identify target groups and vulnerable population
- ✓ identify key stakeholders
- ✓ assess potential positive social impacts of the districts
- ✓ establish a collaborative governance structure
- ✓ involve community members in decision-making processes and foster partnerships with local government, NGOs, and businesses

Community needs

Identifying the difficulties and needs of a community is a process that involves having a set of tools and a methodology applied to achieve this objective.

The Need represents the gap between the current situation "what it is" and the ideal one "what should be".

The need is relative and depends on a series of aspects such as the person's expectations, his education, social status, etc.

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Community needs represent gaps between what currently exists and what should exist in a community in various areas of quality-of-life provision such as: education, health care, housing, social protection, public services, living environment, economy, employment, etc.

These community needs are based on people's personal and subjective requirements regarding the current situation. People's subjective assessments are influenced by institutional factors related to the capacity of the community to provide services (qualified and sufficient human resources, territorial coverage, infrastructure available as required, types of services developed, financial resources allocated, etc.) and the level of citizens' expectations.

Given all these definitions of community needs, four types of community needs can be identified: perceived needs, expressed needs, absolute needs and relative needs.

Perceived needs are subjective in their nature as they consider the feelings and concerns of community members. They are based on what individuals feel are their needs and can change due to various factors at individual or community level. These perceptions are extremely important in establishing the community's needs. At the same time, it is important not to disregard perceived needs as just opinions and to avoid analyzing them.

The expressed needs represent what individuals have already expressed as a need. These can be the complaints people make to local government (e.g. about public transport delays, poor infrastructure) or other needs expressed in different ways by individuals.

Absolute needs are universal, including survival needs (e.g. food, water, safety and clothing), which should be seen as the highest priority.

Relative needs are based on equity and depend on the current situation and rules.

All of these types of community needs are important in a needs assessment process because they reflect various aspects that people consider important for a good quality of life at community level. Perceived needs are the most difficult to identify, followed by the relative ones. Expressed needs can be observed more easily.

The needs assessment process

A Needs Assessment is a systematic process used to identify and evaluate the needs of a particular group or community in order to determine the gaps between current conditions and desired outcomes. This process involves collecting and analyzing data to inform decision-making and prioritizing actions to address the identified needs. *(Witkin, B. R., & Altschuld, J. W. (1995). Planning and Conducting Needs Assessments: A Practical Guide. Sage Publications)*

Needs assessments are usually oriented towards:

Solving a problem;

Avoiding a past or current problem;

Creating or taking advantage of a future opportunity;

Providing learning, development, or growth. (Sleezer 2014)

Effective planning and action require accurate and up-to-date information about the needs of the community.

A needs assessment frames the problems or opportunities and builds relationships with the people and groups who have a stake in the issue. It provides the foundation for planning and action to improve learning, training, development, and performance.

A needs assessment process is important for several reasons

1. Informed decision-making
○ Data-driven choices: Provides empirical data to guide decisions, ensuring they are based on actual needs rather than assumptions.
○ Prioritization: Helps prioritize resources and actions based on the severity and urgency of the identified needs.

2. Efficient resource allocation
○ Targeted interventions: Ensures resources are directed towards areas with the greatest need, maximizing impact and efficiency.
○ Cost-effectiveness: Reduces waste by avoiding unnecessary or redundant services and programs.

3. Improved outcomes
○ Relevant services: Tailors services and programs to the specific needs of the population, leading to better outcomes and satisfaction.
○ Goal achievement: Increases the likelihood of achieving organizational or community goals by addressing the most pressing issues.

4. Stakeholder engagement
○ Inclusive process: Involves stakeholders in identifying and addressing needs, fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration.
○ Transparency: Enhances trust and transparency by showing stakeholders that decisions are based on systematic analysis.

5. Accountability and justification
○ Evidence of need: Provides documented evidence of needs, which is critical for justifying funding requests and program initiatives.
○ Performance measurement: Establishes a baseline for measuring the effectiveness of interventions and programs over time.

Practical examples of the importance of needs assessment:

Healthcare sector:
Scenario: A hospital conducts a needs assessment and finds a high incidence of diabetes in the community.
Outcome: The hospital launches a diabetes prevention and management program, leading to a reduction in diabetes-related complications and hospital admissions.

