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Alternative NEEDS ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES for VIRGINIA

A HANDBOOK

VIRGINIA COMMISSION for CHILDREN and YOUTH

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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VIRGINIA COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH
Suite 901, Ninth Street Office Building
Richmond, Virginia 23219

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INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

The timely use of a needs assessment by an agency or group involved in rendering human services can enable them to schedule their services systematically to more effectively meet the needs of their target group. Carefully determining the needs of a given population facilitates the wise and frugal allocation of funds, and encourages the frequent review of services currently being provided to determine their effectiveness and their rates of utilization.

In an effort to assist those agencies concerned with planning for service delivery, the Virginia Commission for Children and Youth, through a Title XX contract with the Virginia Department of Welfare, has developed this document in the hope that it will enhance both needs assessment activities and interagency planning and coordination.

The purpose of this handbook is to provide a concise overview of needs assessment. Included in this document is a discussion of what a needs assessment is and why it should be conducted. Also addressed is what has already been done in this field and is presently being attempted. Sources of information and assistance are identified and alternative needs assessment techniques, including specific steps, are explored. A technique for conducting a Statewide needs assessment aimed at a specific target group and crossing programmatic boundaries is suggested. The discussion will include modification of the method so it can be adapted to smaller scales of effort. In addition to the presentation of the technique, specific uses for the results and information are explored.

The underlying consideration in the design of this document is its utility. The progression from needs assessment theory to specific steps, activities, and tasks provides the reader with a cursory understanding and useable method of needs assessment for Virginia.

This handbook of Alternative Needs Assessment Techniques: Virginia is the fourth in a series of needs assessment related documents for the target group of children and youth and their families. An Inventory and Analysis of State Data Sources for Children and Youth: Virginia, An Inventory of Legislation Affecting Children and Youth with Selected Analysis, and Innovative Projects for Children and Youth are the first three publications that, in conjunction with this handbook, provide the foundation for needs assessment activities for children and youth in Virginia.

The page numbering system has been designed to incorporate all of the documents. To adequately distinguish the different documents with respect to the different sections, the first number is the document number; the second number represents the section or chapters of the document; and the third number is the page number of the particular section.

WHAT IS A NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

> The Commonwealth lacks a meaningful system for the collection and application of needs data for Statewide planning. Most of the human affairs agencies compile data on needs which represent services being delivered, while others project needs data based on statistical interpretation of prevelance and incidence in the client population. All too frequently, the planning and provision of a human resource services has been based on the availability of given resources, rather than identified needs...capabilities should be developed for the ongoing assessment of needs....
>
> -A study by the Commission on Human Resources Priorities, 1976

The accurate identification of the needs of the citizenry of a particular jurisdiction should be a goal of any policy-making unit. Needs assessment activities initiated by policy makers are designed to provide systematized knowledge derived from observation, study and experimentation. A needs assessment is a means of estimating or determining the significance or importance of unmet necessities created by some situation or condition of living, as well as identifying those necessities already provided. Assessing needs is primarily a data collection activity and is a valuable method of locating service delivery gaps and substantiating unmet needs in a community. The ability to accurately analyze the data that is collected is an integral part of the needs assessment. The analysis of the data produces the conclusions that are assumed to be accurate for the entire client population. The techniques of data collection and analysis can and should be perfected and included as an ongoing activity in the planning process.

WHY DO A NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

Attempts at assessing needs are undertaken so that policy makers may more adequately serve their constituency. More effective policy and program implementation based on information gathered is an important goal of any policy making group, and is the underlying consideration for why a needs assessment should be done. The information obtained in the needs assessment activity will provide decision and policy makers with the justification for new programs and services where appropriate, and will warrant new or additional financial allocations as needs are identified. Decision makers will also be provided with support for the formulation of priorities, based on accurate information collection.

There is a myriad amount of needs information that is required, and regardless of the target population, there are recurring types of information needed by the persons responsible for making decisons. The most common types of needs information required include:

a) Size of the Client Population: aggregate number of potential beneficiaries who will be directly affected by service delivery decisions.

b) Geographical Distribution of the Need: physical boundaries that contain the client population (i.e., state planning districts, counties, urban areas, rural areas).

c) Complexity of Need (Types of Needs): the degree to which the needs expressed have an impact on existing social problems.

d) Opportunities to Address the Needs: service delivery programs presently in existence, and extent of interagency agreements designed for more effective service delivery.

e) Cost of Need: determination of financial obligations incurred if a service is designed to meet the need, and estimation of the long range social effects if the need that has been identified remains unmet.

f) Relationship Between Different Needs: extent to which some needs are interrelated, and the possibility of program and service designs aimed at one need that will induce relief of several needs of the client population.

The important ingredient for providing guidance as to which direction policy makers should take is the accurate assessment of the needs of a particular client population.

The emphasis placed on needs assessment is an attempt to reduce crisis intervention planning for the target population and to employ a proactive, preventive approach to human services delivery. A prerequisite to any preventive planning approach is the identification of the target population which is the focus of concern for an agency or group. The target population is an extract of several types of populations:

a) the total population -- total number of persons included in the category under consideration (for example, children and youth ages 0-21);

b) the risk population -- those of the total population who potentially have a social problem or need (children ages 0-6 who are in potential need of day care);

c) the target population -- those of the total population who are in current need or are experiencing a social problem (children ages 0-6 who are in immediate need of day care);

d) the served population -- those of the total population who are receiving a service to meet the need (children ages 0-6 who are presently receiving day care services).

Those included in the risk population and the target population potentially have the most to gain from the needs assessment activity. An accurate needs assessment could insure that appropriate services are available before the needs become critical.

WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE IN NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

Needs assessment at the present time is still more of an art than a science. Until recently, a needs assessment technique has often taken the form of judgements arrived at through discussions by key decision makers. The perceptions of the needs of the client population are based on existing financial resources and programs, rather than on accurate information which is reflective of actual needs. Often the expressed desires of a small segment of a community are mistaken for the actual needs of that community. Lobbying done by one community may result in the eradication of an isolated problem that is mistakenly assumed to be a need of the entire population.

In planning service delivery programs, many local groups or agencies depend on the data generated at the State level to give an accurate picture of existing needs. This method of needs assessment is sometimes less than helpful because the present capability of state agencies to produce meaningful information to be applied to needs assessment is inadequate, and the data that is available is insufficient to present an accurate picture of the needs as they exist. Furthermore, the data collected currently by state agencies is almost entirely utilization data which represents only those persons being served by an agency, and does not reflect the total population in need, or in potential need, of an agency's services. With only utilization data to rely on, decisions related to long range program planning can be, at best, only hopeful estimates.

In addition to the use of utilization data to project the need for services, some agencies rely on national averages and percentages or federal formulas to assess their client population's need for, or use of, a particular service. For example, the Child Mental Health Study Group of the Virginia Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation (June 1975 - November 1975) had as one of its objectives the determination of the need for services to the emotionally disturbed and mentally ill children of the State:

> "In order to assess needs it was necessary to determine national prevalence figures (emphasis ours) for emotional disturbance and mental illness in children and youth and then apply these figures to the population of Virginia."[1]

Service delivery plans which are based on federal statistics or national averages are not always accurate and can, because of population patterns or

1. Mental Health Services for Virginia's Children, Interim Report of the Child Mental Health Study Group. State Mental Health and Mental Retardation Board, Richmond, Virginia. January 28, 1976.

urban/rural relationships, overlook a significant part of the population for whom services are being planned.

An organized structure by which the needs of a particular population can be researched, analyzed, and prioritized has only recently assumed a position of importance in the human services delivery field. The importance of long range program planning directed toward careful and thoughtful resource allocation has been given additional emphasis by the passage of Title XX of the Social Security Act. Under the mandate of Title XX, the welfare departments of all states receiving Title XX funds are required to develop a Comprehensive Social Services Program Plan which incorporates an assessment of the need for the services planned. Like the welfare departments, other human services agencies are beginning to develop needs assessment as an instrument that can be used for effective program planning.

Some states have already begun to address the needs of their population through some structured type of assessment process. Several states, including Massachusetts, Utah, and South Dakota, have employed various techniques in attempts to accurately identify and prioritize the needs of their state's population. Although these techniques have not been entirely satisfactory, several tasks became clear in the course of conducting those needs assessments that can help to influence the use of a needs assessment instrument elsewhere:

1) Decisions on how the results of the assessment are to be used must be made prior to conducting the assessment. Information which is collected without a plan for its use is not cost effective and has questionable validity.

2) Decisions on what type of information to collect must be made prior to collection of the data to insure a clear direction and purpose for conducting the assessment.

3) If the assessment technique is a survey, it should be pre-tested to identify flaws of poor or inappropriate design which would affect the validity of responses.

4) To insure valid results several different techniques should be used to assess the needs of the same population. The ability to implement more than one technique depends on the time, staff, and funds which the agency or group has available.

In Virginia, efforts are being made to build an integrated human resources management information system (MIS) that will aid in needs assessment activities. Prior to this time, data coding and data formats among agencies have been incompatible, and the lack of uniformity with regard to dates of collection, publication, and updating has impeded comparison of activities between departments. Most of the human resources agencies are currently building their MIS capabilities in an effort to obtain more accurate information about the effectiveness of their programs. Each of these systems will have comparable characteristics which will enable the agencies to share information about their client population for the first time. Although the data generated will continue to be utilization information, it will help to eliminate the "double counts" that take place frequently within any given population since the same individual often receives services from more than one agency or department (i.e., Welfare, Health, and Mental Health and Mental Retardation). Elimination of "double counts" will provide more accurate information about program or service utilization, and will therefore help to more exactly define unmet or undermet needs.

Needs assessment is still in its infant stages and there is no specific technique that is absolutely infallible. However, the use of a systematized plan for determing the needs of a specific target population - evan a plan which requires frequent testing or revision - is, in the context of long-term planning, a means for providing for service delivery that is less costly and more accurate than methods previously used.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

The purpose of conducting a needs assessment is to focus on a particular target group, highlight areas of met, unmet, or undermet needs and provide the data necessary for responsible resource allocation decisions which will enable agencies to make available services to meet these needs. In preparing the design and implementation of a needs assessment, it is helpful to identify various areas of applicable information and assistance. Much of the assistance needed can come from within a community while other information can be gathered from sources at the State level, as well as from other States and from the Federal Government.

