Each of these components will be described in greater detail below.

L	**Leadership** is a critical component of recovery efforts and should be assessed to identify local leaders, their respective roles, and their potential to engage in future recovery initiatives. Leadership should be assessed before other elements as leaders are important sources of information about recovery in their communities.
E	**Environment** is a key factor influencing both the nature of drug use and recovery in communities. Environment consists of several major subcomponents, including local culture, relevant policies, needs and resources.
A	**Awareness** is an often overlooked element of recovery initiatives. This model recommends an assessment of the awareness of the nature of drug use, addiction, and recovery within communities.
R	**Readiness** is defined by the willingness and ability of communities to respond to addiction and promote recovery. Like awareness, readiness is often overlooked when implementing recovery support services.
N	**Network** refers to the nature of relationships within the recovery community. A network assessment looks at existing alliances within the recovery community as well as the level of interconnection between different recovery community leaders, organizations, and gatekeepers.

This toolkit provides resources that can be used in the assessment of each of these components in preparation for implementation of recovery support services as well as ongoing evaluation of systems change efforts.

Planning and Preparing for Assessment

Planning and preparing for your community assessment process is important and, in some respects, just as productive as conducting the assessment. Through the planning and preparation process, you will strengthen your program or organization's community assessment infrastructure and improve its engagement with key community stakeholders.

Action steps

There is no one procedure in planning and preparing for community assessment; the process must be tailored to the assets and culture of your program or organization. This toolkit reviews a series of five action steps to help you in planning and preparing for your community assessment process, adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Community Health Assessment and Group Evaluation model (CDC, 2010).

The five action steps in the LEARN About Recovery model are:

- Assemble a community assessment team,
- Build a community assessment plan,
- Conduct the assessment, and
- Draft the community assessment report.

We will now review each of these action steps in greater detail.

<u>Assemble a community assessment team</u>

The first step in planning for community assessment is to assemble your community assessment team. Optimally, community members should be involved in all aspects of the community assessment process and so should be represented on the community assessment team. In putting together a team, there are several considerations detailed in the box below.

- **What is the purpose of the community assessment?** Are you conducting this assessment before starting a new peer program or in preparation for an advocacy initiative? This will also inform the next step- building a community assessment plan.
- **What skills and expertise do you need for the community assessment?** Do you have individuals with strong ties to recovery communities in the area? What about staff who are good at leading focus groups or analyzing data?
- **What kind of commitment can people give to the community assessment?** Is anyone on the project 100%? Do you have volunteers or interns who can support?

Build a community assessment plan

The second step in planning for community assessment is to build a community assessment plan. This can be an extensive and iterative process. Below are some elements your plan should include.

- **Purpose:** What are you hoping to discover about the target community? Are you assessing leadership, needs, or readiness? What questions are you hopping to answer? How will you use the assessment findings?
- **Scope:** What community are you looking to assess? What are the boundaries of this community? Are these boundaries geographic, demographic, or sociographic?
- **Timeframe:** How much time can you devote to your community assessment? How long can you take for each stage of the assessment (e.g., information collection, analysis, reporting)?
- **Strategy:** How will you conduct your assessment? What approach(es) will you use to collect and analyze data? How will your findings be used and/or shared?
- **Roles:** What role will each of the members of your community assessment team play in ensuring that the strategies are implemented properly? Who will do what?

It is important to note that the process of building a community assessment plan is iterative. For example, in establishing your timeframe and strategy, you may revise your focus. Ultimately, the community assessment plan should be a living document, to be revised based on new information, changes in resources, or other factors.

Conduct the assessment

Once you have assembled your community assessment team and finalized your plan, then you can conduct the assessment. While conducting the assessment, it will be important to have check-in meetings with the team to review progress, share lessons learned and preliminary findings, and explore solutions to any barriers or challenges. A draft meeting outline with key questions is included below.

- **Introductions & Progress Update:** What role do you play on the community assessment team? What have you accomplished since last we met?
- **Lessons Learned:** What have we learned as a result of our activities to date?
- **Barriers/Challenges & Solutions:** What barriers or challenges are we facing? What strategies can we use to overcome these barriers or challenges?
- **Conclusions:** What are our next steps? How should we change or update our plan based on our discussion?

Draft the community assessment report

Once you have collected enough information, then it is time to begin to compile the findings and draft the community assessment report. How will you know when you have collected enough information? There is no easy way to determine this, but a common benchmark is when you begin to reach saturation. Saturation occurs when you begin to consistently receive the same information from different sources and additional work does not yield any new information.

Once you have reached saturation and are ready to pull together a community assessment report, there are a number of steps to take. Some examples of such steps follow.

- **Compile the data:** Ideally, you should set up a system for collecting and storing the information you are gathering through your community assessment process as you are conducting it. If you have not, then you will need to set one up in order to pull your data together to be analyzed.
- **Analyze the data:** Once the data is all in one place, then it is ready to be analyzed. In your analysis, you will uncover the key trends in the information you have gathered and highlight any pieces of information of specific use in meeting your needs.
- **Design and draft the report:** Once you have conducted your analysis and drawn conclusions, then next step is to draft the report. As part of this step, you will need to decide what format makes the most sense for your report, based on who your audience is. You may decide to develop a fact sheet or brief for distribution to government officials or to compile a lengthier report for program staff.
- **Review and revise the report:** You should have someone who was not involved in the community assessment process (and who ideally is representative of the audience for your report) who can review and provide feedback on the report. This person may be a staff person or community member or both. You may want to have multiple people review the report, depending on the purpose, and there may be several rounds of review and revision.
- **Finalize and share the report:** Once the report has gone through enough revisions, it should be finalized and shared with its intended audience. The options for sharing are as diverse as the options for formatting and can include dissemination through e-mail or social media or at an event. You may use multiple methods of dissemination, varying channels for different formats and audiences.

