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Conducting a Needs Assessment

As previously mentioned, the first step in designing your Learning Recovery Plan is to inventory your local assets and identify local needs. With these tools and assistance from MDE, you can learn about several ways to shape your Learning Recovery Plan around the assets and needs in your community. With the **Asset Mapping Tool** you learned about going through an asset mapping process. This tool shows you how to do a needs assessment.

Directions: *A needs assessment can be done in many different ways, depending on how much time you have, the resources you have available, and how thorough you want to be. Below are a series of ideas and activities you might include in your needs assessment. Together with your staff and Learning Recovery advisory team, select one or several of these activities. We've noted what kinds of resources and how much time is required for each to help you select the most appropriate activities for you.*

Existing Data

Before you start collecting new information, look at the data you already have available. We strongly encourage you to use local Minnesota Student Survey data, school Title I needs assessments, identified needs in the school's WBWF plan, the Minnesota Report Card and other local sources of data.

Resources Required: Low—these only require the time of one individual to collect the various data reports.

Time Commitment: Low–only requires the time of one individual to collect data, may require building relationships with organizations that have the data.

Surveys

Surveys are a great way to capture quantitative information about what is needed in your community (see Data Collection: Surveys in MDE's OSTL training course). Students and family members are the most common types of people to survey. You might consider asking the following types of questions:

What kinds of activities or programming would they like to have in a Learning Recovery program (e.g., full service community schools; neighborhood programs; tutoring, academic, behavior and social-emotional

[1] This document was adapted from: McElvain, C. K., Moroney, D. A., Devaney, E. D., Singer, J. S., & Newman, J. Z. (2014). Beyond the Bell: A toolkit for creating effective afterschool and expanded learning programs (4th ed.). Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

supports; vocational or life skills; preKindergarten; family engagement; expand rigorous coursework, Ethnic studies and Indigenous Education; smaller classrooms, Project-based and hands on learning; after school and summer programs)?

What kinds of activities, services, or programming do they already access in the community (e.g., sports leagues, local Ys, scouting organizations, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc.)?

What kind of schedule they would like to see—that is, do they want a program that is offered every day? How late do they want programs to go? For how many weeks? Throughout the school year? Summer?

Will the plan require extra transportation?

Time Commitment: High—you need to identify the population to survey (perhaps all of the young people and their families in your community), distribute the surveys, enter the data, analyze the data, and create some kind of report.

Resources Required: Moderate—the main expense is staff time. You'll need to copy and distribute the survey and then have someone enter the data, which can be time-consuming if you distribute a large number of surveys. You may want to hire someone to tally and present the results.

Focus Groups

Focus groups can be a good way to get qualitative and more in-depth information from a smaller number of people. Focus groups might be with students, families, community members, or potential providers. You will need to identify the groups of people you want to talk to, develop a focus group protocol that includes the questions you want to ask, schedule the groups at a time that is convenient for your participants, and identify people to conduct the groups. Generally, focus groups should include five to eight people. Any more can get unwieldy, but fewer than five requires people to talk too much and can be tiring.

Time Commitment: Low—these can just require a few hours of time to coordinate and organize, and then each group typically lasts between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours.

Resources Required: Moderate—these can be expensive or relatively inexpensive depending on how many people you include, whether you provide food, and who conducts the groups. You may want to hire someone with experience doing focus groups; it can be challenging to keep the group on track and elicit the information you want, so having someone with expertise may be useful.

Program Inventory

One way to determine where there are gaps in programming in your community is to do a program inventory. This can be a formal survey of providers in the community or a more informal review. Some questions to ask providers include:

What age range do you serve?

How often do you run programs? What days of the week? What hours? How many weeks each year? Do you run summer programs?

What types of activities do you offer?

What neighborhoods or schools do you serve? What is your target population?

Time Commitment: High—an inventory can be quite time-consuming. You will need to either set up and conduct interviews or develop and disseminate a survey. Getting community providers to respond to a survey will require follow-up because most are very busy and may not see it as a priority.

Resources Required: Moderate—this does not have to be an expensive process, but it will require a fair amount of staff time, especially if you decide to distribute surveys. Interviews or more informal program reviews may be less time-consuming and therefore less expensive.

Interviews

Interviews with key stakeholders in the community can be a great way to learn more about what is needed and how your Learning Recovery programs might be received. Think about people in your community who could serve as key informants. This might include local leaders such as city council members or faith-based leaders, school officials, directors of local non-profits, the head of the parent-teacher organization, and other high-profile individuals representing your constituents. Develop a set of interview questions unique to each person that targets the information they may be able to provide. Contact each individual to set up an interview. The interview should last between 45 minutes and 1 hour. Any more than that may be overwhelming. If possible, meet in person rather than doing it over the phone in order to build relationships.

Resources Required: Low—these can be relatively inexpensive to conduct and they only require the time of one individual to develop questions and conduct the actual interviews.

Time Commitment: Again, these only require the time of one person to develop a set of questions and set up and conduct interviews. Depending on how many people you talk to, these might take as little as 5 or 6 hours to conduct.

Now What? *Take the information you have gathered for the activities above and write it up in a brief one-page report. This can be a bulleted list or PowerPoint presentation. Present the findings to your Learning Recovery Plan board and other local stakeholders to make sure the information you have gathered is accurate. This is called a feedback loop. Ask your stakeholders to make suggestions based on the findings; note their suggestions in your document. Keep the document for future use. You are likely going to have to demonstrate the need or background for the program in grant proposals, program plans, or evaluation reports. This information can be compelling for recruiting program partners and in-kind donations from local businesses. A little bit of information can go a long way in gathering support for your Learning Recovery programs.*

Finally, think about ways to modify this activity to engage young people in the process once your program is up and running. This is a great way to kick off a service learning project or to engage students in the ongoing process of program planning.