SESSION 1: UNDERSTAND YOUR COMMUNITY AND ASSESS YOUR ABILITY TO MEET ITS NEEDS
SESSION OBJECTIVES

TOOLKIT Objective:
● Provide community organizations with the tools and resources needed to increase their positive impact by developing new sources of volunteers and/or forging strategic partnerships that bring new resources, contacts, experience, and capabilities to the table.

SESSION Objective:
● Understand the importance of taking a deep look both at your community's needs and assets, and your organization's strengths and opportunities.
● Learn how to engage your community in the process and walk away with a framework and ideas for starting a conversation with key community and organizational stakeholders.
Part 1
Understand Your Community

Key takeaways:
● Surface community needs and challenges
● Uncover community strengths and assets

Tools:
● Assess community needs
● Map community assets
UNDERSTAND YOUR COMMUNITY

Each community is unique and has its own history, culture, dynamics, assets, and challenges. Understand these factors to ensure your efforts to meet community needs are relevant and effective.
To truly understand a neighborhood and its needs, there is no substitute for connecting with community members and listening to their experiences and perspectives.

- Reflect on local issues & current/past approaches to addressing them
- Use surveys and listening sessions to address any gaps in knowledge
ENGAGING COMMUNITY

- Involve community members in all conversations from the start
- Instead of relying on general information, aim to get a neighborhood level understanding, which can clarify key issues and disparities and allow you to target your support
- Engage ALL relevant community stakeholders, seek out those who you may not typically hear from
- Treat the community as an equal partner in devising solutions and addressing neighborhood problems
- Meet with community members where they live and gather
WHY DO WE NEED A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- Community needs evolve continually due to changing demographics, emergent crises, new community projects, etc.
- An organization’s ability to address community issues changes over time.
- Regular assessments allow organizations to understand changes and steer resources to meet current challenges.
- Understand organizational blindspots
- Helps organizations determine how best to address critical gaps that align with their mission
- Knowing what is working and what is not getting sufficient attention is critical to an organization’s success
GETTING STARTED

How extensive should a needs assessment be? Consider:

- Your organization’s depth of knowledge
- Current network and relationships
- What you already know based on experience and ongoing dialogue and input
- Urgency of the moment
- Whether there is time to pause

URGENCY OF THE MOMENT VS. TIME TO PAUSE

- During first wave of COVID-19 response, many organizations dove in to help their neighborhoods with whatever immediate needs emerged and were on the front lines of action.
- As time went on, some organizations were able to gather input to guide their efforts as they planned for the next response phase.
REFLECT: COMMUNITY NEEDS

Take 5 minutes to think about how your organization can more effectively surface community needs. Consider:

- What information would deepen our understanding of our community and the issues my organization is trying to address?
- How do we currently reach members of the community?
- Whose perspectives are missing from our organizational data?
- How might my organization work to reach these community members?
TIPS TO ENSURE MEANINGFUL INPUT

- Have a strong facilitator
- Make it clear you are there to listen
- Be open to both praise and criticism
- Invite candid feedback
- Have a strong facilitator
TOOL: ASSESS COMMUNITY NEEDS

Starting point for structuring discussion with community members and stakeholders.

➔ What community needs are met well? Who is meeting them and how?
➔ What community needs are not being met sufficiently?
➔ What resources are already available locally?
➔ Are community members aware of all the key local resources?
➔ What barriers prevent these needs from being met? Are there other local resources that help address these barriers?
➔ Are there certain groups or populations that are not receiving sufficient support? If so, what is preventing them from receiving the support they need?
➔ Are there other neighborhoods that better meet these needs? How do they do it? Which organizations are most effective?
While understanding the needs and deficits in a community is critical to planning, it is equally important to identify the strengths and assets that a community can harness to meet those needs.
ASSETS-BASED APPROACH

- **WHAT:** An asset-based approach recognizes the community’s strengths and looks to uncover potential resources and opportunities and make connections to identified needs.

- **WHY:** Community deepens its self-awareness and builds its own capacity to solve challenges.