A community assessment report may include a community action plan designed based on the findings from the assessment. A community action plan generally includes goals, objectives, activities, and a timeline along with specified performance indicators and persons responsible for different activities.

Community Assessment Plan Template

This is a template to use as you develop the plan for your community assessment. Please feel free to adapt it to better meet your needs.

Purpose

Scope

Strategy

Roles and Responsibilities

Timeframe

Task	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5	Month 6

Leadership Assessment

Leadership assessment is an important preliminary component of any community assessment process. Leadership assessment allows for the identification of key community stakeholders, gatekeepers, and informants, all of whom can play an important role in program development as well as the remaining phases of community assessment.

Different leaders play different roles in their community and will offer different benefits to your efforts. It can be helpful to think of labeling leaders as follows:

- **Gatekeeper:** A gatekeeper is someone who can provide access to certain segments of the community. They may provide access through physical means (in the way a college administrator can provide access to a university) or through social means (in the way a churchgoer can provide access to a church recovery group.
- **Informant:** An informant is someone who cannot provide access to the community, but can provide information about a group. An informant could be someone who frequents recovery events, such as a peer recovery coach, or someone who otherwise knows a lot about a recovery community, such as a drug treatment provider.
- **Opinion Leader:** An opinion leader is someone who is well-respected and influential in the community. It can be easy to confuse popularity with influence, but the two are very different. Opinion leaders are trusted and are often trend-setters in their circles.
- **Stakeholder:** A stakeholder is someone who has an interest in your program or initiative. They can be a member of the recovery community, a service provider, or a government official, to name a few possibilities.

It is important to note that these terms are not mutually exclusive and that different leaders can (and often do) fall into multiple categories.

When conducting a leadership assessment, a key activity is to ask each leader who they consider as other leaders in the recovery community. Individuals who are frequently mentioned are high-profile leaders and important to consider involving in your efforts. However, it is also important to consider involving leaders from diverse segments of the community and not just from a single community.

Sample Leadership Assessment

Stakeholder Name: ____________________	Interviewer Name: ____________________
Interview Location: ____________________	Interview Date: ______________________

What is your recovery story? (Prompt Questions: *What does recovery mean to you? How long have you been in recovery (if applicable)? What has been your path to recovery?*)

What do you consider your role in the recovery community? (Prompt Question: *How do you support the recovery of other individuals?*)

Who do you consider to be the main leaders in the local recovery community? Why?

What role would you like to play in the recovery community moving forward?

Environmental Assessment

Environmental assessment involves the attempt to understand the social and structural factors that support or impede recovery efforts and initiatives. Environmental assessment helps to yield a deeper understanding of the recovery capital in a community as well as those barriers that make recovery challenging.

The LEARN About Recovery model breaks environmental assessment down into four essential sub-components:

- **Culture:** Culture is an important part of any community and most communities consist not of one culture, but many cultures. A key part of any environmental assessment is an assessment of the community cultures and how they inform attitudes and practices related to recovery.
- **Policy:** Different communities have employed different strategies to address local issues related to drugs and drug addiction. It is critical for anyone doing work to support recovery to understand the relevant policies and how they are implemented in practice.
- **Needs:** A common component of most community assessments is a determination of the most widely identified needs. Defining and prioritizing these needs is an important first step before undertaking any initiative.
- **Assets:** Often neglected in favor of identifying needs, assessment of community assets should be used to bolster intervention design, integrating community resources into recovery support efforts.

This toolkit will review each of these sub-components in greater detail.

Culture

There are many different aspects of culture to consider as part of an environmental assessment. To help simplify matters, we will divide these aspects into two categories: demographic and psychographic. A third category, behavioral, which includes practices or traditions, can also be considered.

Demographic

With respect to this community assessment model, the concept of demographics refers to the number and relative representation of different groups in a given community. It may be helpful to know how many people identify in terms of

- gender,
- race/ethnicity,
- sexuality,
- religion, and/or
- other categories.

It may also be useful to get a sense of community experiences related to education, employment, housing, and other socioeconomic status variables.

While demographic questions can be included in community assessment instruments, much of this information may be already available through existing data sources. The United States Census can be a great source of demographic information.

Psychographic

Psychographics refer to the extent to which a community holds, supports, or endorses different values, opinions, attitudes, or norms. Some examples of psychographic characteristics you might consider incorporating into your assessment include

- Prevalence of different recovery values in the community,
- Opinions about different paths to recovery,
- Attitudes and stigma related to addiction, and
- Norms surrounding substance use.

It can be tempting to assume that, as community members, we already know what other community members think about addiction and recovery. Community assessment in this area involves reserving judgment to allow for a more objective exploration of community values, opinions, attitudes, and norms.

Some national organizations collect psychographic and behavioral information, such as the Pew Research Center.

Behavioral

Demographic assessment will tell you about the identities and experiences of people in your community and psychographic assessment will tell you about your community's thoughts and opinions. Behavioral assessment rounds out this trifecta by telling you about the practices and traditions of your community.

There is a wide range of variables covered by behavioral assessment. A critical first step is to refer back to the goals of your community assessment outlined in your plan in order to ensure that your questions are focused. Some behaviors you may be interested in asking about could include:

- What drugs are most commonly used in your community,
- What treatment or paths to recovery people are using,
- How members of your community are celebrating recovery, or
- What roles peer leaders are adopting in their communities.

