

Elder Abuse MDT Needs Assessment – A Worksheet

What is a Community Needs Assessment?

A needs assessment is the systematic effort to gather information from various sources that will identify the needs of elder abuse victims in your community and the resources that are available to them. It will help your community pinpoint reasons for gaps in your community’s ability to respond to elder abuse victims and identify new and future performance needs.¹

Needs assessments are a research tool. They have a clearly articulated goal, a defined audience and a pre-determined sample size. For instance, you will want to select the agencies and organizations that interface with elder abuse victims and request their participation in completing the survey. While there will be variation from community to community, this list will have a finite number of participants that qualify to participate.

Questions are drafted in advance, often in collaboration with other community partners. Most surveys incorporate as many multiple choice questions as possible to standardize responses and assist with the interpretation of data, while allowing for some open-ended questions to account for perspectives not conceived of by those who drafted the survey.

Once you have collected the responses, evaluate and summarize the data. Use this data to engage with other professionals around specified needs and to inform the development of your MDT.

Sample Goals

- To improve the coordinated response to elder abuse.
- To facilitate better elder abuse case outcomes through enhanced collaboration.
- Improving the delivery of services to elder abuse victims.

Exercise: What is your goal in conducting a needs assessment? Goals are broad intentions, as opposed to objectives which are specific and measurable. Think about the big picture. What do you hope to achieve with this survey? Draft your goal here:

Why conduct a Community Needs Assessment?

Needs assessments are not an end unto themselves. Instead, they capture the needs of a community at a moment in time. They are designed to identify gaps in services and barriers to the successful investigation and prosecution of elder abuse cases, and service delivery to elder abuse victims. They are designed to be actionable. Conducting a needs assessment will help to ensure a clear understanding of the challenges you will be facing as you develop an MDT, and the obstacles that your team should focus on to improve services to victims. Most communities have limited resources: time, money, and personnel. A needs

assessment can help you determine how to utilize limited resources wisely and effectively by focusing your efforts on the specific challenges that emerge through the use of this tool.

Choosing a Needs Assessment Tool

There are many ways to conduct a needs assessment survey. One popular way is to use a web-based survey tool. Some advantages to using a web-based survey include:

- Allowing for anonymity of the respondent
- The ability to easily assess data
- The ability to export the results to a spreadsheet

However, some communities prefer to conduct needs assessments in person, over the phone, through email, or as a mail-in paper form. You know your community best. Choose to conduct your survey in a way that you believe will result in the best possible participation rate. You may need to provide more than one option for completing the survey.

Consider an assessment tool that also works within the confines of your budget. Some web-based surveys come with free trials, or offer free limited surveys. The cost of the survey tool is not your only consideration. For instance, if you choose paper mail-in surveys, you will need to assess the staff time it will take to compile and evaluate the results.

This worksheet is designed to specifically assist with the development of a survey based needs assessment, as surveys are a commonly chosen tool. These exercises will be useful regardless of the approach that you take in developing a needs assessment due to the similarity of the development process.

Note: There are times when a survey is not the most desirable way to collect initial data for the development of an MDT. Other options include:

- Hosting a listening session
- Interviewing a focus group
- Compiling a report from existing data
- Mapping assets and resources (compiling a report of existing resources and empowering the community to effectuate change using existing channels)
- Direct observation (going into the community with a set of questions and directly observing each item on your list in an unbiased manner)

Exercise: What tool do you think would work best for your community? Why?

Who Should Participate in a Community Needs Assessment?

Define your audience. If you are creating an elder abuse case review MDT, you will want to capture the perspective of various agencies, organizations, and professionals that provide services to this population in your community, some of which may eventually become MDT members. Even if all of these agencies do not end up participating in the MDT, it is a worthwhile endeavor to glean their professional perspective on possible services gaps and the needs of elder abuse victims.