There are four basic criteria when considering the usefulness of sources:

A) The ability of the source to collect data
B) The ability of the source to analyze data
C) The ability of the source to provide a different perspective of the need
D) The ability of the source to establish policy, make resource allocations, and develop priorities to better meet the needs of the client population.

These guidelines should provide the minimum basis for identifying potential sources of information and assistance when conducting a needs assessment. The task of collecting data that can be analyzed to indicate the incidence of need is not easy, and results of the data analysis can become skewed by neglecting to include a potential source of data pertaining to the group whose needs are being assessed.

There are at least eight major sources of information and assistance available to the persons conducting needs assessment activities regardless of the issues and population of their concern. These sources should be explored for their usefulness to the agency or group contemplating the use of a needs assessment as a planning technique:

1) Special interest groups.
2) Institutions of higher education.
3) Local governments.
4) Regional planning districts.
5) State agencies.
6) Other states.
7) Federal government.
8) Legislative analysis.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

One of the keys to conducting a successful needs assessment is the support of "outside", special interest, or constituency groups. It is important to identify those groups, agencies, or decision makers who can provide service delivery or resource allocation information in a discussion of the identified target population, and who might be able to act upon the data retrieved from the needs assessment. These groups can conceivably be:

A. Task Forces studying a specific problem or concern related to the target group (Governor's Advisory Council on Child Abuse and Neglect);

B. Advisory Committees of those human services agencies dealing directly or indirectly with the target group (Welfare Client Advisory Committee);

C. Government Agencies or political groups that have an impact on funding or the allocation of resources (Resource Allocation Panels (RAP) designed by the Secretary of Human Resources);

D. Departments of local Colleges and Universities that have the target group as their main educational focus (The Gerontology Program at Virginia Commonwealth University); or

E. Advocacy Groups that function either independently or as a part of an agency (Virginia Foster Care Association), and other similar groups of people.

Within each of these groups it is possible to identify certain key persons who, because of their education, experience, or position in the community, might be able to contribute valuable ideas and considerable time

to the design and implementation of a needs assessment model. Additionally, the assistance of these key persons will lend support to the idea of conducting a needs assessment in the community, thereby helping to insure public acceptance of the project, particularly with the population whose needs are to be addressed.

Institutions of Higher Education

State universities and community colleges can be valuable sources of assistance in the design and implementation of a needs assessment plan. Colleges and universities that have departments in Urban and Regional Planning, Public Administration, Psychology, Sociology, Social Welfare, or Political Science can be quite beneficial in conducting a needs assessment. The expertise that is usually available from the staff members of these departments can be helpful in designing the needs assessment tool and in analyzing the information collected by the needs assessment itself.

Colleges and universities have the resource of student manpower to conduct surveys of the local citizenry, and may also have the capabilities of computer systems to aggregate and interpolate the needs assessment data that is collected. Moreover, institutions of higher education are distributed throughout the entire state. Therefore, because of their geographical locations, any and all part(s) of the state can be included in the needs assessment using educational facilities as a source of assistance.

Being involved in a needs assessment can provide real benefits for the institutions of higher education because they are provided with the opportunity to become involved in their community's affairs, and their involvement enables them to participate in long-range planning for service delivery programs in their area. If their participation takes the form of implementing a needs assessment, the students who participate are exposed to a valuable experience and practical on-the-job training.

Local Governments

Another source of information and assistance in designing and implementing a needs assessment can be local governments. Cities and counties can provide a localized understanding of perceived needs in their jurisdictions. Local governments can also provide jurisdictional statistics on program size and service utilization. Their involvement in a statewide needs assessment provides them with the opportunity to insure that their locality's needs are recognized and planned for at the State level. The needs identified will also provide local administrators with important information that they will need to consider when making funding decisions.

Regional Planning Districts

Regional perspectives of needs that may incorporate many local interests can be distinguished by regional planning districts. At this level of planning, the concept of an area's needs is more localized than at the State level, but is not as limited as at the local level. Needs assessment provides a planning district with opportunities to coordinate its regional activities with those being conducted at the State and local levels. As different needs are identified, the potential for funding to meet these needs by State resources is increased, depending upon the financial and social cost of these needs.

State Agencies

Contact with State agencies is important in any needs assessment activity to insure that issue areas of specific departments are considered. Policy and service delivery are determined by the aggregate information collected by the

various agencies at the State level. A needs assessment conducted statewide of any client population which has the potential of receiving services from more than one agency should provide the opportunity for all potential service delivery agencies to have input into the issue areas which are being addressed. It is also important when planning an assessment of the needs of a particular target population to take into consideration any existing interagency agreements related to service delivery, and to be aware of purchase of service arrangements between agencies. Frequently, different state agencies collect diverse data on the same client population, and this data, together with programmatic information collected, helps to more fully define the population being served.

Other States

In any needs assessment activity, consideration should be given to policy and service delivery approaches to the same client population in other states. States that are providing unique or innovative services to the target group should be identified, and their programs analyzed for their effectiveness in meeting stated needs. There is the possibility that because of similar circumstances and situations, a comparable approach could be applied to the needs of a particular client group in Virginia. According to Title XX, every state is required to do a needs assessment; however, no specific techniques are mandated. Innovative needs assessment techniques may be implemented in other states to respond to the regulations that have been established; therefore, contact with the appropriate agencies in other states could reveal data from their needs assessments that Virginia might wish to analyze.

Federal Government

The Department of Commerce at the Federal level publishes census data which exhibits incidence of population characteristics that can be used to help substantiate needs by a correlation of certain identified variables of a particular area. This data is available by census blocks which are appropriate for use in conducting a needs assessment at the community level; census tract data can be used in local areas; standard metropolitan statistical area data can be used for regional needs assessment; and census data by county can be used to address the needs of an entire state. Analysis of the data can reveal the trends in needs of the population. For example, according to the 1970 Census of Population for Virginia, married women whose husbands are living with them and whose children are under six years of age make up 31.4% of the labor force. When analyzed, this characteristic could indicate a need for day care for this segment of the population.

Legislative Analysis

Additional information for conducting a needs assessment can be in the form of legislative analysis. Laws directly relating to the client population should be identified and analyzed to provide insight into why policies of agencies providing services to a client population have taken the direction they have and the ramifications they have upon the client population. In addition to legislative analysis, an index of legislation can potentially show which agency has been mandated to provide particular services which impact on a specific client group in terms of the size of the target group, their ability to receive or utilize existing services (eligibility), or their service capacity (mandated services).

Summary

To this point in the discussion of the needs assessment activity, the focus has tended to be generic in nature so that any interested group could evaluate the needs of a particular jurisdiction when a specific client

population has been identified. There are four basic prerequisites to any needs assessment method that should first be addressed.

1. Define what a needs assessment is and why a needs assessment should be conducted.

2. Define the precise purpose to be served by the information and establish what "needs" information is required by decision makers.

3. Identify prior work and current activities in the field of needs assessment and determine the extent to which existing information that is available will meet the purpose of the needs assessment.

4. Consider possible sources of information and assistance for the citizens level of participation to the Federal government.

The balance of this document will concern itself with review of various needs assessment techniques and the development of a needs assessment plan. Included is a discussion of the recommended method for conducting a statewide needs assessment in Virginia and potential uses of the results of such an assessment.

ALTERNATIVE NEEDS

ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES

ALTERNATIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES

In order to acquire useable knowledge of a target population, enhance those services already in existence, and comply or work with existing legislation, it is necessary first to assess the needs of the target population. This section of the handbook will offer several alternative methods of needs assessment and will outline the process for designing and carrying out a needs assessment.

There are nine generally accepted techniques for conducting a needs assessment.[1] Some techniques will be more applicable than others, depending on the target population whose needs are being assessed. These nine techniques vary in complexity and in the time and cost involved to accomplish them. Funds, time, personnel, public acceptance and data available must be taken into account when considering any of the techniques, as well as what kind of end results are desired. The "ideal" technique to use is the one which can give the most valid results within the financial, staffing, and time constraints of the agency or group conducting the needs assessment. It is not necessary to use all of the techniques; however, to insure that the results obtained from the assessment are valid, it is recommended that more than one technique be employed. The methods most commonly used to determine needs of a client population are:

1) General Population Survey
2) Target Population Survey
3) Service Providers Survey
4) Decision Makers (key respondent) Survey
5) Secondary Information Analysis

1. Techniques for Needs Assessment in Social Services Planning, The Research Group, Inc., Atlanta, Ga., July, 1976.

6) Review of Needs Indicators
7) Review of Managerial Information
8) Review of Needs Information As Identified by Other Human Services Planning Systems
9) Public Hearings, Review of Budget

Most of the techniques can be adjusted in scale to accommodate different sizes of populations whose needs are to be assessed, and most can be adapted, within reason, to budget and staff considerations.

In chart 4.2.1, these techniques are presented in a format that enables them to be ranked against each other in selected areas of comparison. The eight comparative areas are the most common criteria that should be reviewed by someone trying to choose a needs assessment technique. Ranking is done numerically, with 1 being considered very poor, inefficient, or costly, and 5 being considered as rendering superior quality.

For example, in studying the general population survey it can be seen that:

A) in "Use of Existing Methodologies", it ranks 4, or above average, because there are several different methods of surveying already in existance which can be adapted to the particular project. Thus, time need not be spent designing a new methodology.

B) in "Complementing Other Techniques", it ranks 5, or superior, because it can easily be used in conjunction with other techniques to substantiate the validity of results.

C) in "Use Existing Staff", it ranks 2, or weak, because a survey usually requires more personnel than is usually available. Thus, additional time and money must be spent in recruiting and training additional staff to carry out the survey tasks.

D) in "Flexibility of Technique", the general population survey ranks 4, or above average, because it can be easily adapted or modified to suit

the needs of those electing to use it. It is so structured that it can be modified without skewing the results.

E) in terms of "Cost", the survey ranks 1, or very weak, because it is a costly method to use. It usually requires extra manpower to conduct the survey and to collect and analyze the results.

F) in terms of "Amount of Time Required", the ranking is 1 because the survey requires additional time aside from regular activities and requires that the time be available in large blocks.

G) in terms of "Staff/Personpower Required", the ranking is again 1 because the survey usually requires manpower other than that available at current staff levels.

H) in terms of "Validity of Results", however, the general population survey ranks 5, or superior, because the results are usually the most valid with the least amount of skewing.