Local health departments and research institutions, especially colleges and universities, may already be capturing some of the information you might be interested in. It is a good idea to reach out to them before you conduct your own assessment to see what information they may have. Even if the information is outdated, you may be able to use their instruments (e.g., surveys, focus group protocols, interview guides) to conduct a more recent assessment of behaviors.

Sample Culture Assessment

This assessment is intended to ascertain what the recovery culture looks like in your area. You may decide to alter this assessment for any of a variety of reasons, including a desire to measure other aspects of culture.

Demographic

What is your zip code? ____________

How old are you? __________

How do you identify in terms of your gender identity? (Please select all that apply)

- o Female
- o Male
- o Transgender
- o Genderqueer
- o Other (Please specify): _______________________________________

What is your racial/ethnic background? (Please select all that apply)

- o Alaska Native/American Indian/Native Hawaiian
- o Asian American/Pacific Islander
- o Black/African American
- o Hispanic/Latino
- o Middle Eastern
- o White
- o Other (Please specify): _______________________________________

Do you identify as being in long term recovery? Yes No

If yes, how long have you been in recovery? ______ years ______ months

Psychographic

What does recovery mean to you?

What are some of the common misconceptions about recovery?

What are some of the ways in which you believe people enter long-term recovery?

Behavioral

How did you enter long-term recovery?

What are some of the activities you take part in as part of your recovery?

How does your community celebrate recovery?

Policy

Policy can play a key role in supporting or inhibiting recovery efforts and these policies may exist at the national, state, and local levels. The key activities in a policy assessment as part of a community assessment are not only to identify the policies that influence recovery efforts but also to determine what these policies look like in practice as the enactment of these policies can differ considerably from the letter of the law itself.

Legislation

What is the actual letter of the law? What are the federal, state, and local policies that influence recovery efforts, from block grant funding allocation to Good Samaritan laws to access to public benefits following a drug conviction? Advocacy and policy organizations (such as the Addiction Policy Forum or Kaiser Health News) and professional associations (such as NAADAC, the Association of Addiction Professionals) are a good place to find out about relevant policies. Federal, state, and city government websites, such as the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, are also great sources of information about new policy initiatives.

Implementation

In addition to finding out about what actual policies say, it is important to ascertain how the policies are enacted. For example, just because a policy allows naloxone to be sold over the counter at pharmacies means that pharmacies are doing this. Similarly, police may still arrest someone for drug charges in violation of a local Good Samaritan law. There are various ways to determine how policy is being enacted at the local level. Observation- for example, going into pharmacies and seeing how many sell naloxone over the counter- is one strategy. Reviewing public records, such as the number of drug-related arrests, emergency room hospitalizations, drug treatment admissions, and more, is another. Finally, you can ask key stakeholders about their experiences, conducting interviews or focus groups to find out whether policies are implemented and having public impact as intended. A sample of questions you might ask in an interview or focus group is included below.

Sample Policy Implementation Assessment

A lot of information about policy implementation can be obtained through existing archival data. However, there may be times when you want to get more detailed qualitative information about how a particular policy is (or is not) being implemented. This sample assessment explores implementation of a Good Samaritan law through interviews or focus groups, but can be adapted to look at implementation of other policies.

What do you know about the laws in the state relating to drug use?

The following questions ask about drug overdose, which can be a sensitive or painful subject. Please note that you can stop at any time if you are feeling overwhelmed. Are you okay with moving forward?

Have you or someone you know ever experienced a drug overdose?

If you have experienced a drug overdose, how did you respond?

Have you or someone you know ever been stopped or arrested by the police while responding to a drug overdose? (Prompts: Tell me more about this experience. When did it happen?)

Have you heard of the Good Samaritan Law? If so, what do you know about it?

Could you talk about any instances where you or someone you know reported an overdose and weren't stop or arrested by the police because of the Good Samaritan Law?

Do you know anyone who we should talk to in our exploration of drug overdose and the Good Samaritan Law?

Is there anything else you would like to share related to what we have discussed today?

Thank you for sharing your time and experiences!

Needs

When an organization conducts a community assessment, they most often do so to determine nature or extent of the needs within the community. This is usually done with the intent of developing programs to address these community needs. Community Solutions provides a framework for conducting needs assessment, which can be found at communitysolutions.ca/pdf/needs-assessments-6ds.pdf.

Assets

An exploration of the needs of a community is unbalanced without also examining the assets present within the community to deal with the relevant problems. This is most useful when the assets are mapped out so that you can identify which areas in the community have an abundance of assets and which have a deficit. When doing asset mapping, it is important to remember that assets can be either people or institutions. People who are assets are likely to be identified through the leadership assessment referenced earlier. Institutions that are assets can be identified through key informant interviews or focus groups and/or by walking around in a community and identifying pertinent institutions that might provide support, such as community-based organizations, schools, health care centers, religious institutions, and others.

Sample Needs Assessment

This sample needs assessment is meant to be used in conjunction with the sample asset assessment that follows. The two assessments are separated for illustrative purposes. Both can and should be edited to best suit your purpose and community.

What do you see as the top three biggest challenges facing your community?

1.
2.
3.

How much of a problem is drug addiction in your community? On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all a problem and 5 is very problematic, how much of a problem is drug addiction in your community?

1 2 3 4 5

Why is drug addiction as much of an issue as you indicated above?

What resources does your community need to address the problem of drug addiction?

What are the challenges in acquiring these resources?

Sample Asset Assessment

This sample asset assessment is meant to be used in conjunction with the sample needs assessment that precedes it. The two assessments are separated for illustrative purposes. Both can and should be edited to best suit your purpose and community.

What do you see as the best things about your community?

What community strengths or resources are available to address drug addiction ?

What potential assets in your community remain untapped or underutilized?

