



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Strengths and Drawbacks of Different CNA Information Sources

The different information sources from the community needs assessment (CNA) each have various strengths and drawbacks that can help us put lessons learned into context. To briefly recap CNA data sources and the insights they can provide (or not) about community needs:

- The **perceptions survey** provides insights about community members' familiarity with OEE and its work as well as some efforts that might be undertaken to better meet the community's needs.
 - ✓ **Strengths:** (a) information might suggest that marketing campaigns would be helpful, and (b) also could point to some unmet general needs, especially in different demographic sectors.
 - ✓ **Drawbacks:** (a) if the surveys were completed only by existing CSUE contacts and not a more representative group of residents, faulty estimates of the scope of needs can result, and (b) there won't be as much depth about needs as one might gain from focus groups and key informant interviews.
- **Demographic and secondary data** from websites provide information about the makeup of the communities' audience—and its diversity—as well as topical issues that other entities might be addressing now or in the near future.
 - ✓ **Strengths:** helps identify (a) potentially underserved groups, (b) needs that aren't being addressed but maybe should be, and (c) potential collaborators around topical issues. **Social indicators** are especially helpful in identifying trends or emerging issues, like a drop in teen pregnancies or an increase in opioid use.
 - ✓ **Drawbacks:** (a) information might not be available for smaller communities or at the neighborhood level, (b) data might be outdated, and (c) data usually does not provide information about solutions that have been tried before and either worked or failed.
- **Key informants and focus groups.**
 - ✓ **Strengths:** can provide useful qualitative information about the characteristics of a target population—their preferences for consuming information, social networks, values, and beliefs—and the nature of their service needs. They can also provide insights into root causes of problems and potential strategies beyond what can be found in some other sources of data.
 - ✓ **Drawbacks:** they are not reliable sources of information about the actual number of persons affected by a social problem or the demographic distribution of needs.
- The **Civic Capacity Index** provides a profile of the key ingredients of how the community as a whole plans for the future and responds to needs and crises (community resilience).
 - ✓ **Strengths:** may pinpoint key processes that are weak or absent and thus may undermine the community's capacity to meet citizen's needs, or strengths that can be leveraged through collaborative efforts.
 - ✓ **Drawbacks:** (a) using the CCI to guide initiatives likely requires collaborations that cross sectors and get service providers and administrators out of their silos, which may be resisted; (b) solutions likely involve systems changes that take some time; and (c) the CCI does not provide information that is specific to the needs of individuals and families.

- **CNA surveys of individuals.**

- ✓ **Strength:** They (potentially) can provide quite accurate information on the extent and distribution of a social problem when there are no existing credible data. For instance, if survey results indicate that very few people are opposed to childhood vaccinations even though there's a fair amount of noise about that issue in the press, one would be inclined to focus attention on other higher-priority issues (assuming an unbiased survey sample).
- ✓ **Drawback:** The main caveat to survey data is that unless good survey methods are used, the results can be skewed, particularly if the views of those most affected by a problem (e.g., marginalized groups) are underrepresented.

This recap should make it clear that no single source provides clear cut guidance for settling on an action plan. Instead, the information needs to be synthesized through filters including:

- how important an issue is to your community at-large
- how important an issue is to various populations within your community, especially populations that have been underrepresented in past OEE programming and/or those that may provide new "markets" for Extension resources
- what is actionable/feasible given a reasonable potential to add or shift resources or to partner with other organizations
- lessons learned from previous programming efforts

If one was to articulate a single filter through which to process all data, it would be the question: How can OEE maximize its impact in Colorado communities?