Community development:
Scenario: A local government conducts a needs assessment and identifies a lack of recreational facilities in a neighborhood.
Outcome: The government builds a new community center with sports facilities and educational programs, enhancing community well-being and engagement.
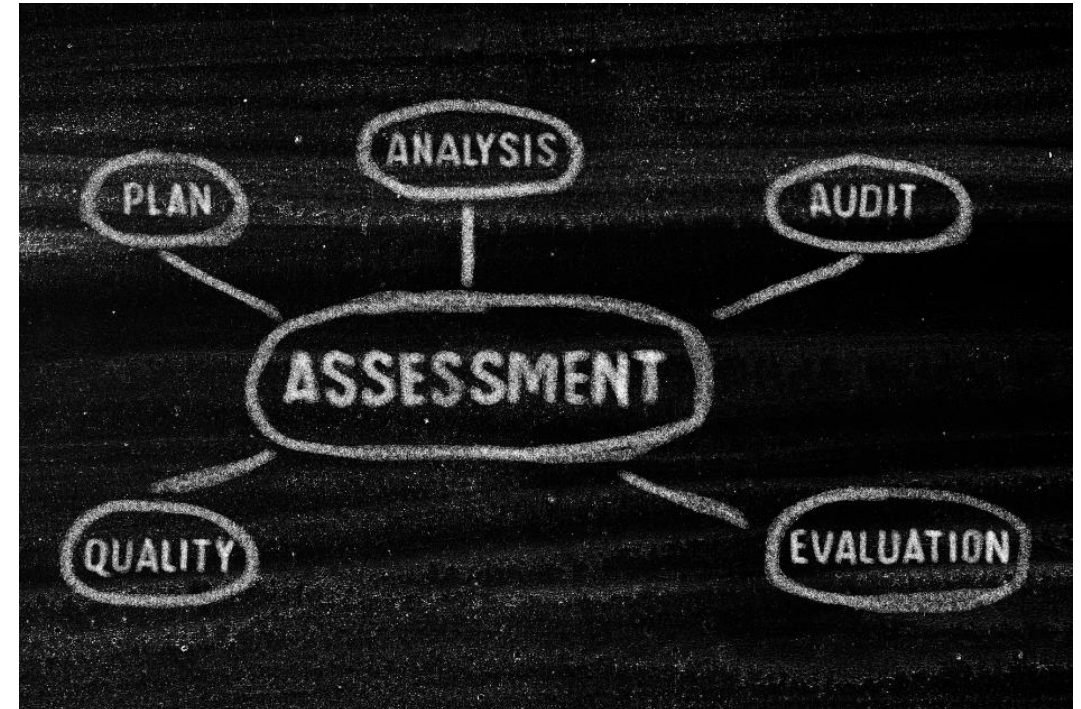
Implementing a community needs assessment process

1. Establish the scope of the needs assessment process
Clearly articulate the reasons for conducting the needs assessment (e.g., identifying service gaps, informing policy decisions).
To define the scope, try to answer the following questions:

- What is the purpose?
- Who will use the results?
- What are your resources?
- How will you involve the community?
- Who will be the decision-makers?

2. Determine the assessment criteria
Establish evaluation criteria - these criteria will help to assess and rank priorities needs and should be developed taking into account the local context. These criteria are factors that will be used to decide which needs have the highest priority and which needs can or should be addressed. Examples of evaluation criteria: effectiveness, equity, staff expertise, etc.

When assessing needs, it's crucial to establish clear criteria to evaluate and prioritize them effectively.

Here are examples of sample criteria that can be used to assess needs in various contexts:

Criteria	Definition	Example indicators
Severity	The degree of urgency or importance of the need.	Number of people affected. Impact on health, safety, or well-being. Risk of making the problem worse if not addressed.
Prevalence	The extent to which the need is common within the community or target population.	Percentage of the population experiencing the issue. Frequency of occurrence. Geographic distribution.
Impact	The potential positive outcomes if the need is addressed.	Improvement in quality of life. Reduction in related problems or issues. Enhancement of community resources or capacities.
Feasibility	The practical applicability of the solution to the need, given the available resources and limitations.	Availability of resources (funding, personnel, materials). Political and community support. Technological and logistical capabilities
Cost-effectiveness	The expected benefits relative to the costs of addressing the need.	Estimated costs of interventions. Expected financial savings or economic benefits. Return on investment (ROI).
Equity	The degree to which addressing the need will promote fairness and reduce disparities.	Impact on marginalized or vulnerable populations. Reduction in inequality. Improvement in access to essential services.
Community support	The level of support and buy-in from community members and stakeholders	Public opinion and feedback. Stakeholder endorsements. Participation rates in related activities or initiatives
Sustainability	The potential for long-term maintenance and impact of the intervention.	Long-term benefits and outcomes. Capacity for ongoing support and funding. Potential for self-sufficiency and scalability.