What would be the best way to mobilize community members to address drug addiction?

Who should be involved in community efforts to address drug addiction?

Awareness Assessment

Awareness assessment entails an exploration of the extent to which community members are aware of either the challenges it faces (e.g., addiction) or the strategies and solutions to these challenges (e.g., recovery, peer recovery support services). Determining the level of awareness in the community is useful for planning awareness campaigns and advocacy education initiatives. Based on the purpose of the community assessment, you may want to focus your awareness assessment on specific groups, such as policymakers, potential partners, or service recipients, or conduct a blanket assessment of the community as a whole. As part of an awareness assessment, you may measure awareness as a binary variable (aware/not aware) and you may also look into other variables detailed below.

- **Awareness:** In the most basic type of awareness assessment, you may just ask community members whether or not they are aware of:
  - ***Community issues*** such as drug or alcohol addiction,
  - ***Community strategies*** such as peer recovery support services, or
  - ***Community solutions*** such as addiction recovery.

  Rather than explore awareness in dichotomous (aware or unaware) terms, you may want to ask community members about their awareness of issues, strategies, or solutions using a Likert scale (e.g., scale of 1 to 5). You may also try to determine specifics of awareness through the use of open-ended questions (e.g., tell me about your awareness of addiction issues among college students in the state).

- **Understanding:** In addition to general awareness, you may want to explore the understanding of community members with respect to specific relevant topics, such as addiction as a brain disorder or the distinction between treatment and recovery.

- **Importance:** Beyond awareness, you may also want to know how important issues such as drug addiction are to community members. Importance should be measured through the use of Likert scales rather than dichotomous variables.

- **Relevance:** Finally, you may want to know how relevant certain issues, strategies, or solutions are to different groups of community members, especially potential partners and policymakers. As with importance, this should be measured through the use of Likert scales.

Most of awareness assessment can be done through surveys, though you may also want to conduct focus groups or individual interviews depending on the purpose of your awareness assessment. Some tools and examples of ways to conduct awareness assessment follow.

Sample Awareness Assessment

The assessment below is meant to assess the how aware your community is about drug addiction and recovery. It is meant to be adapted to the unique circumstances of your community and your assessment process.

1. What do you know about drug use in your community? Is it a serious issue?

2. What are the main drugs used in your community? Please share the top three most commonly used drugs.
   i.
   ii.
   iii.

How much of a problem is drug addiction in your community? On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all a problem and 5 is very problematic, how much of a problem is drug addiction in your community?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all a problem				Very problematic

3. What causes drug addiction? Please select all that apply.
   - ☐ Poor decision-making
   - ☐ Immorality
   - ☐ Traumatic experiences in the past
   - ☐ Imbalance of chemicals in the brain
   - ☐ Bad parenting or upbringing
   - ☐ Other (Please explain)

4. What do you think is the best way to address drug addiction in your community?

5. What kinds of strategies or actions to address drug addiction have you seen or heard of in your community?

Readiness Assessment

If your organization intends to implement some sort of intervention, then a readiness assessment is a good prerequisite. Whether you're planning peer recovery support services or an advocacy campaign, a readiness assessment will yield important information about where your efforts will be best received and where you may need to do work to build awareness of problems, increase access to existing resources, or address other barriers.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) uses the PREVENT model, summarized below, as a framework for understanding the core aspects of readiness (Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas, 2017). As can be seen in this model, a community readiness assessment naturally follows both an environmental assessment and an awareness assessment. The PRE in PREVENT involves assessment of community needs, awareness, and assets.

- **Problem definition/agreement:** This aspect involves the identification of the need or issue as well as the relevant details of why the need exists. This may be done as part of a needs assessment (see the earlier section on environmental assessment).
- **Recognition of problem by the community:** It is also important to determine the extent to which the need or issue is recognized by the community. This may be done as part of an awareness assessment (see previous section on awareness assessment).
- **Existence of and access to resources:** The next step is to look at the resources that exist to address the need or issue as well as how accessible they are. This may be done as part of an asset assessment (see the earlier section on environmental assessment).
- **Vision and plan:** A major part of readiness involves the development of a vision and a plan for using resources to address the need or issue. The more this vision and plan are shared throughout the community, the higher the level of readiness.
- **Energy to mobilize and sustain activities:** Even with resources and a plan in place, change will not happen unless those resources can be used by the community in a sustainable manner.
- **Networking with and support of stakeholders:** Once the community has the capacity to utilize available resources, it is critical that community leaders and stakeholders are mobilized to act in unison to address the need or issue.

- **Talent, leadership structure, sense of community:** The ultimate measure of readiness is when the resources and solutions are integrated throughout the community.

The dimensions of readiness outlined in the PREVENT model can be used to develop a readiness assessment. Based on the results of this assessment, a community can be determined to be fall into one of nine stages of readiness as originally defined by Oetting and colleagues (1995). These stages are detailed below.

1. **Community readiness**: The community does not recognize the issue (e.g., drug addiction) as a problem or sees it as intractable or a problem for other communities.

2. **Denial/resistance:** Some members of the community may recognize the issue as a problem, but most community members see it as "someone else's problem".

3. **Vague awareness:** Community members are generally aware of the issue as a problem, but knowledge, motivation, and leadership are low.

4. **Preplanning:** Community members recognize the issue as a problem and feel that something should be done. While knowledge, motivation, and leadership are present, there is no clear plan in place to address the issue.

5. **Preparation:** Community members have come together and started planning activities, gathering resources together.

6. **Initiation:** The community has started to take action, but these actions are not yet based on data. Community members are being trained and are enthusiastic.