Therefore, if any agency or group can afford the extra time and manpower and has the funding available to conduct a survey of this type, the general population survey technique will give a high return in terms of the validity of the results.

In choosing a technique, it is important to take into consideration not only the desired degree of validity in terms of results, but also what an agency or group can reasonably expect to afford. An agency or group should review their budget and staffing patterns before selecting a technique in order to determine the technique that truly fits the individual constraints of the group doing the needs assessment.

Chart 4.2.1

RANKING OF ALTERNATIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Selected Areas Of Comparison	METHODOLOGIES									
	General Population Survey	Target Population Survey	Service Provider Survey	Key Respondent Survey	Review Of Secondary Information	Needs Indicators	Review of Management Information	Review Of Other Agencies Needs Information	Public Hearings	Review Of Budgets
Use of Existing Methodologies	4	4	4	4	4	2	4	2	5	4
Complement Other Techniques	5	4	4	3	5	3	4	2	2	4
Use Existing Staff	2	2	3	4	3	2	3	4	4	3
Flexibility of Technique	4	4	3	4	4	4	2	3	4	4
Cost	1	2	3	4	4	3	1	2	5	4
Amount of Time Required	1	1	2	3	3	4	3	4	4	4
Staff/Manpower Required	1	1	3	2	3	3	2	2	4	4
Validity of Results	5	4	3	3	2	3	3	3	1	2
TOTALS	23	22	25	27	28	24	22	22	29	29

In order to compare approaches, each technique is ranked according to the following scale:

1 very weak in this area
2 weak in this area
3 average in this area
4 above average in this area
5 superior when compared to all other techniques in this regard

1. Techniques for Needs Assessment in Social Services Planning; State Experiences and Suggested Approaches in Response to Title XX of the Social Security Act; The Research Group, Inc., Atlanta, Georgia, July, 1976.

Regardless of the technique(s) chosen, there are four recommended steps that should be taken prior to any needs assessment activity:

1) It is suggested that an assessment be made of all available data relevant to the target population to be surveyed. Knowledge of available data can be of assistance in "double-checking" the data which is retrieved through the needs assessment instrument, and also helps to identify areas in which information about the target population is not readily accessible or not generated at all;

2) It is also advisable to prepare an index of services already available to the target population. The information that is obtained from the needs assessment will be used in planning services to meet the needs expressed, and a knowledge of currently available services will aid in avoiding a duplication of services as well as helping to locate data applicable to the target population;

3) Some effort should be made to look into legislation - past, current, and pending - that has an impact on the target population or could in any way effect the target population's ability to receive or utilize existing services;

4) Additionally, it is recommended that innovative approaches to service delivery be examined prior to restructuring services based on identified need. There is an ever increasing number of projects being initiated in the many political jurisdictions that should be considered following needs assessment, program implementation, and program evaluation as alternative approaches to service delivery.

These four steps will provide a basic foundation of knowledge about the target population prior to initiating the collection of additional data. The discussion of each different method of data collection and needs assessment includes:

1) A working definition of the needs assessment technique
2) Advantages of the technique in terms of staff, cost, time, flexibility, and validity of results
3) Disadvantages of the technique
4) Detailed steps to conducting each particular method

Methods which provide the most valid results are identified as are the techniques requiring that their results be used only in conjunction with results obtained in other techniques.

With the use of any needs assessment technique, it should be emphasized that there are only minor differences in the scope of the undertaking between a statewide needs assessment and a regional or local needs assessment. With only small variations, the steps involved in the implementation of a statewide needs assessment can be adapted to localities and communities.

GENERAL POPULATION SURVEY

A general population survey involves the sampling of a portion of the total population of a particular jurisdiction. The information comes from no specific segment of the population. The information that is collected from the fraction of the population chosen represents the entire population. Conclusions arrived at are assumed to be an accurate reflection of the population of the entire jurisdiction.

Extreme care, therefore, should be taken to develop a good survey instrument. Careful selection of the random sample to insure that it is statistically representative of the population is important. The needs identified by the survey will be varied and the concentration of need will not be as high as if a specific group determined by specific characteristics were surveyed.

Regardless of who is interviewed, the respondents should have no fear of answering the questions. Fear of future consequences resulting from their responses should be abated. Inaccurate responses can skew results obtained.

The advantages of the general population survey include the use of existing methods for implementation, the flexibility of the technique and the validity of the results. This technique can provide an excellent adjunct for comparison with results obtained from other techniques. When properly done, a survey produces accurate and valuable results applicable to the general population. There are existing methods for conducting population sample surveys that can be used. There are sophisticated methods used nationally that can be adapted to smaller geographical scales to implement a general population survey to determine needs. The technique is flexible, and it can be implemented as a mail survey or personal interview. Its length can be adjusted to obtain desired responses and it can be distributed by geographical area. When used in conjunction with other needs assessment techniques, the results are comparable and adaptable to collective analysis.

There are numerous drawbacks to the use of this technique. The cost in most cases is prohibitive. The scope of such a survey is generally large scale, requiring the hiring and training of interviewers to cover all geographic regions. There are complicated statistical methods used to analyze the collected data that require specialized skills and perhaps the use of a computer. The time frame for such a survey should be 10 to 12 months. Considering the financial cost, the limited use of existing staff, and the time period, careful consideration should be given to alternative techniques before deciding to implement a general population survey.

TARGET POPULATION SURVEY

A target population survey also involves the sampling of a portion of the total population. The distinction between a general population survey and a target population survey is that the information collected by a target population survey comes from a specific segment of the total population that can be distinguished by selected characteristics. An example of such characteristics that delimit the target population include: age, sex, race, income, health, education, present use of a service. The particular characteristics that identify a target group depend on whose needs are being assessed. A further example of particular characteristics that identify the target population would be "families with dependent children ages 21 and under". Information that is collected from the target population sample represents the entire target population. Hence, conclusions arrived at are assumed to be accurate for the entire group.

The difference between a general population and target population survey is the characteristics of the chosen sample. The identified issues, problems and needs will most accurately reflect situations common to those with similar distinguishing characteristics. Likely to be included in the sample of a target population will be individuals who are receiving services to meet a present need. Through the survey instrument, the sample population, which will include some of the service population, will identify service and program effectiveness as it meets identified needs.

It is important in the evaluation of the target population survey results that consideration be given to the fact that the service population has already attempted to make use of an existing service to meet their needs and may be the potential clientele of new programs designed for this target population. It is likely that target and service populations will be able to identify a higher concentration of problems and needs than the general population dependent upon their circumstances, situations, and characteristics. An example of this is the ability of families with children, especially those that receive services, to identify problems and needs more accurately and at a higher incidence than would be identified by families who do not have children. The identification of a higher concentration of needs provides insight into the wants and desires of the target population. It is important to maintain the distinction between wants/desires of a target group and actual needs. It is also important to assure the respondents that the information they supply will not affect their relationship with the service delivery system. They should not feel threatened as the intent of the survey is to assess overall needs of people with similar characteristics. Questions may be considered personal or confidential by a respondent. An inaccurate answer may follow if the respondent feels there may be implications from his answer that would harm him, such as being declared ineligible to obtain a service.

When selecting the population to be surveyed, extreme care should be taken to insure a random sample that is statistically representative of the population chosen. An advantage of this technique of needs assessing is that when properly completed the results are accurate. Moreover, it is flexible and can be adapted to geographic areas, funding available and time limits. It can be conducted by mail or interview and may vary in length to obtain desired results. This technique complements other techniques since the results can be used in conjunction with those obtained from other methods.

The disadvantages of using this method for assessing needs include cost, time, and personnel. When compared to the cost of other techniques, population surveys are expensive. (Each interview can cost as much as $30.00 and, in most cases, more.) The time involved in conducting interviews and awaiting responses from mail interviews can become excessive. A population survey should not be attempted in a time frame of less than 7 months. Considering all the activities involved up to the final report writing, 12 months would be a suggested project length. To conduct a survey, specialized skills are usually required for interviewing and statistical analysis. In most cases a survey is beyond the capabilities of existing staff. Interviewers will need to be hired and trained to implement the survey.

After weighing the advantages and disadvantages of this technique, and if the most valid results are demanded, the target population survey is recommended. Additional attention will be given to this technique as a suggested needs assessment tool in Virginia in Chapter III.

STEPS IN CONDUCTING A GENERAL POPULATION OR A TARGET POPULATION SURVEY

As discussed in the first chapter, the purpose of the needs assessment must be determined. A review of prior work in the area of needs assessment and current activities should be studied. All possible sources of information and assistance should be investigated prior to implementation of the needs assessment technique. The following are explanations of some suggested steps to follow when developing a needs assessment plan for population surveys. Most of these steps apply to the nine types of techniques, but differences in steps are pointed out when they occur in the different techniques.

1) Identify data sources.
2) Identify services available.
3) Identify and index legislation impacting on the target group.
4) Review advantages of alternative techniques.
5) Determine what information is needed for the assessment.
6) Determine limits of time and money for the assessment.
7) Assign who will be responsible for managing the assessment and who will conduct the needs assessment.
8) Determine what will be done with the survey results.
9) Develop a list of information desired from the survey.
10) Select samples of the population for interviewing.
11) Select sampling method.
12) Design the survey instrument.
13) Select interviewers.
14) Test the survey instrument.
15) Refine the survey instrument.
16) Conduct the survey.
17) Collect data, code, edit, and compile information.
18) Analyze information.
19) Report information and analysis.
20) Compare results with other techniques.

1) Identify Data Sources

The accurate identification of where data originates is of utmost importance to the overall needs assessment process. Aggregate information collected at the service point of origin reveals utilization statistics of the service and the extent to which identified needs are being addressed. This information can suggest additional information desired from the survey.

2) Identify services available.

The identification of services available to individuals can, with the help of the survey instrument, identify barriers that prevent the individuals from receiving the necessary services and identify services that are meeting needs.

3) Identify and index legislation impacting on the target group.

The indexing of legislation affecting the target group provides the knowledge of what is mandated of State agencies for a specific target population. Issue areas that have been acted on by the legislature require action by the appropriate agency to meet the problems and provide a framework to modify existing services to meet needs as they have been identified by the governing body.

4) Review advantages of alternative techniques.

