How to Start a Needs Assessment: If you don't get off on the right foot it is more likely to fail!

An AEA Skills Building Workshop presented by

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Objectives/Agenda

Objectives

Understand the Needs Assessment Process

Learn about how NAs might start

Brief look at some starting procedures

     Cultural audits

     Environmental mapping

     Photo Voice

     Others

A hands-on scenario based activity to form and use a NAC

Have an opportunity to discuss the experience and have some fun on a brief journey into NA

Provide a glimpse into the Needs Assessment Kit (Altschuld, Eastmond, King, Kumar, Stevahn, and White, 2010)

Agenda

Introduction (1 minute)

Questions (2-4 minutes)

Basic NA terms and concepts (8-10 minutes)

Overview of Ways to Get Started (15 -18 minutes)

   What are

       Cultural Auditing

       Environmental mapping

       Photo Voice

       Other approaches

Hands-on work, discussion, etc. (rest of time for the session)

Beginnings

Questions for you

- How many have done NAs?
- How did the NA start?
- Were you called in as a consultant, if so who did so and why/
- Was it top down or bottom up?
- Was it in response to a funding mandate?
- Was it in response to some disturbing health or societal trend?
- Murky area with a great need for research?

Terms/concepts

Need
- -definition
- -not mixing solutions with needs
- -examples of needs (see partial table from Kit book 1)
- -types of needs (book 1)
- -levels of needs
- -many issues at the outset

Needs assessment
- -three phase model (see schematic)
- -importance of NAC (needs assessment committee)
- -how to utilize the NAC
- -many techniques and ways to get going

Definitions & Issues

Need: the measurable discrepancy between "what is" or the present state of affairs in regard to the group and situation of interest and the "what should be" or desired state of affairs (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995).

Issues: measurable discrepancy is the key

-needs not solutions (premature closure on solutions)

-verb vs. noun concept (misuse of the word)

-'desired', 'likely to occur', 'ought to occur', etc.

-wish and want lists

-many types of needs

More Terms/Concepts

NA is a systematic set of procedures undertaken for the purpose of setting needs-based priorities and making decisions about organizational improvement and allocation of resources (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995).

Issues

-context for the NA

-readiness for an assessment

-NA is an organizational activity

-political aspects to the activity

-systems concept and how to think about it

-remember causal analysis deals with how things fail for the most part

Lots of subtle aspects of need and NA
    Examples
    Types

ZIGGY   TOM WILSON

"...I LOWERED MY EXPEC- TATIONS SO FAR THAT I TRIPPED OVER THEM!"

Table 1.1 Examples of the "What Is," "What Ideally Should Be," and "What Is Likely" States

Area	What Is	What Ideally Should Be	What Is Likely
Health	30% of U.S. population is overweight	100% at or near a reasonable weight for age, height, gender, and body build	75% will reach the standard within a 5-year period
Mathematics	62.8% of district students achieve the state standard for the fourth-grade mathematics test	100% reach the standard or 75% reach the standard to remove the district from possible state sanctions	65% or more achieve the standard by this time next year
Reading	75% of eighth-grade students understand the instructions on an aspirin bottle or a package of patent medicine	100% should be able to do the task	85% are able to do the task 2 years from now after exposure to improved reading instruction

Table 1.1 (Continued)

Area	What Is	What Ideally Should Be	What Is Likely
Youth Recreation	A community does not have a recreation center and adequate recreation activities for youth	A recreation center will be built and open 5 years from now Within 1 year a recreation program will be started in the community	The recreation center will be a reality 10 years from now A small recreation program will start in 2 years and slowly expand
Immunization	The inoculation rate for preschool children in a particular state is currently at 70%–75%	A rate of 90%–95% will be achieved, thus reducing the likelihood of the incidence (spread) of certain diseases	Rate of inoculation will slowly increase to 80% over a 5-year period Rate will remain the same without the causes of the problem being understood

Table 1.1 (Continued)

Area	What Is	What Ideally Should Be	What Is Likely
Wealth	An individual is currently worth $1,000,000	With inflation and worries about job stability the individual would prefer to be at $2,000,000 to feel more secure	$1,500,000 would be likely in light of the general growth of investments within a 10-year period
Driving While Under the Influence	9% of all drivers during the period from 1 a.m. to 4 a.m. on weekend nights are above the legal limit for intoxication	Nearly 0% with rigorous law enforcement procedures, more sobriety checkpoints, and stiffer penalties	3%–4% even with the procedures specified in the previous column
Educational System	Current state standards for courses and areas required for a high school degree	Given changes in knowledge and the world of work, what standards should we develop for children now entering the educational system and who graduate in 13 years?	What are reasonable expectations for change in complex multidimensional systems like education?