Practical examples of applying criteria:

Educational needs assessment:
Prevalence: Low literacy rates among elementary students.
Cost-effectiveness: High ROI by improving future employment opportunities for students.
Equity: Focus on improving education for underserved and low-income students.

Community development needs assessment:
Community support: Strong community demand for recreational facilities.
Sustainability: Potential for partnerships with local businesses and ongoing community management.
Alignment with goals: Supports the city's strategic plan to enhance community well-being.

3.Develop a plan for data collection

a. Determine data collection methods:
Quantitative methods: Use surveys, questionnaires, and secondary data analysis to collect numerical data.
Qualitative methods: Conduct interviews, focus groups, and community forums to gather in-depth qualitative data.

b. Develop data collection tools:
Surveys and questionnaires: Design surveys and questionnaires tailored to the community's context and the assessment's objectives.
Interview and focus group guides: Create structured guides for interviews and focus groups to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness.

c. Collect data:
Surveys: Distribute surveys through various channels such as online platforms, mail, and in-person distribution.
Interviews and focus groups: Conduct interviews and focus groups with diverse community members to capture a wide range of perspectives.
Secondary data: Gather and analyze existing data from sources like census reports, health records, and previous studies.

4. Collect, analyze and present data

a. Analyze quantitative data:
Statistical analysis: Use statistical software to analyze survey data, identifying patterns, trends, and correlations.
Descriptive statistics: Calculate means, medians, frequencies, and percentages to summarize the data.

b. Analyze qualitative data
Thematic analysis: Identify common themes and patterns from interview and focus group transcripts.
Coding: Use coding techniques to categorize qualitative data and extract meaningful insights.

5. Identify and prioritize needs

a. Synthesize data

Integration: Combine quantitative and qualitative data to create a comprehensive picture of community needs.

Summary: Develop a summary of key findings, highlighting the most critical needs.

b. Prioritize needs

Criteria: Establish criteria for prioritizing needs, such as severity, impact, feasibility, and community preference.

Techniques: Use prioritization techniques like the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) or Delphi Method to reach consensus on priorities.

For the application of criteria and prioritization of needs, we produce several recommendations:

- Review the criteria to make sure everyone understands and agrees with them.
- Discuss the issues that have been identified through the needs assessment and make sure that everyone understands these issues and their consequences.
- Create a consistent rating scale for each criterion (e.g., 1-5, where 1 is low and 5 is high).
- Ensure the rating scale is understood and agreed upon by all team members.

6. Identify next steps and report back: establish risk factors, causes and consequences; analyze data on effective interventions/approaches; discuss results with stakeholders.

Video: Five Steps to Assessing Community Needs (youtube.com)
Assessing the Needs of Your Community (youtube.com)

Unveiling the 5 Steps of Training Needs Assessment

Identifying Goals
Define your organization's objectives and performance gaps to pinpoint the training needs accurately.

1

Data Collection
Gather data through surveys, assessments, and feedback to understand employee skills and deficiencies.

2

Analysis Phase
Evaluate collected data to determine the root causes of performance gaps and training requirements.

3

Developing Solutions
Design tailored training programs that address identified needs, aligning content with business objectives.

4

Implementation Strategy
Plan the rollout of training initiatives, considering delivery methods, resources, and timelines for optimal impact.

5

The Human Capital Hub

Source: https://www.thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/what-are-the-5-steps-of-training-needs-assessment

Target groups and vulnerable populations

Identifying target groups and vulnerable populations is a critical step in the needs assessment process. This step ensures that the needs assessment is focused, relevant, and effective in addressing the specific issues and challenges faced by different segments of the community.