Prior to undertaking the needs assessment activity it should be determined that the technique chosen will provide the required results. Consideration should be given to all techniques to insure that the most valid results are obtained within the limits of funding, time, personnel, and data available.

5) Determine what information is needed by decision makers.

The results of a needs assessment of a target group should supply decision makers with information that provides them with an understanding of the needs. An analysis of the information should reveal the why's and how's of these needs. Who the decision makers are dictates what type of information is needed.

6) Determine limits of time and money for the assessment.

Funding and time limits are major constraints in conducting a needs assessment. These determinants dictate the length and depth of the study. Accurate projections of each should be available before implementation of the survey.

7) Assign the person who will be responsible for managing the assessment. Assign who will conduct the survey.

Authority for defining tasks to be accomplished when conducting the assessment should be established. When performing under fiscal constraints and time limits, there is no room for indecision. Contacts should be established and firm commitments received from those who will actually conduct the survey. Potential interviewers include staff, contractors or volunteers.

8) Determine what will be done with the survey results.

The results of the survey deserve responsible consideration by key individuals capable of establishing policy. The results can develop: (a) recommendations to better meet the needs, (b) explanations of why these specific needs exist, (c) provisions for planning of services,

(d) accurate data collection, (e) analysis of data, and (f) program evaluation.

9) Develop a list of information desired from the survey.

A legitimate needs assessment of a specific population crosses agency and programmatic boundaries to accurately identify the needs of the group. It is, therefore, necessary to incorporate questions into the survey that will be capable of identifying needs that pertain to all public and private agencies that provide and have the potential to provide services.

10) Select samples of the population for interviewing.

The difference between the general population survey and target population survey is in this step of the technique. The distinguishing factor between the two types of surveys is the target population survey collects information from a specific segment of the population that displays a specific characteristic. The general population survey does not discriminate among those who potentiallyycan be interviewed.

11) Select a sampling method.

Sampling is applied to a survey whenever the total number of persons in the population is larger than the number of persons who can be interviewed. The problem is to make certain that the sample accurately represents the population. (A sample that is not representative is called a biased sample.) There are four widely accepted sampling techniques that can be used in the survey. An important element of a needs assessment technique is the accurate selection of the population to be sampled.

A) Simple random sampling is a process of sample selection in which the persons are chosen individually and directly through a random process in which each unselected person has the same chance of being selected as every other person on each draw. The usual practice in sampling from finite populations is to sample without replacement, that is, with a person eligible to be selected only once. Whenever random sampling is used, the selected persons are scattered over the entire geographical region. If the sample is drawn properly, various characteristics of the population will be representatively proportionate.

The next important step in a simple random sample is to determine the list of the population to be sampled. It is important to consider each list carefully as to inclusion of the specific target group. Telephone directories, city directories, or motor vehicle registration lists may systematically exclude all or part of the target group, those who potentially have particular needs, are generally characterized as the poor and would therefore be unlikely to have the conveniences of a telephone or an automobile.

The next step, after the list of the target population is available, is to insure that the selection of the sample is done randomly.

Using the list of the entire target group, assign each member of the group a number, and using a list of random numbers, select the sample. For each random number chosen, the respective name on the target group list will be interviewed. This process continues until the predetermined number of interviews is selected.

B) Stratified random sampling is a method of testing whereby an equal proportion of the population is divided into subgroups or strata and sampled randomly. The subgroups are taken in size proportional to the target group size. If the target population is children and youth ages 0-21, an example of subgroups is males ages 0-21 and females ages 0-21.

C) Stratified random cluster sampling, as the name indicates, is similar to random and stratified random sampling. The qualifying word clusters refers to the geographical grouping of the potential population that has this potential to be selected. Clusters are generally kept small to reduce bias. This sample method saves time and money when surveying in a sparsely populated area.

D) Disproportionate stratified random sampling involves varying the sample proportions within a subgroup. This method can achieve equal levels of precise subgroups. The level of precision will pertain only to the characteristics by which the population was stratified. Disproportionate sampling involves unequal probabilities of selection, giving some persons a higher or lower chance of selection than others. A subgroup of the target population may be extremely important in meeting analysis objectives and yet be only a part of that population.

12) Design of the survey instrument.

Another important aspect of a needs assessment is the interview form itself. Disappointing results will be gathered if the respondents are unable to answer the questions. The survey instrument should be concise and to the point. Questions on the survey should be kept in mind when designing the instrument. If the survey is by mail, special considerations should be given to instructions for the survey's completion and where the results should be returned. Past experiences with mail survey indicate a low rate of return of questionnaires with acceptable responses. Serious consideration must go into the design of the questions regardless of how the survey is conducted. The form of the survey instrument can take a slightly less formal structure when trained interviewers conduct a door to door survey. The respondents should not feel threatened by any response they might make, as fear of an honest answer might produce an inaccurate response and effect the overall survey results. One additional consideration to the design of the form is final compilation of the results. The responses should be in comparable formats for editing and quick coding.

13) Select interviewers.

The selection and training of interviewers is generally time consuming and expensive. Expense can be saved if office staff or temporary help is used to conduct the interviews. Resource to be considered is the use of students and/or volunteers can be recruited from all regions of the jurisdiction conducting the needs assessment. There are usually basic training requirements that must be met before the interviewers survey the sample. A good understanding of the purpose of the study and a thorough knowledge of the survey instrument will enhance their probability of success at gaining the sample population's confidence and adding to the effectiveness of the results.

14) Test the survey instrument.

It is recommended that a mini pre-test be administered. The results will give a good indication of the clarity of the survey form and the effectiveness of the interviewer. The completeness of responses and problems in compiling results should be considered to upon completion of this initial test. When undertaking a needs assessment of any scale or degree, the validity of results should be of prime importance. The testing of the survey will help to insure that the complete sample survey will not yield unusable results.

15) Refine the survey instrument.

Upon compiling the results from the pre-test, the final corrections should be made to the survey form to insure that it will actually produce what it is intended to produce. The instrument will usually require some degree of adaptation to inquire into different issue, problem and need areas at different levels of intensity.

16) Conduct the survey.

The length of time involved in the actual interviewing of respondents depends on the total number of interviews desired. There are statistical procedures to determine the minimum number of responses necessary to obtain valid results. The proximity of respondents to each other is a contributing factor, as is the length of the survey instrument and the number of the interviewers utilized. The interviews should parallel the survey design. Any deviation from the design could potentially skew the results of the entire survey. Mail surveys should be given adequate time for responses to be completed and returned. In some cases a follow-up letter must be transmitted to encourage a response.

17) Collect data, code, edit, and compile information.

The data collection process begins with the initial contact between the interviewer and the respondent. Checks should be made throughout the survey to insure consistency of data collection. Editing should involve the reading of each response to insure completeness, legibility, and appropriateness of response. After the editing process, the answers must be coded so that they can be transferred to a computer for aggregation and statistical analysis.

18) Analyze the information.

The first analysis of the information that has been collected should reveal incidence of need. All the survey activities are completed or nearing completion and the ultimate goal of the process should begin to be realized. The results will probably be in the form of statistics and percentages and provide decision makers with the information to make programmatic decisions and changes when needed.

19) Report information and analysis.

The report of the activities undertaken is the cumulative result of much hard work and effort. The report is the final product with understandable content defining what the needs of the particular target group are with mentions of their distributions and intensity.

20) Compare results with other techniques.

The results of a population survey needs assessment technique and the needs that are ultimately identified for a particular target group should be compared with the results of another technique that has been used in conjunction with the survey. The results of the techniques, when considered collectively, provide a strong foundation for definitive statements of needs.

SERVICE PROVIDER SURVEY

Agencies or groups that render direct services to a particular population are known as service providers. A survey of service providers is quite different from a sample population survey. Depending upon time and cost constraints, it may be possible to interview all department and agency heads of a jurisdiction to obtain their input as to the needs of a particular target group; however, in all likelihood, a sampling of service providers will be necessary if this technique is used.

Specific questions should be designed for those individuals involved in service delivery to identify needs of a specific target group. The problems and needs identified by the providers may be different from those perceived by the client population in a sample survey. A good survey instrument should be developed, keeping in mind who the respondents are going to be. Information obtained by the survey of service providers can potentially identify problems and needs that often are not recognized or discussed by the general public for a variety of reasons. For example, drug abuse, child abuse, and alcoholism may not be identified accurately in a population survey either because of ignorance or the respondents' unwillingness to admit incidence. The service provider generally has knowledge of such less obvious needs and existing agency resources to meet needs already identified.

The results of this needs assessment technique are generally considered to be valid, when used in conjunction with the results of another technique. Together they provide a strong foundation for the identification of a target population need.

A major advantage of identifying and assessing need by using this technique is that there are presently existing methods for conducting a service provider survey. The results obtained can easily complement those obtained from a technique that should be used in conjunction with this technique. Depending on the sample size and geographic distribution existing staff can be used to conduct the survey. The technique is relatively flexible as it can be adapted to different geographic locations and levels of effort.

The major disadvantages of this technique center on the financial constraints of conducting a survey either by mail or interview, the amount of time involved in such a survey, and the possibility that this technique could be beyond the scope of the existing staff. It is important to remember that service providers are primarily concerned with utilization of their service and not necessarily with the non-service population. This perspective may be reflected in their evaluation of the needs.

STEPS IN CONDUCTING A SERVICE PROVIDER SURVEY

1) Identify data sources.
2) Identify services available.
3) Identify and index legislation impacting on the target group.
4) Review advantages of alternative techniques.
5) Determine what information is needed by decision makers.
6) Determine limits of time and money for the assessment.
7) Assign the person who will be responsible for managing the assessment and assign who will conduct the survey.
8) Determine what will be done with the results.
9) Develop a list of information desired of the survey.
10) Identify service providers.

    A list of providers that deliver services to a target population will need to be identified. All service providers should be included in this listing if their services impact on the needs of a target population. It should be possible to identify agency and department heads at the local service delivery level. To insure accurate sampling techniques all localities should be accounted for.

11) Select a sample of service providers to be interviewed.

    The total population of service providers includes even those agencies providing services to individuals that are not part of the specific target group for whom the needs assessment is being conducted. Therefore, it will be necessary to limit the selection of a sample of the service providers to those delivering services to the particular target group.