7. **Institutionalization/stabilization:** Multiple activities are taking place according to a plan, conducted by trained and experienced individuals. At this point, efforts are stable though there may still be limited data and evaluation.

8. **Confirmation/expansion:** Programs and initiatives are securely in place and leadership is focused on expanding these efforts. Community members are participating in these efforts and data are being collected and used to inform efforts.

9. **Professionalization/high level of community ownership:** Community members have high levels of knowledge of the issue and are highly involved in efforts to address it. Multiple efforts are in place to address the issue in different groups within the community. Evaluation is conducted effectively and is used to inform efforts.

Sample Readiness Assessment[1]

As with the other tools in this toolkit, this assessment should be adapted to better meet your needs.

Problem definition/agreement

What do you see as the top three greatest issues or challenges facing your community?

1.
2.
3.

On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all a problem and 5 is very problematic, how much of a problem is drug addiction in your community?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all a problem				Very problematic

Recognition of problem by the community

In your opinion, to what extent do others in the community see drug addiction as a problem?

How is drug addiction portrayed by local media?

Existence of and access to resources

What resources are available in the community to support recovery from drug addiction?

[1] Many of these questions were adapted from Ferris, Holm-Hansen, and Kelly (2011), *Assessing Community Needs and Readiness: A Toolkit for Working with Communities on ATOD Prevention.*

Vision and plan

What is the vision for recovery from drug addiction in the community?

Who shares this vision? How widely is it shared?

To what extent is this vision supported by data or research?

Energy to mobilize and sustain activities

To what extent is the community committed to addressing drug addiction and supporting recovery? Is there long-term commitment?

What events have mobilized the community?

What barriers are there to participation in activities?

What are the benefits to getting involved? What do people want to get out of their involvement?

Networking with and support of stakeholders

What local, state, or national networks exist that could connect to the community efforts?

What other community organizations or institutions should be included?

To what extent are community leaders involved? If no community leaders are involved, who are the current champions of community initiatives and activities?

Talent, leadership structure, sense of community

How do community members demonstrate civic engagement (e.g., voting, volunteering, attending government meetings)?

Does the community have a history of working together?

How stable is the community? Are there long-term residents or homeowners?

What leadership exists within the community?

Network Assessment[2]

One of the final and most complicated forms of community assessment is a network assessment. Once an intervention has been started, you may consider conducting a network assessment to determine the reach of the intervention in the community, the interconnectedness of the intervention with other community assets and resources, and/or the integration of the intervention into various community institutions. Network assessment can help you to find the answers to these and more questions.

Given the diversity of applications for network assessment, here are some case studies to illustrate the purpose and details of a network assessment.

- A health center implementing peer recovery support services wants to determine how integrated its recovery coaches are in the community and within different sub-groups of the community based on geography (e.g., neighborhood or zip code) and demography (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, sexual identity).
- A recovery community organization is looking to discover how well connected it is to other organizations and institutions supporting recovery efforts in the city.
- An advocacy organization forming a statewide network to promote systems change in support of recovery is considering how to evaluate the depth, breadth, and scope of this network along with its efficacy in bringing about positive change.

In each of these cases, what is being measured is a different sense of the functionality and effectiveness of the network in achieving specific goals.

When conducting a network assessment, there are three potential domains to consider: connectivity, health, and impact. Each of these will be explored in greater detail.

- **Connectivity:** Network connectivity refers to the capacity of the network to reach different individuals, institutions, or organizations. There are three dimensions to connectivity: scope, breadth, and depth.
- **Health:** Network health refers to the ability of the network to operate effectively and efficiently. Like network connectivity, network health is composed of three dimensions: infrastructure, impact, and resources.
- **Impact:** The success of the network is measured by its impact. In looking at impact, one should consider both what has been achieved (effectiveness), the efficiency of the approach, and the equity with which activities were conducted.

[2] Many of the elements of this description of network assessment were adapted from a network assessment model developed by RecoveryPeople, which was in turn inspired by the work of Taylor, Plastrik, Coffman, and Whatley (2014).

Connectivity

As mentioned above, the connectivity of the network looks at the degree to which it reaches and engages different individuals, groups, organizations, or institutions according to its mission and purpose. Many of the measures of network connectivity look at the quantitative number or qualitative nature of the relationships forged through the network. The three dimensions of connectivity are scope, breadth, and depth.

- ***Network scope*** is measured by the number of members of the network. Network members may be individuals (e.g., persons in recovery or recovery coaches) or they may be institutions or organizations (e.g., recovery community organizations, drug treatment centers, schools).
- ***Network breadth*** looks at how extensive the network is. This is a measure of the reach of the network, determining how well its membership represents different groups geographically and demographically. For networks whose membership consists of organizations or institutions, network breadth looks at how well the network encompasses different types of institutions, such as social service providers, faith-based institutions, and governmental agencies.
- ***Network depth*** looks at the nature of the relationships between network members to determine how strong the connections are within the network, which may be measured by the number of interactions, perception, or productivity.

Health

The health of the network is the endurance of the network, or its ability to last until its mission is achieved, as well as its flexibility, or its capacity to respond to any incidents that arise. The health of the network includes three dimensions: infrastructure, resources, and outputs.

- ***Infrastructure*** refers to the internal systems and structures that support the network, which include documentation, communications, policies and procedures, and more. Infrastructure supports participation in the network.
- ***Resources*** are what the network uses to conduct its activities and accomplish its goals. Resources can be tangible (e.g., funding, space, staff) or intangible (e.g., participation, reputation).
- ***Outputs*** , not to be confused with outcomes, are what the network accomplishes through its activities. Outputs may include the number of recovery coach sessions, the number of referrals to outside organizations, or the number of individuals reached through an advocacy campaign.

