STEP 2: DETERMINE YOUR FOCUS

Now that you know who will be involved in this process, your first step together is to determine what you collectively want to achieve with this assessment. Clearly articulating this is essential for building group consensus and for ensuring that you are successful in accomplishing what you set out to do.

⇒ Step 2 has three activities, which are reflected in the *Step 2 Planning Worksheet: Issues, Problems, Goals and Objectives* (following page 4-16):

2.1   Identify and Prioritize Community Public Health Issues

2.2   Define the Problem

2.3   Create Realistic and Achievable Goals and Objectives

2.1 Identify and Prioritize Community Public Health Issues

The first time you bring your partnership together, identify the public health issues that each of the community partners, their families, or clients are concerned about. The particular health issues your group prioritizes as being the most important become your **community assessment focus**. Your focus ensures that your community assessment explores one topic well, rather than taking on more topics than your partnership resources can handle. **The focus can be broad**. This is useful if you are not quite sure what the major health concerns of your community are, and want to collect some general information about disease rates, availability of health services, or community members' perspectives on health and health care. **Or, the focus can be more specific.**   This might be the best option if your community is already aware of particular health concerns in the community, and would prefer to invest the community assessment in this one particular area. For example, if diabetes rates are already known to be high in your community, the assessment can focus on diabetes. Thus you might concentrate on assessing availability and use of diabetes screening services, diabetes-related care, or explore issues related to diabetes management such as nutrition and physical activity.

In many cases, the different members of your community partnership will have their own particular health issue interests. It is very important to discuss these different interests to identify the health issues on which everyone can agree. You can facilitate this discussion with your community partners using some of the following questions to stimulate a thoughtful conversation. Write each issue raised on paper posted to the wall so that everyone can see what is being said.

Discussion Questions:

- Do all community members have access to basic health needs, such as food, shelter, health education, clean water and clean and safe environments?

- In your opinion, what are the illnesses most affecting members of the community? Keep in mind the different illnesses experienced by infants, children, adolescents, adults, the elderly, people with special health care needs, men and women.

- Do you think community members are able to get health services when they need them? Are there any particular groups you feel have a harder time accessing services?

- Do you think most community members have sufficient health insurance coverage? Are there any particular groups you think have less insurance coverage?

- What health services are not being provided to the community that you feel are needed?

- What health services are being provided to the community that you feel are underutilized?

- Do community members have to go outside of the community for health services and resources?

- What group(s) of individuals do you think have the most unmet health needs?

⇒ If questions about the current health of the community are being raised and no one has the answers, write them up on a different piece of paper. These can help inform the questions this group would like the assessment to answer, as well as the type of information which needs to be collected in order to answer them.

After you have a long list of health issues on the wall, it is a good idea to prioritize which ones are best to explore and address in this community assessment. It is probable that not all issues can be realistically explored with this assessment, and may need to be a part of the "next steps" to be taken after the assessment. Agreeing on what issues are the most important may be a difficult process, so here are things to consider or to pose to the group when prioritizing public health issues:

- Which issues were raised and discussed the most?

- Which issues do community partners feel are the most severe in the community? Which would be considered the most severe by community members?

- Which affect the most people? Which have the largest number of at-risk people?

- Which result in the highest rate of premature death or disability?

- Which present the largest social burden to the community?

- Which create the largest economic burden on the community?

- Which are already being addressed by programs, services, or resources?

⇒ Use this discussion to identify the issues the partnership wants to address in the community assessment.

2.2 Define the Problem

The selected health issue can be framed in terms of **unmet needs**, **gaps in health care services, or a lack of community-wide resources or funding**. It is important to define the focus of your assessment in terms of a specific public health problem for the following reasons:

- It focuses your assessment and drives the kind of data to be collected.

- It helps identify and implement an appropriate community improvement as a result of what you find in your assessment, such as public health programs, policy changes, or grant seeking.

- It provides a rationale for these community improvements.

- It allows you to define the problem from the perspective of your community when you seek help from outside audiences—such as policymakers and funders—to implement your community health improvements.