12) Select a sampling method.
13) Design the survey instrument.
14) Select and train interviewers.
15) Testing of the survey instrument.
16) Refine the survey instrument.
17) Conduct the survey of service providers.
18) Collect data, code, edit, and compile information.
19) Analysis of information.
20) Report information and analysis.
21) Comparison of results with other techniques.

KEY RESPONDENTS SURVEY

Individuals who are not directly involved in the service delivery system but because of their knowledge of the community, can assist in identifying problems and needs of their jurisdiction or geographical region, are valuable sources of needs assessment information. The positions these individuals hold may be political in nature. Such key respondents could include elected officials, key decision makers appointed by a governing body, or agency/department heads. These individuals are important when considering the political aspects of planning and resource allocation. The data obtained from these key individuals may help to identify areas that have the potential of becoming "public issues" which may affect the availability of services for a particular population.

If the respondent is a candidate for a public office his perceptions of the needs of the citizenry can be given consideration by including them in the needs assessment process. Selected analysis of certain identified needs of a specific target group can provide insight that indicates which program and service plans are likely to be supported by political and community leaders. These programs and services should be in response to identified needs.

An advantage of using this method is that there are existing methodologies for conducting surveys that can be made adaptable to key respondents. The information desired can be generally collected by the existing staff at a reasonable cost. The technique is flexible as to the number of interviews, the length, and method for conducting the survey.

The major disadvantage of a survey of key respondents is that it will only identify issues, problems, and needs that are opinions of these individuals. These individuals may have only statistical support of incidence for

their opinions. Furthermore, these individuals can only represent those who have access or are allowed to have access to them. Undoubtedly some segment of the population may be overlooked and not included in the evaluation by the decision maker.

Although this method of assessing the needs of a specific target group is similar to the way needs have been identified in the past, the major disadvantage of the technique is that the results should not stand alone as an indicator of need. Information obtained from other needs assessment techniques should be considered in conjunction with the results of this type of survey to arrive at valid indicators of need.

STEPS IN CONDUCTING A KEY RESPONDENT SURVEY

1) Identify data sources.
2) Identify services available.
3) Identify and index legislation impacting on the target group.
4) Review advantages of alternative techniques.
5) Determine what information is needed by decision makers.
6) Determine limits of time and money for the assessment.
7) Assign the person who will be responsible for managing the assessment and who will conduct the needs assessment.
8) Determine what will be done with the survey results.
9) Develop a list of information desired from the survey.
10) Identify key respondents.

    Key respondents are often distinguished by their elected office, or appointed position. There are many boards, commissions, advisory councils, task forces and department staffs or their directors.

11) Select samples of the key respondents for interviewing.

    The total population of key respondents include those individuals who are making decisions not related to the specific target group whose needs are being evaluated. Therefore, it will be necessary to limit the sample to those whose decisions impact on the target group.

12) Select a sampling method.
13) Design the survey instrument.

    Always keep in mind the characteristics of the respondents when designing the survey instrument. The survey instrument should provide an opportunity for open-ended responses by those interviewed. The issues, problems, and needs as perceived by the decision makers are what this needs assessment technique is attempting to uncover.

14) Select interviewers.
15) Test the survey instrument.
16) Refine the survey instrument.
17) Conduct the survey.
18) Collect data, code, edit and compile information.
19) Analyze information.
20) Report information and analysis.
21) Compare results with other techniques.

SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

Needs assessment is primarily a data and information collection activity. There are many existing sources of social data that are collected, organized, aggregated and analyzed that can be an important source of information when assessing needs. Secondary data is defined as that which is gathered by other agencies or governmental units and is either specific or general in nature. Most service delivery agencies collect data on program utilization. This type of information usually appears in state plans, annual reports, special reports, evaluation reports and budget reports. In addition to all the reports available, the Department of Commerce publishes census data that aggregates many population characteristics that are capable of being analyzed.

Secondary data can be used to locate and identify the severity of social problems and location of services for meeting these problems. The data selected can identify problem areas where services are lacking. This type of information can be used to locate areas for service development and expansion aimed at a particular target group.

To assure the validity of the needs assessment results, the most accurate and reliable data available should be used. The data should be available across departmental and programmatic boundaries as well as across geographic areas and on an ongoing basis for studies into program effectiveness.

The advantages of this technique are many. The results provide good support to results of other needs assessment methods and together make a strong foundation for needs indicators. There are methods for analyzing existing data that is gathered by other sources. The amount of time needed to gather and analyze secondary data is relatively short when compared to the length of time involved in a survey. The technique is relatively flexible in that specific data can be either obtained for a very limited target group or a vast amount of data can be collected from the general population of a geographical area. One additional consideration of this technique is the time involved. It can vary depending on how the information is gathered. If personal meetings are conducted and there is hand-to-hand transfer of published information, the time involved can be very short depending upon the number of contacts made for information needed. However, if requests for information are made by mail, the time required for completion is longer. There may be the need for many follow-ups to be made before all the information is received. Careful consideration should be given to all steps before deciding on this or any other needs assessment technique.

The disadvantage of this technique is that results obtained do not stand alone as a needs indicator. The utilization of services does not always serve as an indication of need as there is a portion of the population who is in need of a service but not receiving one.

STEPS IN SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

1) Identify data sources.
2) Identify services available.
3) Identify and index legislation impacting on the target group.
4) Review advantages of alternative technqiues.
5) Determine what information is needed by decision makers.
6) Determine limits of time and money for the assessment.
7) Assign a person who will be responsible for managing the needs assessment. Assign who will conduct the needs assessment.
8) Determine what will be done with the results.
9) Develop a list of information desired.
10) Identify secondary data to be used.

The target group under study indicates what secondary data should be considered. Population projections and program utilization statistics can be obtained from most agencies providing services. The data that is collected will be tied very closely to social characteristics and need indicators which are part of the next needs assessment technique discussed.

11) Collect data, code, edit and compile information.
12) Analyze information.
13) Report information and analysis.
14) Compare results with other techniques.

REVIEW OF NEEDS INDICATORS

Social indicators are characteristics common to a segment of the population that reveal a certain social condition. The purpose in using social indicators is to show recurring traits of the population or target population that can be used for analysis. There are several ways these indicators can be obtained. Identifying indicators can be accomplished by including questions about social indicators on a survey instrument. Once identified, indicators should not be used alone as an indicator of need, rather they should be used in conjunction with other data that has been compiled that shows need actually exists.

Social indicators are a good reason for supplementing other needs assessment technique. There are basic indicators that provide data on incidence of problems and social patterns that can be adapted to most target gtoups. Aggregate data of the population which is identified by specific characteristics are available in the census data. Percentages are also available of the specific characteristics to the total population. The higher the percentage, the more accurate the judgement of the incidence of the characteristics in the population. High ratios can be indicators of need depending on the characteristics examined. Examples of indicators that are most often used include the following:

Family Patterns:

A. Type of family and number of own children
B. Relationship to head of household
C. Marital status
D. Children ever born

Educational Patterns:

A. Years of school completed
B. School enrollment
C. School drop out rate
D. School achievement

Employment Patterns:

A) Employment status
B) Employment status of spouse
C) Occupation
D) Class of Worker
E) Industry
F) Agricultural

Economic Patterns:

A) Income levels
B) Types of income of families
C) Ratio of family income to poverty
D) Income below povery level of families, family heads, unrelated individuals, persons

Housing Patterns:

A) Tenure, race, and vacancy status
B) Lacking some or all plumbing facilities
C) Complete kitchen facilities and access
D) Rooms
E) Persons
F) Persons per room
G) Units in structure
H) Value
I) Year structure was built

Physical and Mental Health Patterns:

A) Institutionalization
B) Incidence of disease
C) Family members with health problems
D) Developmental disabilities

There are several advantages to employing this needs assessment technique. The gathering of indications of need data is flexible with regard to target group and needs assessment method, and the time involved is dependent upon the technique. The time and cost of identifying needs indicators can vary with the extent to which subjective indicators can be developed.

The disadvantage of employing needs indicators as a needs assessment technique is that the results obtained should be used only to complement results obtained from other techniques. Presently, there are not many widely accepted methods for developing needs indicators. The method for identifying the indicators would most likely have to be developed. While analysis of needs indicators can provide important information, other techniques of needs assessing should be given serious consideration.

STEPS IN NEED INDICATOR ANALYSIS

1) Identify data sources.
2) Identify services avaialable.
3) Identify and index legislation impacting on the target group.
4) Review advantages of alternative techniques.
5) Determine what information is needed by decision makers.
6) Determine limits of money and time for the assessment.
7) Assign who will be responsible for managing the assessment and assign who will conduct the needs assessment.
8) Determine what will be done with the results.
9) Develop a list of information desired form the social indicators.
10) Identify social indicators relevant to the target group.
11) Collect data, edit, code and compile information.
12) Analyze information.
13) Report of information and analysis.
14) Compare results with other techniques.

REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

The review of data collected by information systems will likely reveal recurring client characteristics that can be important in evaluating the types of needs presently being addressed through the service delivery system. The purpose for analyzing management information data in a needs assessment is to identify utilization of service rates of the target population who have similar social characteristics. However, this information is not representative of the needs of those who are not receiving a service. As has been stated in regard to each technique discussed, every needs assessment should begin with a review of data sources. Such a review should include management information systems. The review can provide information regarding apparent needs, demand for service, and trends in services delivered. When the data is compared with other collected secondary data and survey information, discrepancies and similarities will be identified. The results of assessing the needs of a target group by use of the management information system must be combined with the results of another technique for the most valid conclusions.

Employing management information systems as a needs assessment tool is advantageous as the information is already being collected by most human service delivery agencies and there is the potential of utilizing developments in the system that have been initiated elsewhere. The cost is relatively inexpensive as the systems are in place and requests for information can be made by existing staff. The time involved in the gathering of information is in the transmittal of data. There are many reports available on a routine schedule; however, there may be lags between requests for information and the actual gathering of the information.

Major limitations to management information systems are that the information reflects only those individuals who participate in a program or use a service, the information may not be in a usable needs assessment format, and the data collected by the various agencies is not likely to be in a comparable form.

Providing needs information is not the primary purpose of an information system which therefore limits the flexibility of the technique; however, the information that is collected is useful in a needs assessment. The following steps are suggested when developing a needs assessment plan using management information systems.