Source: from Needs Assessment Kit I, Book 1 by J. W. Altschuld and D. D. Kumar , 2010, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Table 1.2 Types of Needs

Type	Characteristics	Comments
Present (Short-Term) Versus Future (Long-Term)	Some needs are short-term in nature (3 years or less with emphasis on less) Long-term needs will generally be over 3 years or more into the future	Groups will focus more easily on short-term needs (i.e., ones that they can see being resolved in lesser periods of time) Longer-term needs will be difficult to mobilize support for and to develop commitment of groups to their resolution
Severe Versus Slight	Some needs will be considered to be severe (larger in scope or of more consequence) Others will be of not so great scope and not represent as great an underlying problem	Severe or major problems will be more complex, will be harder to deal with and resolve, will take more time and resources for resolution, etc. As in the prior row, it will be easier to develop enthusiasm for solving slight needs
Maintenance/ Upgrade	Does not indicate a direct discrepancy at the current time but will become a need if a service, level of skill, etc., is not maintained or upgraded	All systems and skills need maintenance, which if neglected will lead to problems (discrepancies)

Table 1.2 (Continued)

Type	Characteristics	Comments
Collaborative	Needs assessments carried out by collaboration between two (bilateral) or more (multilateral) cooperating institutions or agencies	Organizations sense or feel that collaboratively (mutually) assessing needs and solving them have advantages for each involved agency and institution
Levels 1 (Recipients of Services), 2 (Deliverers of Services), and 3 (System Supporting Levels 1 and 2)	Level 1 deals with needs of those who receive services, Level 2 focuses on those who deliver services and what they require to do so, and Level 3 relates to overall needs (funds, facilities, etc.) of the system to support Level 2 and, in turn, Level 1	Many times are carried out at the second or third levels rather than at the first one Level 1 is to be stressed since it is the reason for the existence of Levels 2 and 3

Table 1.2 (Continued)

Type	Characteristics	Comments
Asset or Capacity Building	Approaching the issue not from a discrepancy point of view but from that of building and capitalizing upon assets and strengths rather than deficits or needs	Needs assessment always starts with needs or problems instead of strengths It is more positive to think about the strengths of the community and how to use them than to focus on needs (negatives)
Retrospective	Retrospective needs are assessed generally after a project or a program is underway and is at the point of undergoing a summative evaluation. If there has not been a prior needs assessment or if questions arise as to what or whose needs are being served, then the situation might call for a retrospective assessment of needs	In general, retrospective assessments of need are not often seen in the literature. An early citation is in the Program Evaluation Kit (1978) as suggested by Herman, Morris, and Fitz-Gibbon used in conjunction with the evaluation of a program This may be a catch-up mechanism when the need for a project was not established previously or an unanticipated or different Level 1 group than intended is utilizing project resources

Source: from Needs Assessment Kit I, by J. W. Altschuld and D. D. Kumar , 2010, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Table 2.2   The Needs Assessment Model (Phases and Key Steps)

Phase	Overarching Phase Descriptor	Key Steps
Phase I Preassessment	Focusing the needs assessment, and what do we know about possible needs?	1. Focusing the assessment 2. Forming an NAC 3. Learning as much as we can about preliminary "what should be" and "what is" conditions from *available* data sources 4. Moving to Phases II and/or III or stopping
Phase II Assessment	Do we need to know more, will we have to conduct a much more intensive data collection effort, and do we have ideas about what are the causes of needs?	5. Conducting a full assessment about "what should be" and "what is" conditions 6. Identifying discrepancies (Levels 1, 2, and 3) 7. Prioritizing discrepancies 8. Causally analyzing needs 9. Preliminary identification of solution criteria and possible solution strategies 10. Moving to Phase III
Phase III Postassessment	Are we ready to take action, and have we learned enough about the need to feel comfortable with our proposed actions?	11. Making final decisions to resolve needs and selecting solution strategies 12. Developing action plans for solution strategies, communicating plans, and building bases of support 13. Implementing and monitoring plans 14. Evaluating the overall needs assessment endeavor (document with an eye to revisit and reuse)