Impact

The impact of the network will be determined in part by the intended outcomes of the network as defined by the network mission and vision. Like the other domains, network impact will be evaluated on an ongoing basis. Some aspects of network impact may not be able to be assessed until some time has passed to allow outcomes to be evident. Network impact includes three dimensions: effectiveness, efficiency, and equity.

- ***Effectiveness*** is the proven capacity of the network to effect change on the individual, institutional, and/or community level. Measuring effectiveness involves examining what activities the network has engaged in and the changes or outcomes that resulted.
- ***Efficiency*** is related to, but distinct from, impact. Efficiency involves looking at the cost-effectiveness of activities based on the resources used and the impact achieved.
- ***Equity*** is a complicated process that refers to how well the activities were done in such a way as to minimize social disparities and inequities, differences in health and social outcomes by gender, race/ethnicity, class, geography, sexual identity, and more. Measuring equity involves knowing the make-up of the community and determining how well network activities reached the intended audience with a critical eye to who was not reached and why.

Process

In addition to the three domains described above, it is important to consider assessing the process by which the network formed and continues to develop. What are the membership patterns, norms, and communication mechanisms of the network and how have these changes over time? What are the motivations of long-standing network members versus those of newer network members? Process is an especially critical element for assessing social service or advocacy networks as it can help guide the future trajectory of the network.

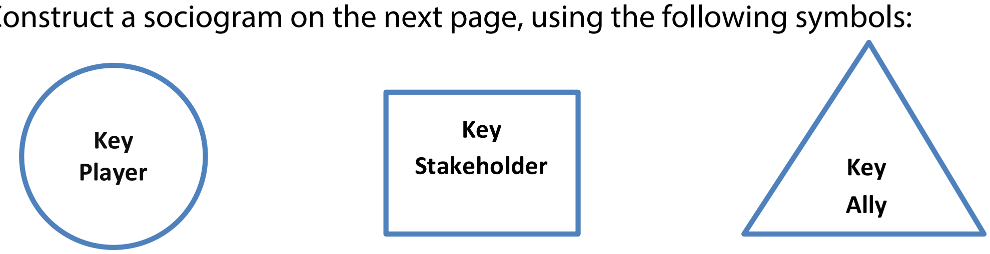
Assessing the network process will vary based on the nature of the network. Assessing the processes of social networks within communities will involve conducting focus groups or interviews with network members who have been involved in the network for different amounts of time (e.g., interviewing community members who are in different stages of recovery). Assessing the processes of social service or advocacy networks can be somewhat easier if documentation of network meetings, major correspondence, and other process activities has been maintained. Additionally or alternatively, the same processes used to assess the network process of community social networks can be used in these networks.

Network Mapping Worksheet

One of the first steps in assessing network connectivity is to map out the network. In doing this, you should consider who the assets in your community are. Who are the players, stakeholders, and allies in addressing addiction and promoting recovery? This worksheet will help you to think about the different people and groups with which you may work and how they interconnect. The result will be a sociogram, which is a visual representation or map of the relationships between individuals.

Step 1. In space below, list all of the individuals and organizations in your community that you think will be important to—or would be strategic to—connect with, engage, or involve. These may be people who are already part of the network or people who need to be integrated more into the network.

Step 2. Identify all of the key players on your list. Put a small circle by their names.
Step 3. Identify all of the major stakeholders on your list. Put a small square by their names.
Step 4. Identify individuals or groups who are not yet partners or stakeholders but who could be allies in your work. Put a small triangle by their names.
Step 5. Construct a sociogram on the next page, using the following symbols:



Sociogram

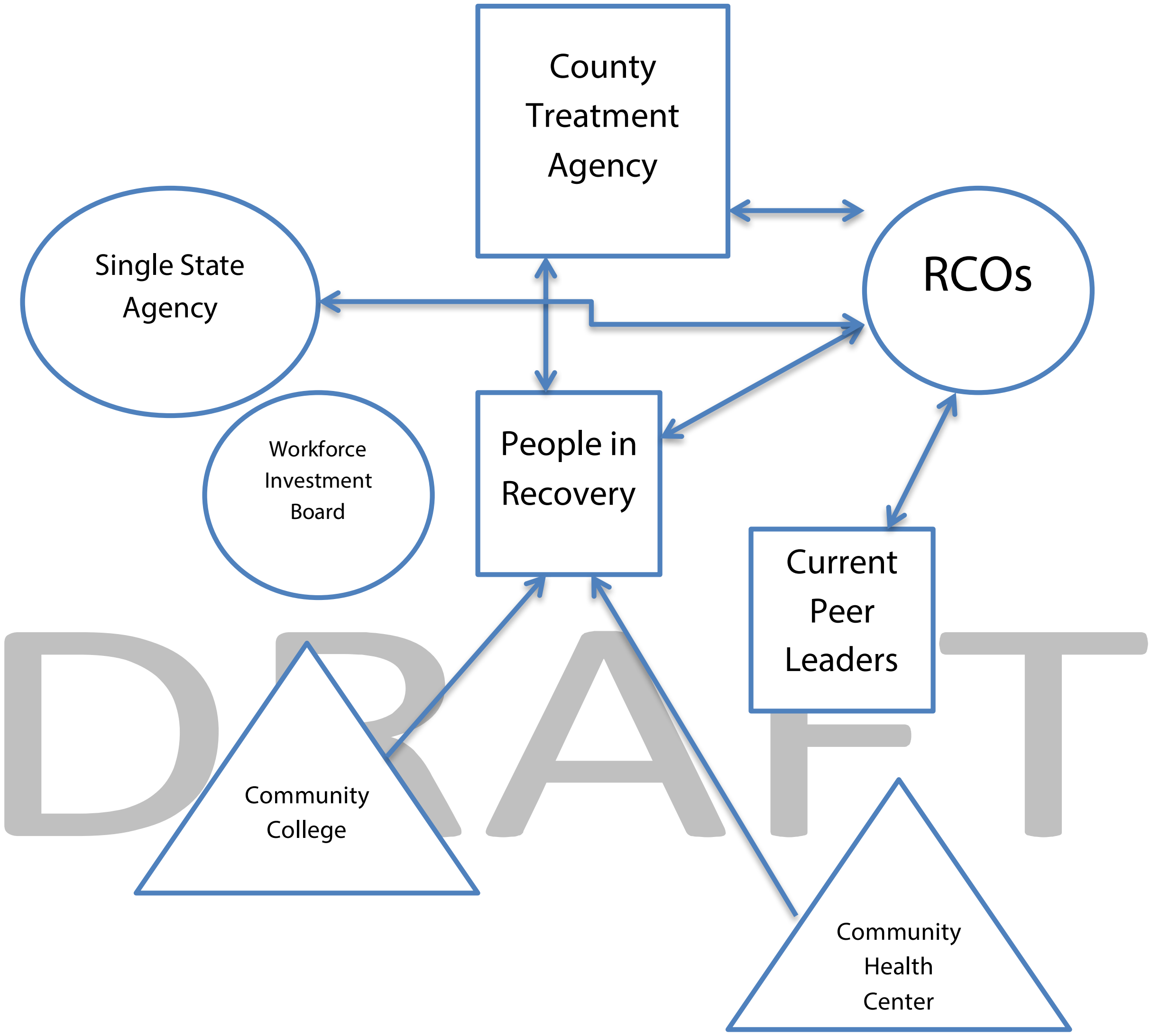
Draw an oval for each key player; use the size of the circle to show relative influence or power. Put names inside the circles.