- **HOW:** Community organizations tap into existing neighborhood assets - where relevant - to meet key needs and expand their capacity.
Objective: Identify existing assets and resources in the community to facilitate potential connections and build organizational capacity to address key needs. After completing both with input from colleagues at your org, you should have some ideas for potential partners and an initial pitch to begin outreach.
**Step 1:** Define the geographical (or other) boundaries of the neighborhood you plan to serve and the focal issue or issues your organization plans to address.

**Step 2:** Create a list of organizations and key individuals in the community that might help achieve your mission and address the outstanding needs that were identified.

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My organization will work with ______(neighborhood )___________________ on _______ (issues)______________________________.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individuals</th>
<th>Institutional</th>
<th>Governmental</th>
<th>Cultural</th>
<th>Local Associations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consider resident skills and talents. Are there any individual leaders in the community?</td>
<td>Are there any local institutions that may be able to provide social, physical resources and/or access to volunteers?</td>
<td>Are there any current government initiatives in the neighborhood? Who and where are our electeds that could be a resource?</td>
<td>Does your neighborhood have any historic landmarks, museums, other institutions that could provide physical space, social and learning resources, etc.?</td>
<td>What are some grassroot and local groups (including virtual groups) that are active in my neighborhood that may have access to broader networks and unique resources?</td>
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</table>
**Step 3:** Choose your priority assets from each column and list them below. Identify potential partners to connect you with these community assets (columns 2 and 3).

**Step 4:** Clarify what the partner could do to help support or complement your work and how a partnership with your organization might forward the potential partner’s work (columns 4 and 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asset Category</th>
<th>Priority Asset</th>
<th>Potential Partners to Contact</th>
<th>How a Partnership Can Forward the Work of my Organization</th>
<th>How a Partnership Can Forward the Potential Partners’ Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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Part 2
Assess Yourself and Make a Plan

Key takeaways:
● Understand our organization’s role
● Envision a path forward
● Plan to increase organizational capacity

Tools:
● Reflection on organization
● Vision for serving the community
● *How Might We* Planning
BUILD INTERNAL SUPPORT

Responding to community needs will likely mean that organizational changes will be made. In order to create a smooth process, it is important to foster an environment of trust and transparency. Here are some strategies to deal with resistance to change and create champions to change:

- Include employees in the process early, especially those in leadership positions
- Gain and acknowledge feedback throughout the change process
- If there is any, understand the true nature of the resistance and effectively engage these concerns
- Clearly articulate changes to employees and explain why it is important and the positive outcomes of the change
- Define clear roles and decision-makers
- Provide training where needed
- Implement change in several stages
ASSESS YOURSELF AND MAKE A PLAN

Understanding the greatest needs and how your organization is uniquely positioned to support your community will help maximize your impact.
Objective: Use these questions to reflect on the state of your organization, the systems currently in place, and areas of both strength and opportunity.

➔ What has our organization done really well to address, or try to address, some of the community’s articulated needs?
➔ What are some key organizational strengths that we can lean on and build on?
➔ What challenges can prevent our organization from delivering on our mission and supporting our community?
➔ What have we tried that hasn’t worked well? What have we learned?
➔ What are our organization’s core competencies that we are uniquely poised to offer?
➔ What community needs are we ill-equipped to meet? Are there gaps in our organization’s capacity?
➔ Could we meet those needs through partnerships with other organizations or volunteers?
REFLECT: ORGANIZATIONAL NEEDS AND ASSETS

Take 5 minutes to reflect upon your organization’s needs and assets. Consider:

- What has my organization done well to address community needs?
- What are some key organizational strengths that we can lean on and build on?
- Could we meet some needs through partnerships with other organizations or volunteers?
As you rethink how your organization could best serve the community, consider what you may need to change, build, or grow to deliver on your mission. A clear vision will focus your efforts and can guide you to be successful.
Objective: In conjunction with the reflection questions presented in this section, this visioning activity offers a quick temperature check on what you may want to evolve at your organization. The group exercise can help surface some initial thoughts to help guide discussion about organizational vision.
**Step 1:** Invite key stakeholders from your organization to work individually to complete the table below.