STEPS IN REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

1) Identify data sources.
2) Identify services available.
3) Identify and index legislation impacting on the target group.
4) Review advantages of alternative techniques.
5) Determine what information is needed by decision makers.
6) Determine the limits of time and money for the assessment.
7) Assign a person who will be responsible for managing the needs assessment.
8) Determine what will be done with the results.
9) Develop a list of information desired from the information systems.
10) Identify the management information systems that collect data relevant to the target group.
11) Collect data, code, edit and compile information.
12) Analyze information.
13) Report information and analysis.
14) Compare results with other techniques.

REVIEW OF NEEDS INFORMATION FROM OTHER AGENCIES

The idea of involving other agencies, their data sources, services and legislation has been maintained throughout the discussion of the needs assessment techniques. Compiling needs information from other human services delivery agencies can be considered a needs assessment technique in and of itself. The purpose of this interdisciplinary approach to needs assessment is to insure needs and problems as identified by all human service delivery agencies are included in an assessment of the needs of specific target populations. This approach should include a review of other agencies' plans which would probably have sections on needs of individuals who are not presently making use of a service. When analyzed and compared, attempts could then be made to identify areas of duplication and gaps in services provided.

There are a few advantages to employing this needs assessment technique when compared to other techniques. It is possible to make use of existing staff members to collect the information from the other agencies. The time involved in this technique is in the transmittal of the information. Needs information may or may not be available when needed for the specific target group.

The major disadvantage of this type of data is that it is not as complete as what might be obtained from secondary data collection and management information systems and therefore should be used in conjunction with other needs assessment results. As existing personnel can attempt the analysis of the other agencies' needs informtion, the cost is relatively low when compared to that of other needs assessment techniques. Presently, there are not widely accepted and practiced methods of collecting and analyzing other agencies' information and the problem of incomparable information makes analysis difficult and time consuming. Because of the difficulties encountered in analyzing the information, there are also problems in comparing these results with those obtained from other needs assessment methods. The results that are obtained do not substantiate need for a particular target group unless used in conjunction with results of other techniques.

Before attempting to collect needs information from other agencies, other techniques shoud be considered as alternatives.

STEPS IN REVIEWING AGENCY NEEDS INFORMATION

1) Identify data sources.
2) Identify services provided.
3) Identify and index legislation impacting other target groups.
4) Review advantages and review of alternative techniques.
5) Determine what information is needed by decision makers.
6) Determine limits of time and money for the needs assessment.
7) Assign a person who will be responsible for managing the needs assessment and assign who will conduct the needs assessment.
8) Determine what will be done with the results.
9) Develop a list of information desired.
10) Identify other agencies' needs information.
11) Collect data, code, edit and compile information.
12) Analyze information.
13) Report information and analysis.
14) Compare results with other techniques.

PUBLIC HEARINGS AND REVIEW OF BUDGETS

There are some activities which can sometimes serve adequately as complements to a needs assessment process but which usually are not satisfactory when used alone because they do not generate enough data to be useful. The most common are public hearings and review of budgets. The purpose of a public hearing is to provide citizens with access to policy makers so they can express their opinions, wants, desires, and need for services.

The advantages of public hearings are that they provide an opportunity to educate participants as to perceived needs; the sharing of ideas about these needs has the potential of leading to a clearer understanding of the needs of a particular target population. Hearings are attractive because they are inexpensive to conduct and require little time and staff. Hearings can be held as frequently as desired and in as many different locations as is practical.

However, the disadvantages of relying exclusively on the results obtained from the public hearings are serious. In most cases those persons who are present at these meetings are unrepresentative of the population for whom services are being planned, and there is usually not enough time allowed for a full and thorough presentation of the proposed services. The views presented by those present are usually those of service providers rather than recipients. Attempts at utilizing hearings in other states have revealed that service providers commonly dictate the direction of the discussion of the issues, and thus the responses received through a public hearing represent rather skewed perceptions of the needs of the target population. Because of the questionable validity of the results of a public hearing, consideration should be given to other methods before selecting it as a needs assessment technique.

The review of a budget is another activity which can be used in conjunction with other needs assessment techniques. An agency or group's perception of the extent of a need is generally reflected in the amount of funds it has allocated to meet that need. A review of the budgets of all those agencies or groups that have an impact on the target population can give some idea of the variety of needs perceived and the extent of service programs available to meet those needs.

There are several advantages of reviewing budgets; however, they do not outweigh the advantages of any other technique. The review of budgets is a flexible technique in that as many budgets as necessary can be reviewed and in as much detail as desired. Existing staff can be used to this end, and time is not a critical factor as a review of budgets can be an ongoing process. The cost of reviewing budgets, when compared to that of other techniques, is negligible.

The disadvantages of this needs assessment technique are important considerations that should be given adequate attention before deciding on this technique. The budget information of different agencies is not necessarily comparable in terms of identifying services to the particular target group whose needs are being assessed. When the results are obtained, they can be used in conjunction with the results of other needs assessment activities to present a more complete picture of the needs of the target group. Used alone, however, the results will not be significantly valid.

STEPS IN CONDUCTING PUBLIC HEARINGS AND BUDGET REVIEWS

1) Identify data sources.
2) Identify services available.
3) Identify and index legislation impacting on the target group.
4) Review advantages of alternative techniques.
5) Determine what information is needed by decision makers.
6) Determine limits of time and money for the assessment.
7) Assign a person who will conduct the needs assessment and assign a person who will be responsible for managing the needs assessment.

8) Determine what will be done with the results.
9) Develop a list of information desired.
10) Identify locations for public hearings or identify budgets to be reviewed.
11) Conduct hearings, review budgets.
12) Collect data, code, edit, and compile information.
13) Analyze information.
14) Report information and analysis.
15) Compare results with other techniques.

SUMMARY

In this section we have presented a variety of techniques for use in a needs assessment activity with provisions for the enlarging or reducing those techniques to fit the constraints of the agency or group concerned with assessing the needs of their particular target population. A needs assessment is necessary to insure that the services provided to a community are effective, and to determine if additional services are required. The process of assessing the needs of a target population, regardless of the technique used, should be an ongoing activity of any agency or group concerned with rendering services to that population. The needs assessment mechanism should be built into the planning process of any agency or group, and should be viewed as an indispensible planning adjunct. Needs assessment provides an opportunity for the evaluation of existing programs as well as providing data for the planning of additional programs for those of the risk population who are not receiving services. The potential usefulness of ongoing data collection and needs assessment activities to the allocation of resources is essential to effective program administration.

It should be re-emphasized that with any needs assessment technique there are only minor differences in the scope of the undertaking between a statewide needs assessment and a regional or local needs assessment. The steps involved in the assessments, with very minor variations, are adaptable to different sized jurisdictions.

In conclusion, chart 4.2.1 provides a comprehensive overview of the techniques with selected areas of comparison. What might be the best method for a concerned group considering a needs assessment, may not be the most appropriate method for another group. Consideration should be given to all techniques, their advantages and disadvantages, to determine which technique will be most appropriate.

THE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUE

Assessing the needs of a particular target population on a Statewide basis is a complex undertaking and requires that many considerations be taken into account and decisions be made prior to the actual implementation of an assessment technique. This section will identify the variables and circumstances to be considered in the implementation of a needs assessment on this scale and will compare the ideal circumstances for conducting a needs assessment with the actual implementation of such an assessment in Virginia. Techniques will also be suggested for increasing or decreasing the scale of the needs assessment activity in an effort to conform to the particular situations of agencies or groups attempting an assessment of the needs of their target population on a local or regional level.

VARIABLES OF A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

There are several important variables that influence the success of a needs assessment, and each should be given careful consideration before deciding on which technique to employ. The best method for conducting a needs assessment is one which makes positive use of these variables to obtain the most valid results within the limits of reality and practicality. Any needs assessment effort that is undertaken involves the variables of available funding, staff, time, and the validity of results desired. These are important considerations regardless of the method used to assess needs.

1. Funding: How large the scale of the needs assessment is depends upon how much an agency or group has available in its budget or how much it can expect to obtain through grants, donations, budget allocations, or other sources. The amount spent will be directly proportional to the type of instrument used, the amount of time allowed for the entire needs assessment process, and the degree of difficulty experienced in carrying out the needs assessment. For example, if an agency or group plans to conduct a population

survey, it is recommended that no less than $20,000 be budgeted in order to obtain an expected degree of validity on a Statewide basis. In North Dakota, a population survey was conducted at a cost of $50 an interview. A needs assessment technique that can be used in conjunction with a target population survey is a service provider survey. In Utah, a service provider survey was conducted at a cost of $19,000 which included the designing of the survey instrument, the training of the interviewers and the analysis of the results. These are two types of techniques whose results can be used to complement each other.

2. Staff: In many cases, the regular staff members of an agency or the members of a group interested in conducting a needs assessment are unable, because of the constraints of their existing job responsibilities, to take on the additional duties involved in a needs assessment activity. This is particularly true in the area of interviewing if the needs assessment technique involves a survey. For example, a Statewide needs assessment employing a target population survey requires a minimum of three full-time staff members to develop the survey instrument, design an interviewer's manual, hire and train the interviewers, and analyze the data that is collected by the interviewers. In addition to the staff members, a number of interviewers, either paid personnel or volunteer, or both, need to be recruited to actually conduct the interviews. In North Carolina, a Statewide assessment involving all 100 counties was conducted, using 600 volunteers at the local level. When considering the allocation of personnel to be responsible for the needs assessment activities, it is important to remember that it is recommended that another type of assessment activity be simultaneously conducted with the primary needs assessment process.

3. Time: The time allocated for the entire needs assessment process depends on the amount of funding available and on the type of technique chosen. The more involved a technique is in terms of design and necessary personnel, the longer it will take to carry out. When considering conducting a population survey, for example, an agency or group should allow at least 7 to 12 months to design, conduct, and analyze the results of the survey. When one or more techniques are conducted simultaneously, additional time must be allowed for correlating the results to get an accurate picture of the needs identified.

4. Validity of Results: The ideal situation in developing a needs assessment plan is to have the capability to determine the information desired so that the type of technique can be chosen before the determination of the amount of funding, staff, and time is made. However, funding, staff, and time limits are often already fixed, thus limiting flexibility to the choice of a technique that fits those predetermined constraints. When the technique to be used must be chosen in terms of how much the agency or group can financially afford, they may be unable to conduct more than one type of needs assessment, and the validity of the results may therefore be questionable. For example, if the only type of needs assessment technique that can be employed is a public hearing, the results will not be as helpful as results obtained from a target population survey. If an agency or group can choose their technique and then appropriate the time, staff, and money to successfully carry out that technique, they can expect fairly accurate results; however, if their flexibility has already been somewhat limited, it is still possible to achieve a certain degree of validity despite the limitations of the technique(s) which must be chosen.