Draw a rectangle for each major stakeholder; use the size of the square to show relative influence or power. Put names inside the squares.

Draw a triangle for each ally. Put names inside the triangles.

Draw lines with arrows to show who is connected to whom.

Sociogram Example



Network Assessment Tool

This tool is intended to assess both the health and perceived effectiveness of a network. This tool should be administered to network members, who complete it anonymously in order to ensure as much truth as possible in responses. The responses are then looked at in aggregate (collectively) to determine areas of strength and areas in need of development.

Please select the number that most closely corresponds to your level of agreement with the statements below along a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates no agreement with the statement and 5 represents complete agreement with the statement.

Network Purpose					
All members share a common purpose for the network.	1	2	3	4	5
Together, members have identified strategic goals and objectives for the network.	1	2	3	4	5
Network plans reflect network goals.	1	2	3	4	5
Network Performance					
Members are working jointly to advance network goals.	1	2	3	4	5
Members are adding value to each other's work.	1	2	3	4	5
Members are creating new knowledge or insights together.	1	2	3	4	5
The way the network communicates with stakeholders builds support for the network.	1	2	3	4	5
The network is creating value for the constituents it serves.	1	2	3	4	5
The network is able to attract additional network funds, as needed.	1	2	3	4	5
Members honor their commitments to the network.	1	2	3	4	5
The network is meeting its strategic goals and objectives.	1	2	3	4	5
Members are achieving more together than they could alone.	1	2	3	4	5

Network Operations					
Decision making processes encourage members to contribute and collaborate.	1	2	3	4	5
The network anticipates, surfaces, and addresses conflict when it arises.	1	2	3	4	5
The network's internal communications systems are serving it well.	1	2	3	4	5
All members are contributing time and resources to the network.	1	2	3	4	5
The work of the network is attuned to the comfort and energy levels of members.	1	2	3	4	5
Members reflect on network experience and adjust network practice accordingly.	1	2	3	4	5
The network has mechanisms in place to promote accountability among members (e.g., agreements, understandings).	1	2	3	4	5
Network Operations					
As a network, members have the material resources needed to advance network goals.	1	2	3	4	5
As a network, members have the skills they need to advance network goals.	1	2	3	4	5
As a network, members have the connections they needed to advance goals.	1	2	3	4	5

Please indicate any additional comments or questions in the space below.

This assessment tool is reproduced from the Network Health Scorecard, http://www.networkimpact.org/downloads/NH_Scorecard.pdf

Methods and Approaches[3]

As you can see, there are a lot of different approaches you can employ when conducting a community assessment. Each of these approaches has different benefits and different costs and limitations that you should consider when planning your community assessment.

Overview

In order to support your community assessment planning process, here is a brief overview of the different types of methods and approaches you can use to gather information along with a listing of pros and cons for each method or approach.

Method or Approach	Pros	Cons
Direct Observation Taking structured notes in a particular location or venue on resources, activities, interactions, or other elements.	• Low cost • Easy way to get a lot of information • Unobtrusive • Low chance of observation bias • Easy to pair with other methods/approaches • Sources of leads to key informants • Pairs well with mapping/GIS	• Can be time-consuming • Easily influenced by external factors • Observer objectivity may yield bias in findings • Requires skilled and/or trained observers • Requires access to locations and venues, which may be prohibitive
Interviews Structured or unstructured one-on-one directed conversations with key individuals or leaders in a community	• Low cost (assuming relatively few) • Respondents define what is important • Rapid data collection • Possible to explore issues in depth • Opportunity to clarify responses through probes	• Can be time-consuming to set up interviews with busy informants • Requires skilled and/or trained interviewers • Produces limited quantitative data • May be difficult to analyze and summarize findings

[3] Adapted from SAMHSA's *Data Collection Methods: Pros and Cons* (2017).