Source: from Needs Assessment Kit I, by J. W. Altschuld and D. D. Kumar , 2010, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Common Issues in Getting NA Started

Focusing

- Organization or community doesn't really understand need or NA

- Going too narrow or too broad

- Getting organized

- Establishing NAC

- External facilitator not knowing the organization

- Internal facilitator too close – no fresh thinking

- Linking NA results into decision-making

- If other organizations are involved, pinpointing ways to go about process

Clarifying the field of vision and gaining a clear perspective are absolutely essential!

Some Common Approaches to Begin the Process

Approaches

Interviews

Data-resources list via Altschuld &Witkin (2000)

Watkins/Guerra Quiz

Document review

Literature review

Environment mapping

Various types of surveys

Open-ended

Initial fact finding

Readiness

Forming/using the NAC

Others that you may know about

Ways noted here

Data-resources list

Cultural Audit

Altschuld & Eastmond (2010) in the NA KIT

Lauffer's (1982) Environment

Mapping

Older but valuable for collaborative NAs

All techniques are useful

Recon is underlying concept

All force more thinking about the NA process

Last but not least the NAC

Cultural Audit (Altschuld & Eastmond, 2010)

1. **Assumptions about the area in consideration**
   Motivation levels of people engaged in the area
   Commitment of all organizational levels to the assessment
   Expectations of performance
   Respect factors across the work (concerned) unit
   Everyone understands what the others do
   Individuals can take initiative within a collective framework
   Other related questions and ideas
2. **What are the common practices now done in the area?**
   How do we commonly deliver our services or products?
   How do we connect with our audiences/clients?
   What is the nature of our interactions?
   How do we handle and distribute our funds?
   Where are our shortfalls in terms of funds?
   Other related questions and ideas

3. **Communication Channels**
    Staff members and administrators know and understand each other
    A spirit of cooperation exists
    Communication is not too hierarchical in nature
    Communication is reasonable without over-clogging channels (the wheat rather than the chaff comes through)
    The communication environment is fairly open
    Climate is positive
    Other related questions and ideas
4. **Anomalies, Problems, and Exceptions**
    Are there any unrealistic expectations?
    Are there cohorts that make people feel uncomfortable beyond those in a normal workplace?
    Does the organization provide enough time to adjust to new initiatives?
    It is okay to challenge ideas without feeling intimidated?
    Are there any factors that work against achieving collective goals?
    Other related questions and ideas

Altschuld & Eastmond (2010) Sage Publishing

Environmental Mapping

Older approach by Lauffer for working in developing countries

To map out the environment around an organization, first briefly describe your organization and need

Then identify

Consumers/users of services

Collaborators/competitors

Suppliers to organization

Auspice providers

Next specify the strength of linkage to your organization and how amenable to change these linkages are

Review the map and suggest reasons why other organizations would want to participate in a collaborative NA with you and why they might not want to do so

Lauffer is a more external/internal look at the issue whereas cultural auditing is more internally focused

Technique still has high utility for work in NA particularly as related to the collaborative situation

Getting a feel for the lay of the land.

Cooperative Needs Assessment

1. <u>Purpose</u> - to help you think through the nature of the environment in which the agency or organization exists and which will be the context for the cooperative needs assessment strategy.

2. First, produce a hand-printed paragraph describing the agency or organization. Include its size, location, etc. in your description.

3. Place agency, organization or institution name in center of map supplied for that purpose. Then initially complete steps 4-6 for map as applicable to your situation.

4. <u>Identify actual or potential consumers and place names in boxes</u>
   - Recipients of agency services or products
   - Be specific
   - Could include other agencies or organizations
   - Could include those who should be consumers but currently are not

Cooperative Needs Assessment cont.

5. Identify collaborators and competitors

Other service providers

Competitors for services

Current and potential collaborators/competitors

6. Suppliers of resources

- Money
- Facilities
- Political Influence
- Etc.

7. Auspice Providers

- Board of Directors
- Legislative Guidelines

Cooperative Needs Assessment cont.

8. Go back to each box you've filled in and score it in terms of 2 dimensions. Place the score for the dimensions beside each box.

Importance to your agency's survival and achievement of goals.

