



Step 1: Identify Unmet Needs

In this data-driven step, identify unmet needs, or gaps, between what the current food security challenges are and how the community is addressing these needs.

1.1 Community Assessment

It is essential to have an understanding of the local food security situation as a starting point. The **Community Assessment Worksheet** facilitates this by suggesting key food security-related indicators to assess your community. The tool is a framework that can be easily customized, by adding or deleting indicators depending on the community's focus and available information.

Ideally, use data that is recent and accurately represents the community to complete the **Community Assessment Worksheet**. However, it is not uncommon to have outdated statistics, data that are not specific to the local area (e.g., there is state or district data but not specific city or village data) or data that are missing for a particular population (e.g., children, the elderly or the underserved). In these cases:

- Use the collective knowledge of the advisory panel to describe the local situation for that indicator or subgroup
- Consult the health department or other organizations that handle data to see if more local or recent information is available
- Reach out to local tax-exempt hospitals — the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act requires them to complete a Community Health Needs Assessment every three years
- Work with local partners, such as a health department, college or university, to collect new data, if the advisory panel feels that it is essential to have that information before moving forward.

Do not let data issues deter progress. Do the best possible with the information available and move on. Later on in the process, consider whether improved assessment or surveillance data is an important place to invest resources for the community.

“The outcome of the data was powerful. It provided us with facts, not assumptions, that hunger is truly present in an affluent community like ours.”

1.2 Program Inventory

Programs that are already in place to address food insecurity are vital community assets. The **Program Inventory Worksheet** documents what is known about each existing program's participation, accessibility and outcomes. It also organizes this information by category (e.g., congregate feeding programs, emergency food assistance programs, etc.). Keep in mind that, depending on the scope of the project, identifying current programs for every category may not be necessary. Modify this tool as needed.

Once the **Community Assessment Worksheet** and **Program Inventory Worksheet** have been completed, pause to use the expertise of the advisory panel to review and provide feedback. The panel should come to a consensus that the information gathered accurately reflects the current local food security situation.

1.3 Gap Analysis

A gap analysis highlights discrepancies between the current reality and the desired state. Start this process by identifying areas of need and areas of strength on the **Community Assessment Worksheet**. Then, look at how programs catalogued in the **Program Inventory Worksheet** line up with the areas of need and strength. For example, the **Community Assessment Worksheet** may show a high prevalence of child poverty and child food insecurity, and the **Program Inventory Worksheet** may show high participation in school lunch and school breakfast, but low participation in Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and summer and after school meals by eligible individuals. List the unmet needs, or gaps, in the **Gap Analysis Worksheet**. This tool also can be modified as needed for the local situation.

You may identify several unmet needs; do not attempt to address them all simultaneously. Hone in on the key areas (e.g., a particular part of town, age group or high-risk population). If the community has or is developing a strategic plan, focus areas may already be identified. When completing this step, remember to set clear goals and a firm timeline to keep from becoming overwhelmed.

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There is a lot of overlap in services. That discovery was probably the best thing that came out of this process.

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