In defining the problem, consider the following question for each prioritized health issue:

1. What is the problem?

2. How severe do you think this problem is in your community?

3. What do you think contributes to this problem?

4. What are the health consequences of this problem?

2.3 Create Realistic and Achievable Goals and Objectives

The differences between goals and objectives can be confusing. In fact, many people believe they are writing goals, when they are actually writing objectives, and vice versa. It is best to begin the discussion about goals and objectives for the assessment by having each of the community partners present to the group:

1. Their ideal for the health and well-being of community members

2. Their perception of the current reality

3. The difference between their ideal and reality

Once everyone has articulated this, it is easier to draft goals and objectives for the community assessment. Here are some definitions and helpful hints:

A Goal

- Is a broad statement

- Provides overall focus, vision and direction

- Can be lofty and idealistic, as it is not necessary that a goal be reached during the time frame

- Can be non-specific and non-measurable

Objectives

- Are more realistic steps to achieve goal(s)

- Are always *active*, and use strong action verbs like "plan", "conduct", "examine", "collect", "produce", "analyze" and "write"

- Answer the following questions: WHO?, WHAT?, WHEN?, WHY?

- Are clear to everyone

- Are **SMART**:

    - Are as ***Specific*** as possible

    - Are ***Measurable,*** in order to determine progress toward your stated goal(s)

    - Are ***Achievable***, given available time, staffing and resources – you don't want to set your assessment up for failure by setting objectives that are not possible to accomplish

    - Are ***Relevant*** to the goals, needs and interests of the community and the partnership

    - Specify a ***Time frame*** for when they will be accomplished

Remember that what you want to develop here are **goals and objectives specifically for your community assessment**. Community partner organizations have their own goals and objectives, and you may have other partnership goals and objectives if you work together on other projects. Do not confuse these with the assessment goals and objectives.

Here are some examples of community assessment goals and objectives. Please keep in mind that these are **just a few examples** of the many different types of goals you

could develop for your own community assessment. Also, there are only three examples provided for each goal out of the infinite number of possible community assessment objectives that could be developed to address each example goal. The goals and objectives you develop may look very different.

Examples of goals and objectives for a community assessment with a broad focus:

Goal Examples	Community Assessment Objective Examples
▪ To understand community members' access to health care.	▪ Gather secondary data from at least 10 local health care service providers in spring 2005 to better understand which services are most utilized by the community, and which are not. ▪ Perform asset mapping in four low-income neighborhoods in spring 2005 to determine what services are accessible by what neighborhoods in the community. ▪ Survey 20% of residents in spring 2005 about their use of local health care services to better understand community health assets and needs.
▪ To examine community health needs and identify possible community-based program solutions.	▪ Examine four sources of existing county-level health data in March and April of 2005 to determine the three most common community health problems. ▪ Conduct four to six focus groups with the leaders of community-based health organizations in July of 2005 to identify program challenges, success stories, and possible future collaborations. ▪ Conduct six to ten focus groups with community members in May and June of 2005 to discuss their top unmet health needs and possible programmatic solutions.

Goal Examples	Community Assessment Objective Examples
▪ To determine community resident readiness for local advocacy and policy efforts.	▪ Conduct two focus groups with 20 community leaders in 2005 to discuss challenges and successes mobilizing community residents. ▪ Survey 20 community leaders in 2005 to identify major community associations, networks, clubs, and volunteer organizations. ▪ Survey 150 residents recruited through identified community associations in 2005 to see how interested and motivated they would be to participate in community advocacy or policy efforts, and what community issues are most important to them.

Example of a goal and objectives for a community assessment with a more narrow focus:

Goal Examples	Community Assessment Objective Examples
▪ To understand the dietary behaviors of community teens.	▪ Gather sales data from one high school food service director in 2005. ▪ Conduct surveys with 50% of local high school students regarding their at-home and in-school dietary behaviors before January 2005. ▪ Map the locations of fast food and convenient store outlets before June 2005 near one high school campus and students' walking routes.

After developing your goals and objectives, look back through your *Step 1 Planning Worksheet: Organizational Chart* to see if your partnership has representation from organizations that work in the various public health topic areas raised in your goals and objectives. If not, then identify additional key community stakeholders and invite them to join your community partnership.