Score	Value
I+2	Very Important
I+1	Somewhat Important
I+0	Neutral
I-1	Somewhat Unimportant
I-2	Very Unimportant

Amenability to influence

A+2	Very Amenable
A+1	Somewhat Amenable
A+0	Neutral
A-1	Somewhat Un-amenable
A-2	Very Un-amenable

Cooperative Needs Assessment cont.

9. Write above the dotted lines the linking mechanism (s) for the factor in the environment and the agency. Identify the mechanisms as existing (E), probable at a future date (P) and desirable or ought to be there (D).

10.   Congratulations! You've mapped out the task environment for your agency   or institution. Review it and then complete steps 11 & 12.

11. Define reasons for other agencies and groups in the task environment to participate in a cooperative needs assessment process. Be specific and define and define as many reasons as possible.

Cooperative Needs Assessment cont.

Reasons

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

7.
8.
9.
10.
11.
12.

Cooperative Needs Assessment cont.

12. <u>Define</u> factors or forces that might work against/for successful cooperation on the needs assessment

<u>Forces Against</u>

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.

Forces For

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.

Cooperative Needs Assessment cont.

13. Outline procedures or steps you would initiate for a successful cooperative needs assessment. How would you capitalize on the forces for and how would you work to combat forces against?
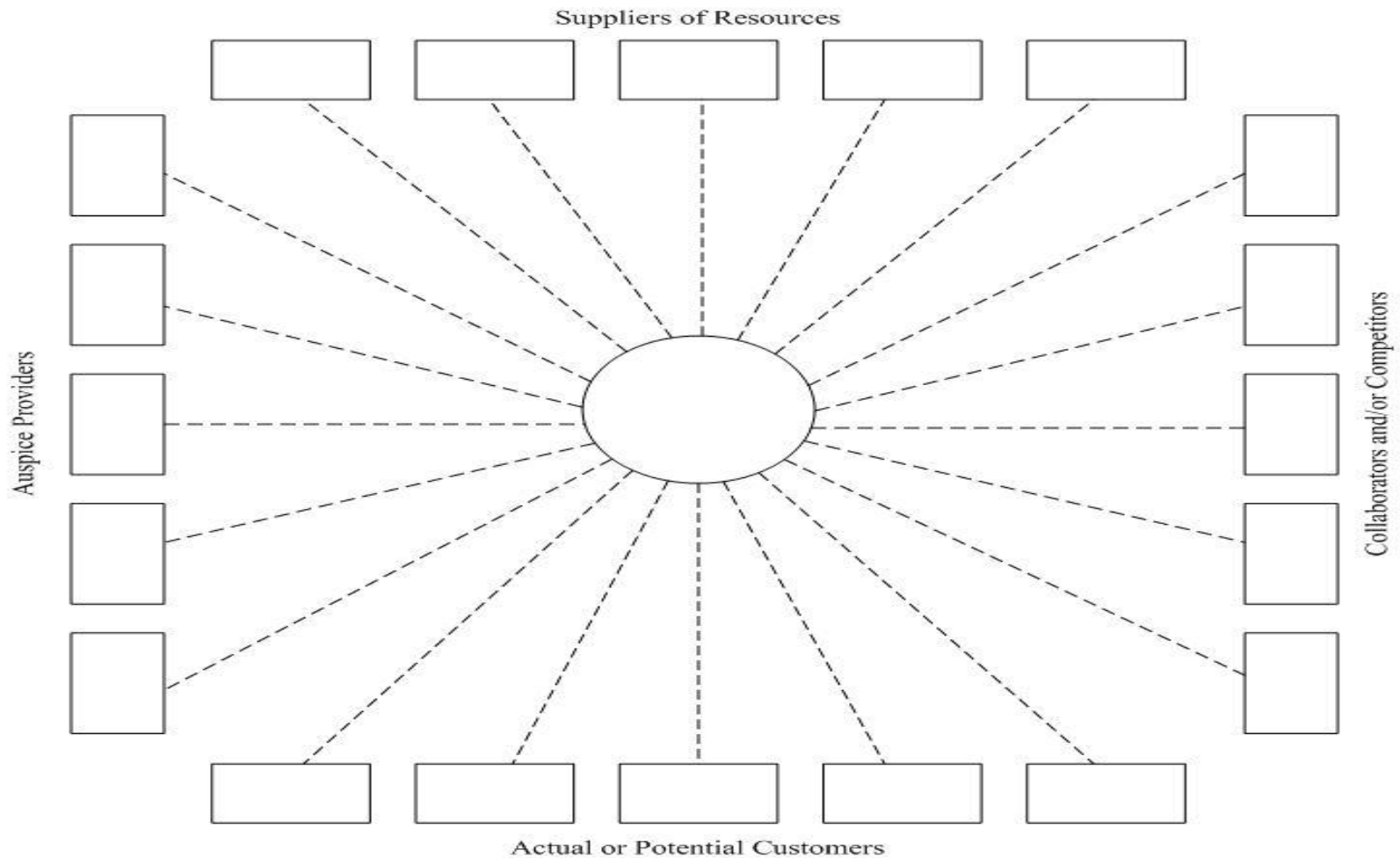
Against Forces Against
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.