Exercise: Identify agencies, organizations, and professionals that you would like to participate in your survey. Identify a point person and contact information for each potential participant. Below is a list of possible participants to kick-start your list.

| Agency/Organization | Point Person | Contact Information |
|--|--------------|---------------------|
| Law Enforcement | | |
| District Attorney’s Office/Prosecutors | | |
| Civil Attorneys | | |
| Adult Protective Services | | |
| Ombudsman | | |
| Public Guardian/Conservator Office | | |
| Medical Examiner | | |
| Community-Based Victim Services | | |
| Systems-Based Victim Services | | |
| Geriatrician | | |
| Gero-Psychologist | | |
| Forensic Accountant | | |
| Community Service Providers (non-profit organizations) | | |
| Other Aging Services Agencies and Organizations | | |
| | | |
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Timeline Considerations

Use the *Needs Assessment Planner* to set timeline goals for each stage of developing a needs assessment to facilitate success and help track your progress. These can be internal deadlines and can have some inherent flexibility, but having a clear timeline can help you conceptualize the scope of this task and help you hold on to the big picture as you begin to grapple with the details of data collection.

Tip: Consider giving respondents 2-4 weeks to complete the needs assessment survey. This may help you obtain more responses by accounting for the hectic schedule with which many respondents contend.

Creating a Needs Assessment Dissemination Plan

You have identified your audience, chosen your survey tool (web-base, paper, interviews, etc.), and decided on a timeline. You are well on your way to creating an effective needs assessment dissemination plan.

Next, consider your messaging. You will want to draft a brief letter or email to accompany the survey that explains your goal, the need for the assessment, what you hope to accomplish (e.g., to use this information to create an MDT), and their crucial role in identifying gaps in services and forming a strong foundation for better collaboration. If you plan to create a report and share it with respondents, let them know. This can inspire individuals to participate. Do you plan to invite respondents into the process of developing an MDT based on the findings of the survey? Doing so can also be a compelling reason to participate. Be sure to clearly articulate the due date up-front to your participants.

Here is some sample language that you may find useful:

Dear colleagues,

As you may know, our organization is exploring the possibility of creating an elder abuse case review MDT. To that end we have created a community needs assessment to ascertain the current elder abuse services landscape and to identify gaps in services and collaboration. We plan to compile a report of our findings in which we will make recommendations about how an elder abuse MDT might serve to close service gaps and strengthen collaboration. The goal of this survey is to identify ways in which we might optimize a coordinated response to elder abuse (Insert your own goal).

You are a vital participant in this survey. Your insight and evaluation of services and community needs are the foundation of our inquiry. We recognize the value of your time and have attempted to draft a survey that meets our needs while being respectful of your busy schedule. We humbly request your participation in this survey, which is due on (insert due date).

You may contact (insert contact person) with thoughts, concerns or questions. Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Tip: Identify influential allies who are willing to encourage participation within their organization. Have personalized contact with these individuals ahead of disseminating your needs assessment survey to secure their approval and request their assistance.

Exercise: Draft correspondence to accompany your needs assessment survey.

Drafting a Needs Assessment

You are now ready to work on the heart of your project – drafting survey questions. This is where you will dig in and create a tool to uncover the needs of your community.

Consider creating a survey that will allow for anonymous responses to facilitate truthful and direct dialog regarding problems. You may want to break your survey into two components:

- A **Self-Assessment** will ask organizations to summarize key information about their own services and clients.
- The **Needs Assessment** will ask questions about service barriers, community needs, and other problem areas. This structure will help to better identify the services that exist in the community, and who is receiving those services. It also allows for the second component of the survey to be anonymous and therefore more forthright.

You may want to assess:

- Resources available in your community to support the MDT
- Barriers that will need to be addressedⁱⁱ
- Existing MDTs (and coordinate with existing MDTs to eliminate redundancy; one community found a “...confusing array of elder abuse teams...”ⁱⁱⁱ)
- Special populations that are in need of services

Sample questions to consider

Identifying current services and client’s served: Sample self-assessment questions.

- What services do you provide to elder abuse victims?
- Identify the demographics of your clients:
 - Average and median age
 - Zip code or neighborhood
 - Health concerns, disabilities, or special needs
- Service Accessibility
 - Languages spoken
 - Hours open
 - Locations

- Accessible by public transportation
- Size of staff relative to clients (case load evaluation)
- What type of community outreach/advertising does your organization conduct?
- Training
 - Does your organization provide specific elder abuse training?
 - Does your organization participate in cross-training with other agencies, organizations, or professions? If so, please note specific trainings.
 - Do you have any cross-training needs?