1. Define target groups:

General population segments: These could include children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly.
Specific interest groups: Such as students, parents, employees, and employers.

2. Identify vulnerable populations:

Socioeconomic status: Low-income families, the unemployed, and those experiencing poverty.
Health status: Individuals with chronic illnesses, disabilities, mental health issues, and the elderly.
Demographic characteristics: Ethnic minorities, immigrants, refugees, and single-parent households.
Other vulnerabilities: Homeless individuals, victims of domestic violence, and substance abusers.

Identifying target groups and vulnerable populations **ensures relevance and precision**:

a. Tailored interventions:
Identifying specific groups allows for the design of interventions that are precisely tailored to their unique needs. For instance, programs for children with special needs will differ significantly from those aimed at elderly care.
b. Resource allocation: Accurate identification helps in the efficient allocation of resources, ensuring that funding, time, and efforts are directed toward areas with the greatest need.

Identifying target groups and vulnerable populations **addresses inequities and promotes social justice:**

a. Focus on marginalized groups: Vulnerable populations often face systemic barriers and inequalities. By identifying these groups, the needs assessment can address these disparities and promote social justice.
b. Equitable service delivery: Ensures that services and support are distributed equitably, preventing further marginalization of already disadvantaged groups.

Identifying target groups and vulnerable populations **enhances community engagement and buy-in:**

a. Builds trust: When community members see that their specific needs are being recognized and addressed, it builds trust and increases their willingness to participate in the assessment and subsequent interventions.
b. Encourages participation: Engagement of targeted groups in the needs assessment process can lead to more accurate data collection and a better understanding of the community's needs.

Identifying target groups and vulnerable populations **improves effectiveness of interventions:**

a. Specific strategies: Different groups may require different strategies. For example, youth may benefit more from digital engagement platforms, while seniors might need in-person support.
b. Increased impact: Interventions that are tailored to the specific characteristics of target groups and vulnerable populations are more likely to be effective and have a lasting impact.

Identifying target groups and vulnerable populations **supports advocacy and policy development:**

a. Evidence-based advocacy: Identifying and documenting the needs of specific groups provides solid evidence for advocacy efforts aimed at securing funding, resources, and policy changes.

b. Informing policy makers: Policymakers can use the detailed information from the needs assessment to develop and implement policies that better address the needs of various community segments.

Identifying target groups and vulnerable populations **enhances sustainability of interventions:**

a. Long-term planning: Interventions that are designed with a clear understanding of the target population are more likely to be sustainable in the long term as they are better suited to evolving needs.

b. Building community capacity: Tailored interventions often include components that build the capacity of target groups, leading to more resilient and self-sufficient communities.

Stakeholders

The stakeholders that should be involved in a needs assessment process should include:

- Community members – is important to involve more of them in order to hear various opinions
- Community members experiencing needs that should be addressed
- Community leaders - members of a school board, local government officials, human service providers, and other professionals in the field
- Informal community leaders
- Health and human service providers
- Community activists
- Businesses, especially those that employ people from populations of concern

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Stakeholders are those who may be interested or who may have a role in an initiative.

How do we classify stakeholders:

➢ **Primary stakeholders** are the people or groups that stand to be directly affected, either positively or negatively, by an effort or the actions of an agency, institution, or organization.

➢ **Secondary stakeholders** are people or groups that are indirectly affected, either positively or negatively, by an effort or the actions of an agency, institution, or organization.

➢ **Key stakeholders**, who might belong to either or neither of the first two groups, are those who can have a positive or negative effect on an effort, or who are important within or to an organization, agency, or institution engaged in an effort.

Identify Key Stakeholders:

➢ Community members: Residents of the community, including representatives of the identified target groups and vulnerable populations.

➢ Local government: City council members, health departments, social services, education departments, and public safety officials.

➢ Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs): Organizations working in areas like healthcare, education, social services, housing, and advocacy.

➢ Businesses and employers: Local businesses, chambers of commerce, and industry representatives.

➢ Service providers: Healthcare providers, educators, social workers, and law enforcement.

➢ Faith-based organizations: Churches, mosques, temples, and other religious organizations.