For Forces For
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.

Task Environment Map

Suppliers of Resources

Auspice Providers

Collaborators and/or Competitors

Actual or Potential Customers

Task Environment Gap

Data Resources List Format for Pre-assessment

Goal:	Expand AEA membership in accord with criteria developed by a membership committee		
Concern: To what extent does the membership represent the diversity and nature of practicing evaluators? What are potential other sources of AEA members?			
What is Known		**Data to Gather**	
Facts	*Sources*	*Facts*	*Sources*

# of members 	
Highest degree
Gender
Countries
Area of specialization
 	
_____
_____
_____
	Membership lists
	         TIG list
	         Registration
	         Evaltalk list
		AEA, Prime Organization
		Evaluation as a prime focus
		Nature of practice
		Other organizations
			Surveys
			Interviews at Conference
			FGIs
			
			_____
			_____
			_____

		Opinions	*Sources*
		Why join?	See above
		What value?	
		When?	

Additional columns may be added (Altschuld & Witkin, 2000)

Goal: To revise our curriculum in educational research, evaluation and measurement

Concern: What do we know about our students and why they come to our program! How does our curriculum match up with those of other institutions? What skills and knowledge are our students using in their work? What skills will be needed in the future?

What is Known		Data to Gather	
Facts	*Sources*	*Facts*	*Sources*
Past Students Degree levels Gender Countries Current jobs **Courses** What we teach How concepts relate	Records Faculty Notes Syllabi Syllabi review Group discussion Job opportunities Requests for services	Complete listing of jobs held How training relates to current work Publications What do other curricula and courses look like What do our competitors do better than we do? **Opinions** What current students think of courses What past students perceive as important and/or missing	Email survey Collect current resumes Literature review Phone interviews of other universities Collect other syllabi and benchmark **Sources** Focus group interviews Surveys Phone interviews
		Why did they choose us	
		What are their expectations What other consumers (other faculty) think of us	

Altschuld (2003) Korean Educators' Workshop

Goal:			
Concern:			
What is Known		**Data to Gather**	
Facts	*Sources*	*Facts*	*Sources*
		Opinions	*Sources*

Witkin & Altschuld, 1995

Needs Assessment Committee (NAC) Considerations

Purposes
Membership
- Characteristics
  - How selected
  - Size
  - What is required of members
  - Role of facilitator to keep it going
  - Feedback to NAC
  - Technical skills (think about member selection)

NAC Considerations, cont'd.

Other Features
- Costs
- Phase I decisions factored into meetings
- Products
  - Many examples of summaries in the Kit

Some Pitfalls
- Critical mass
- Development of group chemistry
- Momentum

Early Phase 1 Exercise – Selecting the membership for the NAC

What might a NAC do

- Identify sources of information
- Provide ideas about potential areas of need
  - Watch however for bias
  - Ask for ideas across all NAC members
  - Suggest content for instruments
  - Perspectives/vernacular of different groups
- Review methodology
  - Make suggestions about data collection instruments
  - Critique methods being used
- Provide technical expertise
- Suggest what might be important information for decision-makers

What might a NAC do, cont'd.

- Offer ways to tie into decision-making
- Make suggestions for how to change membership for Phase 3
- Pilot test instruments
- Role play scenarios particularly decision-making ones
- Presenting a credible public face to the activity
- Doing formal NA presentations to decision-makers

NOTE: the NAC is not the formal decision making body but it provides information via the NA for decision-making