Identifying barriers to services - Sample needs assessment questions:

- Please rate your familiarity with the following agencies/organizations. (List agencies and organizations in your area. Provide a scale of 1-5 with 1 being “completely unfamiliar” and 5 being “I work closely with this agency/organization”.)
- With which agencies/organizations would you like to form a stronger working relationship? (List agencies and organizations in your area, and leave space for respondents to include additional entries.)
- What do you perceive to be the biggest barrier to positive elder abuse case outcomes? (open-ended question)
- What teams or meetings do you currently participate in that serve elder abuse clients? (List teams and meetings that you are familiar with and leave space for respondents to write in additional teams or meetings.)
- Have you observed that your clients have needs that your organization is unable to meet either because they fall outside of your mission, or for other reasons? If yes, please explain. (open-ended question)
- Which of these common barriers to collaboration have you encountered in the last year? (List common barriers. Sample answers are provided below. See chapter 10 of the guide for additional ideas.)
 - Differences in organizational culture including:
 - Industry-specific language and terminology
 - Policies related to confidentiality
 - Conflicting goals or outcome priorities
 - Organizational challenges including:
 - Frequent or continual reorganization
 - Frequent staff turnover
 - Shortage of professionals (e.g., neuropsychologists)
 - Funding challenges
 - Differences among collaborators including:
 - Lack of understanding of other’s professional role and responsibilities
 - Lack of professional cross-training
 - Lack of trust among professionals, departments, or organizations
 - Professional barriers including:
 - Feeling overwhelmed or “burned out” by case load
 - Lack of access to resources and interventions on behalf of victims
 - Lack of appropriate or needed training (e.g., elder financial abuse, forensic markers of physical abuse, signs of sexual abuse, cognitive functioning, etc.)

Exercise: What questions will assist you to identify gaps in services and barriers to overcome? Draft survey questions here. (Consider asking community partners to help you think through these questions once you have created a draft.)



Collecting Data

Track your responses by profession in order to target agencies that have not responded for additional outreach efforts. If you are not getting the responses that you need, try sending regular reminders, calling key point people at those agencies, or setting up a meeting to discuss barriers to participation.

Tip: If you put forth a good effort to collect responses and certain agencies are still not participating, do not despair. What some might view as a setback could actually be a valuable opportunity – you may have just discovered your first barrier to creating a MDT. Needs assessments are designed to identify such barriers. Include this information in your report and make recommendations (if possible) about bridging any inter-agency divides and reaching out to service providers that were not keen on participating in the survey.

Evaluating Data

Tabulate the results of your needs assessment survey. This will be easier for close-ended questions (e.g., multiple choice questions). For open-ended questions, try to organize responses into categories.

Look for and document trends in responses. Note emerging needs, system's issues, barriers to services, and other significant findings.

Drafting a Report

All of your effort has met its purpose in the drafting of your needs assessment report. Now that you have a clearer understanding of the issues and barriers facing your community, you can begin to suggest solutions and work toward better elder abuse case outcomes through the development of an MDT tailored to your specific community.

Keep the following in mind as you draft your report:

- It may be desirable to illustrate the current response to elder abuse in comparison with how you envision the MDT responding to these cases.
- Try to incorporate visual interpretations of your data where possible. Charts and graphs can help people visualize the information you are presenting.
- Note problems and make recommendations. It can be overwhelming to bring the needs of your community into such sharp focus. Propose solutions, offer recommendations, and bring the community into the process of problem solving.

Bravo!

A community needs assessment is a large undertaking. Take a moment to recognize all of the hard work that has gone into this project. Thank your participants, check this off your list, and give yourself a well-deserved pat on the back.

Endnotes

- i. See OVC online toolkit Guide to Conducting a Needs Assessment, available at <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taresources/OVCTAGuides/ConductingNeedsAssessment/pfv.html>); see also <http://www.centeronelderabuse.org/docs/A-Collaborative-Approach-to-Multidisciplinary-Teams-in-Sonoma-County.092812.pdf> and Reilly, B. A., Trahan, C., Hazelett, S., Istenes, N., Cafalu, C., & Dyer, C. B. (n.d.). Guidance manual for: Medical professionals forming an interdisciplinary elder mistreatment team (pp. 33-34).
- ii. Reilly, B. A., Trahan, C., Hazelett, S., Istenes, N., Cafalu, C., & Dyer, C. B. (n.d.). Guidance manual for: Medical professionals forming an interdisciplinary elder mistreatment team (p. 95)
- iii. Schneider, D. C., Mosqueda, L., Falk, E., & Huba, G. J. (2010). Elder abuse forensic centers. *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect*, 22(3-4), 255-274.