| CURRENT STATE: | Write down TEN HONEST WORDS to describe our organization’s current approach to address community needs. | ONE YEAR FROM NOW: | Write down TEN WORDS you would like stakeholders to use to describe our organization’s approach to serving the community A YEAR FROM NOW. |
**Step 2:** Come together and share your words from the first column and write down common themes and outliers. Then share your words from the second column and note the common themes and the outliers. Compare notes to see if you align on organizational strengths and gaps and how you would like the organization to evolve in one year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CURRENT STATE:</th>
<th>ONE YEAR FROM NOW:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THEMES:</td>
<td>THEMES:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUTLIERS:</td>
<td>OUTLIERS:</td>
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**Step 3:** Reflect on the results and discuss as a group. What are the key differences you see between the current state and desired future state? Are there clear indications of where to focus your work to achieve your desired future state? What are some of the words or ideas that showed up as outliers? Different perspectives help paint a more accurate picture of how stakeholders perceive your organization, which can guide your plan to evolve.
Let’s take 10 minutes to reflect upon your vision for serving your community by completing the first part of the visioning exercise.

**CURRENT STATE:**
Thinking about your own knowledge and experience, as well as what you’ve heard from the community and other stakeholders, write down TEN HONEST WORDS to describe our organization’s current approach to address community needs. Think about it from the perspectives of a range of stakeholders (staff, clients, volunteers, community) and the types of words they might use (the good and the bad) to describe how we work.

**ONE YEAR FROM NOW:**
Write down TEN WORDS you would like this same range of stakeholders (staff, clients, volunteers, community) to use to describe our organization’s approach to serving the community A YEAR FROM NOW. What would you LIKE them to say about our organization and the way we address community needs?
PLAN TO INCREASE ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Before jumping into action - pause, create a plan, and prepare your organization to evolve.
Objective: Use *How Might We* questions to guide ideation and brainstorming towards action. Rather than simply ask how an issue could be resolved, you will create more opportunities for solutions if you frame the question more openly. The *How Might We* format encourages you to expand your thinking to generate more ideas and actionable next steps.
**HOW TO CRAFT A “HOW MIGHT WE” QUESTION**

**Too broad:** How might we get volunteers to return?

**Too narrow:** How might we provide food for volunteers at project sites so they will be encouraged to participate again?

**Just right:** How might we create a welcoming environment that will encourage volunteers to return? **OR** How might we build incentives for volunteers to return?
**Step 1:** Reflect with colleagues on what you’ve learned about your community’s needs and assets, as well as the themes that emerged from the visioning activity.

**Step 2:** Consider specific challenges and opportunities you want to address and frame some *How Might We* questions.

**Step 3:** For each question, brainstorm potential solutions that your organization could explore. Discuss which ideas seem most impactful and which are most feasible.
TOOL: PLAN AND IDEATE WITH “HOW MIGHT WE?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOW MIGHT WE?</th>
<th>POTENTIAL IDEAS/SOLUTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How might we better leverage our strengths to increase our community impact?</td>
<td>Star the ideas that feel most important and highlight the ideas that feel most feasible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How might we fill some of the gaps of the community and our organization have identified to fulfill our mission?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How might we....</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Individually, take a few minutes to:
   a. Review your notes from the earlier reflection activities on community and organizational needs and assets vision
   b. Pick one theme or challenge you think your organization needs to work on and create one How Might We question
   c. Brainstorm 2-3 responses/ideas/solutions to your How Might We question

1. In your group, share your name, organization, and How Might We question and one of your ideas/responses:
   a. Get group feedback on how you might sharpen your How Might We question to elicit the most effective responses
   b. Have the group do a 1 min brainstorm and share any ideas/solutions/responses to your How Might We question.
ADDRESSING UNMET NEEDS

To take action on the ideas you have generated, you will likely need to increase your organization’s capacity in some areas. Some key ways to build organizational ability to increase impact are:

- **Partnerships:** Well-chosen strategic partners bring new experience, resources, and capabilities to increase your community impact.
- **Volunteers:** Community and corporate volunteers offer a relatively low-cost way to bring new skills to your organization without adding headcount.
- **Other Avenues:** Strategic board seats, external perspectives through advisors and subject matter experts, and other well-chosen sources of input can build and broaden organizational capacity.
QUESTIONS?

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THANK YOU