There are several techniques outlined in the previous chapter which are relatively inexpensive and can be carried out by existing staff. They can be conducted within a fairly short period of time (four to six months), and can provide the results which are indicative of the needs of a target population. When used together, the validity of the combined results can be considered to be reasonably dependable. These less demanding techniques include a key respondent survey, a review of management information, and a review of needs indicators. Any of these techniques used alone cannot usually render very reliable results, but if used in conjunction with one or more other techniques can provide relatively accurate and useful data that indicates needs.

SUGGESTED TECHNIQUE FOR VIRGINIA

In Virginia, if personnel and the financial resources are available, and a Statewide assessment survey of the human services needs of a specific population is desired, it is recommended that a target population survey rather than a general population survey be used as the needs assessment instrument. A target population survey, while it is expensive, time-consuming and relatively difficult to conduct, renders the most valid results because it goes directly to the source of the desired information. As discussed in the previous section, the target population survey covers a specific group of individuals, among whom are current recipients of services who can identify not only problems which exist within the current service delivery system but can also identify services which are needed that do not exist within that system. The target population survey, therefore, has the capability of presenting a very accurate picture of the current situation and needs of a specific group of individuals.

There are basically three types of household surveys that can be employed to gather the desired information. The easiest type of survey is to mail questionnaires to everyone in the sample. Experience has shown that mail surveys will yield a maximum of 30% to 40% return. Returns can be boosted to relatively high levels by intensive efforts (such as letter or telephone follow-ups). A recent report showed mail returns of 70 percent and over when follow-ups were used. Of course, these extra efforts push up costs, while making the respondent group more representative.

> For example, the cost of a 1965 mail study was $37,000 for 5,630 initially returned questionnaires (70 percent of the sample), or $6.55 per return. A personal interview follow-up raised his return rate to 86 percent. These additional returns cost $13.65 each. It is instructive to note that $10,000 went for supervision, training, record keeping, and office work, $5,200 for listing of addresses, and $11,300 for enumeration of households. The questionnaires and mailing cost only $6,600.*

Further problems are encountered when editing the results for appropriateness of the response. People with reading difficulties, apathetic, or disinterested families will probably not complete the questionnaires and return them. In most cases, these are the very families the agency is most interested in.

Telephone interviewing is the next type of low cost survey. The major difficulty with this method is that families without telephones are automatically excluded. Furthermore, the telephone is very impersonal. There are many revealing clues that can be obtained from a personal interview that cannot be determined over the telephone. For example, there have been actual cases of the respondent assuring the interviewer over the telephone that there

*An Introduction to Sample Surveys for Government Managers. The Urban Institute, Washington, D.C., March 1971.

are no problems in the household. A follow-up personal interview with the same respondent revealed a barren apartment with an alcoholic husband and sick children. Presently, there are no documented maximum lengths for a telephone survey. Without one-to-one contact there would seem to be limits to the length of time a respondent's attention can be held on the telephone.

Therefore, if resources are available, the optimal and recommended approach is the personal interview in the home setting. There are two methods for conducting a personal interview, both of which have drawbacks. One is to make an appointment with the family in advance of the interview. This can be done by mail so as not to exclude anyone in the sample. The other is simply to appear at a door without providing any advanced knowledge of the interview to the household. The first approach involving the pre-contact produces an unusually high rate of families that are not home at the time of the scheduled interview. Additionally, when the interview is conducted, the forewarned family is likely to present its best side. The house or apartment might be unusually clean and the children wearing good clothes while watching television. The interviewer can usually detect clues to a deceptive appearance. The second method results in a clearer impression of the family situation. However, the interviewer may be under suspicion regarding his intentions. All interviewers should have appropriate and complete identification ready to assure the respondent that his cause is legitimate. Additionally, the one-to-one interview allows for some degree of immediate editing of responses and in-depth questioning to clarify vague answers. In the mid 1970's professional interviewers were receiving between $2.00 and $3.00 an hour.

TECHNIQUES TO BE USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE TARGET POPULATION SURVEY

Earlier in this section, it was recommended that one or more other needs assessment techniques be used in conjunction with the primary needs assessment technique. The use of additional techniques can help in corroborating the results obtained and can help to give a clearer understanding of the needs of the target group. If a target population survey is used, it is recommended that a key respondent survey, a service provider survey, or an analysis of secondary data be used as additional techniques to supplement the results of the target population survey.

The following three charts represent the estimated time frame for activities involved in conducting a Statewide needs assessment of a target population using the recommended techniques. Each chart enumerates the steps to be followed in using that particular assessment technique. There is an explanation of each step given in Section Two for each technique. Chart 4.3.1 lists the steps and time frame in conducting a target population survey. Chart 4.3.2 lists the steps and expected time frame for conducting a key respondent survey. Chart 4.3.3 lists the steps and approximate time frame for reviewing secondary data. Ideally, the three needs assessment techniques should be conducted simultaneously to facilitate comparability of results.