Stakeholders play a very important role in the needs assessment process. Their involvement ensures the assessment is comprehensive, relevant, and actionable. Here's an in-depth look at the importance of stakeholders in this process:

1. Providing diverse perspectives:

a. Comprehensive understanding: Stakeholders bring diverse perspectives and insights, contributing to a more holistic understanding of the community's needs.
They can identify issues that might not be apparent to others, ensuring no significant need is overlooked.

b. Inclusivity: Involving a wide range of stakeholders, including marginalized and vulnerable groups, ensures that the needs assessment is inclusive and representative of the entire community.

2. Enhancing credibility and legitimacy:

a. Building trust: Stakeholder involvement builds trust and legitimacy. When community members see that respected and diverse stakeholders are engaged, they are more likely to trust the process and its outcomes.

b. Validation of findings: Stakeholders can validate the findings of the needs assessment, lending credibility to the data collected and the conclusions drawn.

3. Facilitating resource allocation

a. Access to resources: Stakeholders often control or have access to resources (funding, information, human resources) that are critical for conducting a thorough needs assessment.
b. Leveraging expertise: Different stakeholders bring various forms of expertise and knowledge that can enhance the quality of the needs assessment.

4. Facilitating communication and collaboration

a. Building networks: Stakeholders often have extensive networks. Their involvement can help facilitate broader communication and collaboration across different sectors and groups.
b. Fostering partnerships: Effective stakeholder engagement fosters partnerships that can support the implementation of the needs assessment findings and subsequent interventions.

5. Ensuring sustainability

a. Long-term commitment: Stakeholder involvement helps ensure that the needs assessment leads to sustainable changes. Their ongoing engagement and support can sustain initiatives over the long term.
b. Continuous improvement: Stakeholders can contribute to continuous improvement by providing feedback and helping to monitor and evaluate the impact of interventions.

Stakeholder analysis in 4 steps:

Source: https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/stakeholder-analysis-template-pmptemp

Identifying and managing project stakeholders is an effective way to ensure a successful project. When key project stakeholders are involved, they provide support that can be essential throughout the project. On the other hand, without supportive stakeholders, you may find yourself setting stakeholder expectations mid-project, which can lead to unnecessary changes and risks to the project.

1. Identify all relevant stakeholders

Before you can manage stakeholder expectations, you first need to know who your project stakeholders are. You need to make sure that you consider both internal and external stakeholders. To find out who your project stakeholders are, ask yourself the following questions:

✓ Who is interested in this project?
✓ On whom will this project have an impact?
✓ Who can influence this project?
✓ Who can approve/reject this project?

2. Analyze stakeholder influence-interest levels

A high level of stakeholder involvement can take your project to a higher level. The best way to ensure a high level of involvement is to create a clear stakeholder list describing the level of influence and interest of each stakeholder. This grid - sometimes called a power-interest grid or **interest matrix** - is the best way to get a view of the four main stakeholder groups:

➢ High influence and high interest: These are the people who are likely to approve and sponsor your project. Externally, they may also be key partners or customers. Throughout the project, make sure you actively engage with these project stakeholders - you can think of them as the key players in your stakeholder team.

➢ High influence and low interest. These people may stop you or support your project, but they are probably not interested in doing so. They could be distant cross-functional partners or your company's executive management. Make sure these stakeholders are aware of the basics of your project and ask high influence and high interest stakeholders to help you manage the relationship if necessary.

➢ Low influence and high interest. You probably don't need the approval of this stakeholder group, especially for the first elements of the project. It is more important to involve these stakeholders in stage 4. During project implementation, inform these stakeholders about the project.

➢ Low influence and low interest. These are secondary stakeholders. Depending on the size and level of complexity of your project, you may want to include them semi-regularly in your project status reports or not include them at all until the end. However, during the implementation of the project, make sure you contact these stakeholders if they want to get more involved.

3. Understand stakeholder needs

Understanding stakeholder needs in a needs assessment process involves asking a variety of questions tailored to different stakeholder groups. These questions should be designed to gather detailed, relevant, and actionable information. Here are examples of questions you can use to understand stakeholder needs:

✓ What do they need?
✓ What level of communication do they want?
✓ What's the most effective communication strategy?
✓ Are there any influences or influencers for these stakeholders?
✓ How can you accurately identify stakeholders' interests?

