

Conducting a Comprehensive Needs Assessment:

Best Practices to Create a Plan You Can Work

Planning Partners

Our Agency's Planning Partners

- The SETRPC worked with several entities who each actively participated in conducting the comprehensive needs assessment:
 - A consultant partner
 - Human Service Agencies
 - Economic Development Agencies
 - Transportation Providers
- Each of these partners was essential to the success of this needs assessment.

Consultant Partner

- Access to complimentary skill sets
- Assistance with conducting outreach/surveys
- Assistance with data compilation
- Access to useful programs that are not regularly used by the planning commission and therefore not worth the investment

Human Service Agencies

- Access to first-hand knowledge of client needs
- Access to clients for outreach, input, or survey distribution
- Insight into the transit-related issues that emerge while assisting clients with mobility needs

Economic Development Agencies

- Access to first-hand knowledge of the transportation needs of those seeking employment
- Access to individuals who are seeking employment and may lack transportation
- Insight into issues that arise when assisting those seeking unemployment who also have mobility needs

Transportation Providers

- Access to expert knowledge about local transportation services
- Identification of gaps in the current services
- Access to client feedback

Methodology

Who Designs the Methodology?

- The SETRPC and its consultant partner developed the methodology.
- For the upcoming planning cycle, the SETRPC will develop the methodology solo.

How to Develop a Methodology

- Consider your goal.
- Determine the essential phases of the needs assessment:
 - Reviewing the currently available services
 - Collecting data
 - Evaluating data
 - Determining priority needs based upon the results
- Identify the steps you will take in accomplishing each phase.
- Create a methodology that provides a step-by-step guide for completing your needs assessment.

Conducting Your Comprehensive Needs Assessment

Who Conducted the Needs Assessment?

- The SETRPC and its consultant partner conducted the needs assessment.

How to Conduct a Comprehensive Needs Assessment

- Get started with background information.
- Inventory current systems and evaluate services.
- Collect data.
 - Surveys and questionnaires
 - Public meetings and focus groups
 - Ride alongs
- Evaluate the data.
- Assess transit-dependent risk populations.
- Determine priority needs based upon the results.

Get Started with Background Information

- Consult with prior planning partners to initiate the process.
- Review previous plans.
- Review data collected through recently completed projects.
- Consult with prior planning partners to initiate the coordination process.
- Review the plans of areas with similar profiles.

Inventory Current Systems and Evaluate Services

- Identify all currently available services.
- Obtain service information and service details.
- Coordinate with local service providers to ensure accurate and up-to-date information.
- Evaluate the services for gaps and needs.

Collect Data

- The SETRPC uses the following methods for collecting data:
 - Surveys
 - Questionnaires
 - Public meeting series
 - Focus groups
 - Ride alongs

Conduct Surveys and Administer Questionnaires

- Public surveys allow residents to provide input on a variety of transit-related topics.
- Surveys and questionnaires directed at transportation providers, human service agencies, and economic development agencies provide an opportunity for input from the people who are in direct contact with people who use transit services.
- Meet with providers and representatives of local agencies.

Our Agency's Survey Data Collection and Evaluation

- The SETRPC and its consultant partner collected the majority of the data.
- Planning partners, including economic development agencies and human service agencies, also collected data by distributing and collecting surveys.
- 19 agencies provided survey responses.
- The SETRPC and its consultant partner evaluated the data.

Public Meetings and Focus Groups

- Host a series of public meetings.
- Public meetings should be spread throughout the region with each meeting in a series being identical.
- The SETRPC hosted 2 rounds of 4 public meetings.
- Advertise.
- Assemble a focus group with a diverse representation of stakeholders.

Ride Alongs

- Conduct ride alongs.
- Ride alongs provide an opportunity to engage actual riders in the planning process in a way that accommodates the client.
- Ride alongs provide a reliable channel for public input.

Assess Transit-Dependent Risk Populations

- The SETRPC and its consultant partner developed demographic profiles of the region.
- These profiles enabled staff to determine whether or not services were meeting the mobility needs of individuals at-risk for transit dependency.

Cost of Conducting a Comprehensive Needs Assessment

Cost and Funding

- Our last plan's comprehensive needs assessment cost about \$7,000.
- The funding source for the assessment consisted solely of Regionally Coordinated Transportation Planning funds.

Lessons

Planning Projects Depend on an Excellent Comprehensive Needs Assessment

- Begin your assessment with this in mind.
- The needs identified through this comprehensive needs assessment will shape the regional planning projects that your agency proposes during future funding cycles.

Focus on “Umbrella” Priority Needs

- Priority needs should be broad.
- Don't fall into the trap of labeling solutions as needs.
 - Example: a route between two service areas
 - Specific solutions may not be the best or only way to address your need.
- As you review your results, look for similarities between stated needs, identified gaps, and suggestions from the public.
- Identify “Umbrella” needs that encompass the smaller issues.
 - Examples: Regional Connectivity and Communication

Collect Meaningful Data

- Successfully determining a set of priority needs depends on the data set.
- Seek both quantitative and qualitative data.
 - Quantitative data such as survey results allow you to measure the level of need.
 - Qualitative data can include service information, questionnaire results, or public comments.
- Anecdotes are interesting and can provide direction but are not meaningful data.

Direct the Process from a Local Perspective

- Your plan should reflect your area's needs.
- Your plan should take into account the unique characteristics of your region and how they will affect the direction and outcome of future planning projects.
- Start the process of determining needs and potential solutions at the local level.