Chart 4.3.1

TARGET POPULATION SURVEY
SCHEDULE OF WORK TASK

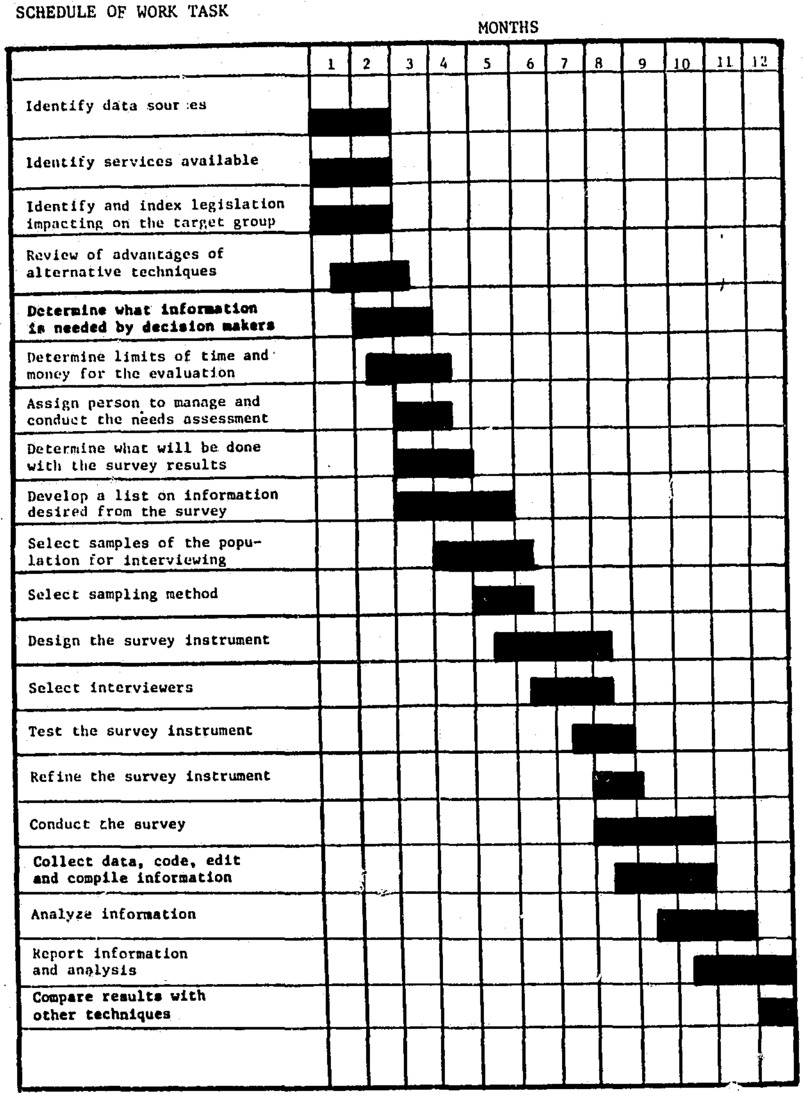


Chart 4.3.2

KEY RESPONDENT SURVEY
SCHEDULE OF WORK TASK

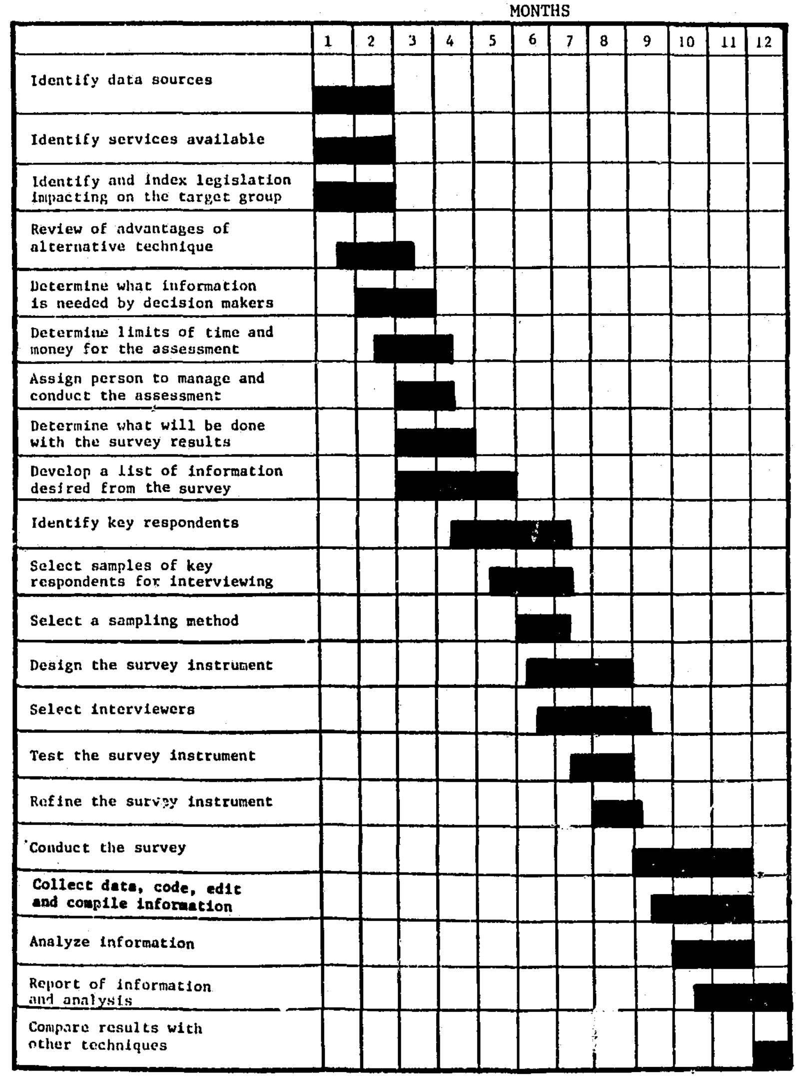
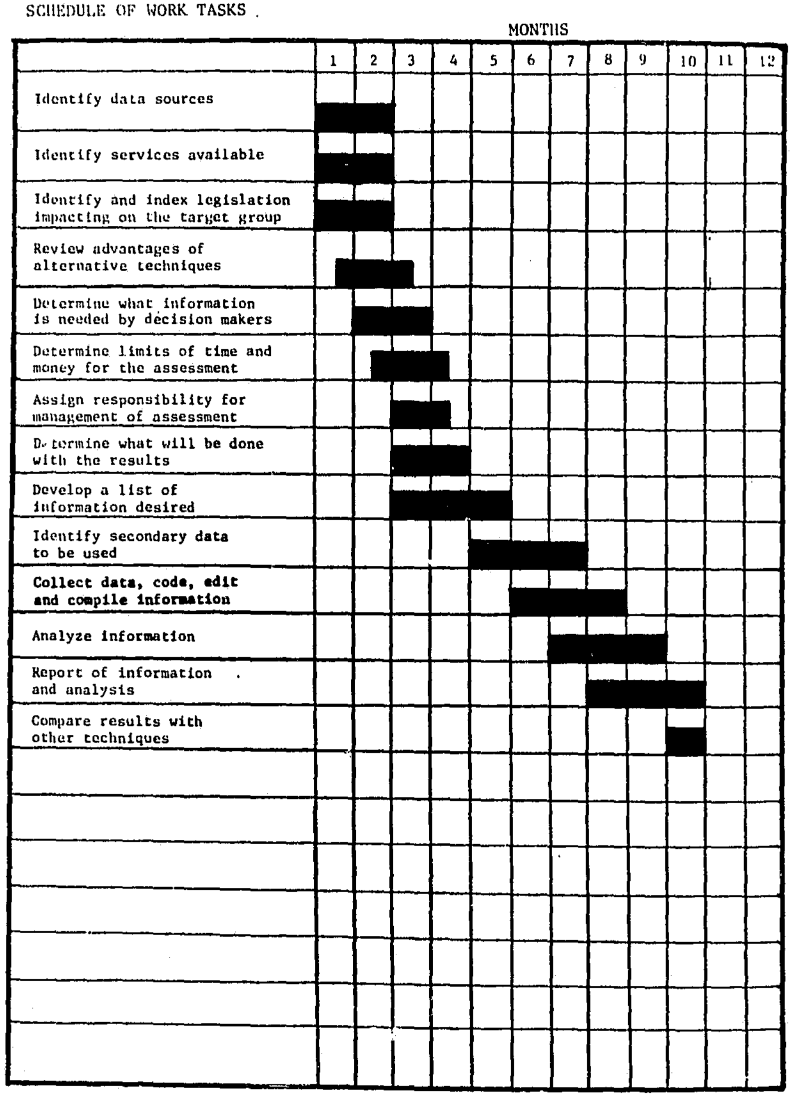


Chart 4.3.3

SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS
SCHEDULE OF WORK TASKS



SUMMARY

The major emphasis of this section has been on the variables to be considered in developing a needs assessment technique for use on a Statewide basis. It should again be pointed out that the variables are similar in nature at different levels of effort in the needs assessment process. Cities, counties, and regional planning districts will have to consider the same constraints to conducting a needs assessment of their citizenry as would be considered at the State level.

In essence, the needs assessment works in reverse. It is important to first determine the information desired of the assessment and then decide which method will provide the desired results within the constraints of time, funds, and staff.

The recommended procedures for conducting a Statewide needs assessment includes using another technique for arriving at conclusions of need to be used in conjunction with the target population survey. In addition to the target population survey, the review of secondary data, or a service provider survey, and a key respondent survey are alternative techniques. Time frames for conducting the assessment should heavily influence the determination of which technique should be employed.

The recommended Statewide needs assessment techniques should provide the most valid results within the identified constraints. It should be emphasized that the important ingredient to implementation of any technique is <u>planning</u>.

RESULTS OF THE

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The results of a needs assessment, regardless of the scale effort attempted, should provide data on program utilization as well as information on members of the at risk population who are not receiving a service. What the results of the assessment will provide, who they will effect, and who wants and/or needs to know the results are three important considerations of any needs assessment. The purpose of this section is to examine and discuss these important considerations.

Information that is collected and anlyzed from the needs assessment should provide justification for new programs and services that are designed to meet newly identified needs, as well as identifying those needs which are being adequately met by already existing services. In addition, data collection should construct the foundation for adequate funding to maintain programs presently meeting needs, as well as supporting the need for additional funding to provide new programs and services.

Presently, services and programs designed for meeting needs are funded in an attempt to reach the most people of the target group for the least amount of money. This situation of providing services at a minimal expense appears to be a gooe management practice. However, the needs assessment may identify the fact that needs are not completely, adequately, or effectively being met under such conditions.

Historically, service providers have placed in the position of stretching their limited financial resources to cover an increasing service population. The alternative to such a situation might be to provide a unit of service that produces the desired result and then establish the funding. Through the needs assessment mechanism, more adequate and efficient service delivery can be obtained. The long range implications of continuing to ineffectively meet or ignore needs deserve serious consideration. If the needs of a specific client population are not met as soon after they are identified as possible, those same needs are likely to increase at a geometric progression as does the population. The decisions and policies affecting a particular target group can have far-reaching ramifications on the future decisions of the policy makers of different target groups. The theory of needs assessment attempts to avoid creating or contributing to the future existence, incidence, and degree of needs which are the results of present decisions.

The results of the needs assessment activity should provide demographic, social, and economic characteristics of the target group. These recurring traits should be carefully analyzed when considering the needs of the target population. Accurate collection of utilization data by the service population in addition to information on individuals in the target group not receiving a service should be an anticipated outcome of needs assessment. The collection of this type of information should be an ongoing process that will help to establish a ranking of needs priorities. These priorities could then be identified easily by the public who deserve to know in what direction the policies of their government are headed.

In addition to the justification for funding and new programs, the identification of characteristics, and the ranking of priorities, needs assessment provides an opportunity for program evaluation. The opportunity for program evaluation is rarely afforded a service population. There is a fine distinction between needs assessment and program evaluation that should be maintained. Needs assessment considers individuals beyond those included in the service population and is broader in scope than the limited vision of programmatic evaluations.

The results of a needs assessment will affect a variety of persons regardless of the scope of the effort undertaken. The target population whose needs have been assessed have the most to gain from the needs assessment. The po-

tential of identified needs being addressed is greatly increased by the needs assessment. In addition to the target population, the general public and society itself will feel the benefits of the needs assessment. Efficient allocation of tax dollars coupled with public understanding of needs provides the foundation for a good working relationship between any decision making unit and its constituency. The analysis of needs in terms of financial cost and social cost can help to relieve the intensity of identified needs in the future. The nature of interrelated needs provides the opportunity for them to be addressed in a geometrical progression. Adequately meeting a particular need of a specific target group can potentially relieve other needs of the group. An example of this could be the timely implementation of programs for youth employment which might relieve some of the problems of juvenile delinquency.

The final and perhaps the most important consideration given to the information collected by needs assessment is who needs to know the results and why. Decision makers at the highest level of the jurisdiction where the needs assessment was implemented can exert the most influence based on the information. The key decision makers are generally elected to a political office or appointed to a position of authority. At this level, legislation can be formulated to respond to needs identified by the assessment. It should be kept in mind that these key decision makers can only represent those who have access, or are allowed to have access, to them. The results of the needs assessment should therefore also be available to any decision maker at any level who has the potential to address the identified needs of the target population with services, programs, policies or legislation. For example, agency directors, committee chairpersons and commission members are in a position to dictate policy and program implementation.

The public itself deserves to know the results of a needs assessment that has been initiated by their service delivery and decision making system. There is an increasing demand from the public for hard program evaluations and needs assessments addressing the ills of our social system. There are several basic ideals of American society which include getting one's money's worth, realizing a profit, and efficient spending of limited funds, that continue to influence service delivery in the public sector. The overriding consideration of the needs assessment is to be able to make more rational allocations of resources to address social problems and need based on scientifically gathered evidence rather than on fad, opinion, or faith.

SUMMARY

This document is the fourth in a series of documents published by the Virginia Commission for Children and Youth focusing on the benefits of needs assessment activities in a human services delivery system. The previous documents each concentrated on a particular activity in the needs assessment process. This document has dealt most specifically with the problem of designing and implementing a needs assessment method.

There are numerous recommendations contained in this handbook for alternative methods for conducting a needs assessment. The following list is some of the critical considerations in selecting and implementing a needs assessment technique:

A. Review the current situation and capabilities using the criteria discussed with each technique in Section II of this handbook. Realistically appraise the situation and the need for information and the ability to undertake alternative techniques.

B. A thorough understanding of the service delivery system for the target population is necessary.

1) what services are available
2) how many units
3) to whom
4) geographical location
5) at what cost
6) how evaluated

C. Prepare a detailed plan for conducting the assessment.

1) tasks
2) schedule
3) responsibilities
4) costs

D. Collect information using a structured and tested instrument. Collect only relevant information. Know in advance how the information will be used, by whom, and when.

E. Provide feedback to all participants. Present the results of the needs assessment to citizens, agencies, and staff and allow for comments.

These are the guiding principles in conducting an effective needs assessment. Technical suggestions regarding sampling, interviewing, and time frames are contained throughout the manual.

The potential benefits to be derived from the needs assessment activities by the planning process cannot be over-emphasized. Regardless of the method employed to identify the needs of a specific segment of the population, the results should influence the meeting of identified needs through the resource allocation process.

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