4. Develop a stakeholder communication plan

A stakeholder communication plan is essential for ensuring that all stakeholders are adequately informed and engaged throughout a project or initiative. It outlines the strategies and methods for communicating with stakeholders and includes detailed information about communication objectives, methods, schedules, and responsibilities.

Purpose and Objectives	Explain why the communication plan is necessary. Describe the overall goals of stakeholder communication (e.g., keeping stakeholders informed, managing expectations, gaining support). Define specific, measurable communication objectives (e.g., increase stakeholder awareness, ensure stakeholder engagement, manage stakeholder expectations).
Stakeholder Identification and analysis	Identify all relevant stakeholders, including individuals, groups, and organizations. Categorize stakeholders by their level of influence and interest (e.g., high influence/high interest, low influence/low interest). Assess each stakeholder's needs, expectations, and potential impact on the project. Include information about their preferred communication methods and frequency.
Communication methods and channels	Specify the methods used to communicate with stakeholders (e.g., meetings, emails, newsletters, reports, social media). Tailor communication methods to suit different stakeholder preferences and needs. Identify the channels through which communication will be delivered (e.g., in-person meetings, virtual meetings, phone calls, social media platforms, websites).
Communication content and messaging	Define the core messages to be conveyed to stakeholders. Ensure consistency and clarity in messaging across different communication materials. Outline the types of content that will be shared (e.g., progress updates, project milestones, changes in scope, issues and resolutions).
Roles and responsibilities	Identify who is responsible for each aspect of stakeholder communication (e.g., project manager, communication officer, team leads). Clearly define the responsibilities of each team member involved in stakeholder communication (e.g., drafting messages, distributing updates, managing stakeholder feedback).
Feedback mechanisms	Describe how feedback from stakeholders will be collected (e.g., surveys, feedback forms, suggestion boxes). Ensure there are mechanisms for stakeholders to easily provide feedback. Outline the process for analyzing stakeholder feedback and incorporating it into project plans and communication strategies. Explain how feedback will be addressed and communicated back to stakeholders (e.g., acknowledgment of feedback, actions taken).

As your project gets underway, make sure to update any relevant stakeholders on changes and progress.
In addition to increasing visibility, documenting your processes early reduces the risk of any miscommunication down the road.

To ensure your project goes off without a hitch, you need to **make sure your stakeholders' expectations match your project deliverables—in other words, you need to increase and encourage clarity across your project.**

Involving community members in decision-making processes

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Involving community members in decision-making processes and fostering partnerships with local government, NGOs, and businesses during a needs assessment process is essential for ensuring that the outcomes are relevant, sustainable, and supported by all stakeholders.

Constructive relationships between communities and the institutions of government make community engagement not only desirable, but necessary and viable as it is likely to lead to more equitable, sustainable public decisions and improve the liveability of local communities.

Community engagement is primarily, part of a dialogue where organizations and communities can make decisions to create social capital.

Steps and strategies for involving community members:

a. Establish clear objectives: Define the goals of involving community members, such as gaining diverse perspectives, ensuring transparency, and fostering community ownership.

b. Create inclusive platforms: Organize town hall meetings, focus groups, and public forums where community members can voice their opinions and contribute to decision-making.
Use online platforms and social media to reach a broader audience, especially those who may not be able to attend in-person meetings.

c. Develop advisory committees: Form advisory committees or working groups that include community representatives. Ensure these groups are diverse and representative of the broader community.
Rotate members periodically to give different community members an opportunity to participate.

d. Use participatory methods: Implement participatory techniques such as Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) to actively involve community members in all stages of the needs assessment.
Conduct workshops and brainstorming sessions where community members can directly contribute ideas and solutions.

e. Empower local leaders: Identify and engage local leaders who can mobilize community members and facilitate discussions.
Provide training and capacity-building opportunities for these leaders to enhance their skills in community engagement and facilitation.

f. Ensure transparency: Keep the community informed about the progress and outcomes of the needs assessment. Share information regularly through newsletters, websites, and community meetings.
Be transparent about how community input is being used in decision-making.

Resources:

https://nccdh.ca/resources/entry/the-community-tool-box
https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/community-needs-assessments
https://www.thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/what-are-the-5-steps-of-training-needs-assessment
https://asana.com/resources/project-stakeholder

Photo source: www.canva.com

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