Method or Approach	Pros	Cons
	• Sources of leads to other data sources and other key informants	
Surveys Standardized questionnaires administered in person, over the phone, or online that ask predetermined questions	• Can be highly accurate • Can be highly reliable and valid • Allows for comparisons with other/larger populations when items come from existing instruments • Easily generates quantitative data	• Relatively high cost when done in person or over the phone • Relatively slow to design, implement, and analyze when done in person or over the phone • Accuracy depends on who and how many people sampled • Accuracy limited to willing and reachable respondents • May have low response rates, especially online • Little opportunity to explore issues in depth
Focus Groups Structured interviews with small groups of like individuals using standardized questions, follow-up questions, and exploration of other topics that arise. **Community Listening Sessions** Community listening sessions or public forums are a specific format of focus group. They are an opportunity to bring community members together to discuss issues and problem-solve.	• Low cost • Rapid data collection • Participants define what is important • Some opportunity to explore issues in depth • Opportunity to clarify responses through probes • Community listening sessions are easy to integrate into other community events • Community listening sessions may link you to key informants and other people	• Can be time-consuming to assemble groups • Produces limited quantitative data • Requires skilled and/or trained facilitators • Less control over process • Difficult to collect sensitive information • May be difficult to analyze and summarize findings

Method or Approach	Pros	Cons
	who are interested in being part of efforts	
Archival Data that have already been collected by an agency or organization and are in their records or archives	• Low cost • Relatively rapid • Unobtrusive • Usually allows for historical comparisons or trend analysis • Often allows for comparisons with larger populations	• May be difficult to access local data • Often out of date • Inconsistencies in collection standards may make trend analysis difficult or invalid • Accuracy limited by original data collection process • May not be data on knowledge, attitudes, and opinions • May not provide a complete picture of the situation

Community Assessment Report and Action Plan

Once your community assessment has been conducted and completed, it is important to develop a community assessment report. Part of the purpose of the community assessment report is to summarize and disseminate key findings from the community assessment process. Another part of the purpose is to recommend a specific action or set of actions based on the nature of community issues, needs, resources, and readiness; these actions should be summarized in the form of a community action plan.

The format of the report will depend on your stakeholders. You may consider developing a longer report with a one- to two-page executive summary that can be distributed publicly to community leaders, partner organizations, and policymakers. Alternately, you may select highlights from the report that can be distributed via social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. At minimum, your report may include the components outlined in the box below.

- **Introduction:** A brief overview of the circumstances that led to your community assessment, including what you did and why you did it. You should also touch on what you intended to assess (i.e., which components of the LEARN model) and the scope of the community as you defined it for the assessment. Much of this can be pulled from your community assessment plan.

- **Methods:** A more detailed description of what you did as part of your community assessment process. This section should detail what methods and approaches you used (see the *Methods and Approaches* section for examples) as well as what groups of community stakeholders were involved. Be sure to maintain the confidentiality of the individuals who participated in your surveys, interviews, focus groups, etc.

- **Key Findings:** This section details the important things you discovered as a result of your community assessment. Depending on the format and length, you may want to prioritize only the most important pieces of information you have discovered or you may want to be more thorough and descriptive.

- **Recommendations:** Your report should close with some sort of call to action. What steps should be taken based on the new information shared in the key findings? These recommendations may be for policymakers, organizational staff, community leaders, or even your own organization or institution.

What follows are sample templates for both the community assessment report and for the community action plan.

Community Assessment Report Template

This is a template that you can use to organize your community assessment report. You can touch briefly on each of these points for a one-page summary or go into detail for a longer report.

Introduction

Methods

Key Findings

Recommendations

Community Action Plan Template

On the next page is a sample template for a community action plan based on the findings from your community assessment process. Feel free to alter this table to fit your needs. Following is some clarification on how to complete this template.

- **Goal**: A goal is the main outcome you are working to achieve. It is the purpose for all of your activities.
- **Objective**: An objective is a measurable step taken to achieve the goal. A goal will likely have more than one objective. All objectives should be SMART or specific, measurable, achievable (or attainable), relevant (to the goal), and time-based.
- **Performance Measure**: A performance measure is how you know that you have achieved an objective. It can be a product (e.g., curriculum) or a measurable result (e.g., 75% of participants will be able to identify at least three RCOs in the state).
- **Activities**: An activity is an action taken towards the completion of an objective. Activities take less time to complete than an objective and should be listed in a logical, sequential order. Some activities may overlap in timeframe and not all activities need to be related to each other, but should all be related to the relevant objective. Each activity should have the following information listed:
    - **Projected Initiation and Completion Dates:** For each activity, an estimated start (initiation) and finish (completion) date should be included. Some activities may not have a definitive completion date as they may be conducted on an ongoing basis, in which case the completion date can be “ongoing” or a specific time frame (e.g., “monthly”, “quarterly”, “yearly”).
    - **Measure/Outcome:** The measure/outcome is the performance measure (as defined above) for each activity. It is a way to determine intermediate progress in completing the objective.

Goal 1:

Objective 1A:

Performance Measure:

ACTIVITIES	Responsible Person(s)	Projected Initiation Date	Projected Completion Date	Measure/ Outcome
Activity 1Ai:				
Activity 1Aii:				
Activity 1Aiii:				

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Resources

The following resources were used, both directly and indirectly, in the development of this toolkit.

Addiction Policy Forum, http://www.addictionpolicy.org/

Kaiser Health News, http://khn.org/topics/mental-health/

NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, http://www.naadac.org/

Pew Research Center, http://www.pewresearch.org/

United States Census, http://www.census.gov/

White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp