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How Do We Quantify Community Need?

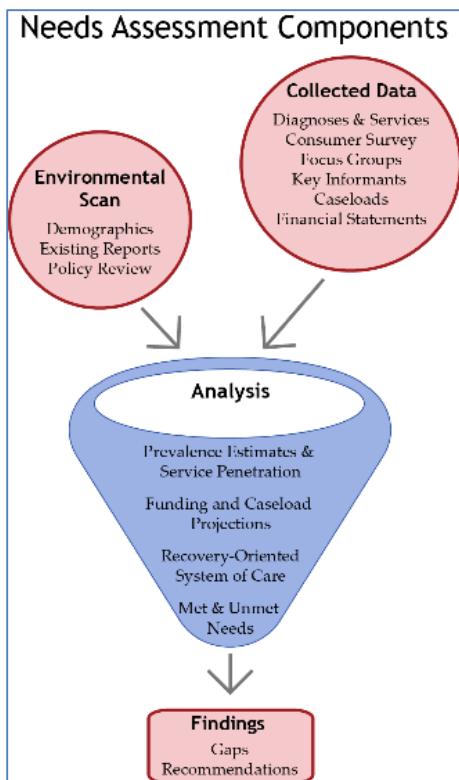
By Emily Campbell, Associate Director; Director of Applied Research, Williamson Fellow

Communities are constantly changing. With limited resources available to address health, social, and economic issues, how is an organization to choose between competing priorities? Organizations frequently contact The Center for Community Solutions seeking help to assess needs. Sometimes these groups are attempting to better understand the barriers their clients are facing. Others wonder if their efforts are well-targeted. Some are considering expanding into a new geographic area or adding to the menu of services they provide. In the first two months of 2017, Community Solutions completed three needs assessment projects: looking at how Cleveland Rape Crisis Center might reach more clients, examining housing needs of people living with HIV/AIDS for the Ryan White Part A program and Cuyahoga County Board of Health, and conducting a survey of older adult residents for the Age-Friendly Columbus initiative. The common thread through these projects, and all the needs assessments Community Solutions has participated in, is the desire to use data to make informed decisions.

Community Solutions approaches all needs assessments as opportunities to provide clarity about the scope and nature of community conditions. We believe that needs assessments are critical to information-based planning and decision-making processes and to ensure that resources are well-aligned and that services are provided as efficiently and effectively as possible.

We often start by looking at outside information. No needs assessment can reach the entire population of people who might be affected by a particular condition. Understanding the scope of an issue is critical to designing a response. Are there 100 people impacted or 100,000? Outside data from reliable, timely sources can help organizations understand the broader community environment and gain a sense of how deep their services reach into it. Sometimes, this means reviewing and summarizing previously published reports and existing research. Most often, Community Solutions relies on public data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and state agencies.

It is even better when we can use data that the organization is already collecting to compare their clients with the overall population they are seeking to serve. Most groups working in the health and social service arena are collecting some sort of data about their clients and the organization's activities. The demographics or geographic distribution of current clients can be matched against outside data to identify where there might be unmet needs. Looking at which services are most frequently used or what outcomes clients are achieving, for example, allows us to tailor our findings to the particulars of an organization. Most of the time, if something surprising appears in the data, the organization with whom we are partnering can tell us why. Perhaps funding increased or decreased for a particular service, the departure of a caseworker meant that their capacity was temporarily reduced, or outside factors caused a spike in need.



This shows the importance of examining and describing the environment in which an organization is operating, so that we can put our findings into context. What developments on the policy front may have made the work of the organization easier or more difficult? Is there something happening in

receiving assistance. To go beyond the types of quantitative information best suited to collection via survey, we often recommend conducting focus groups with clients. These facilitated conversations enable us to dig deeper and allow us to better understand the findings from a survey.

Finally, we rely on “experts” to help us understand the outcome of other data sources. People who are working every day to address community conditions are usually very aware of what is helping and what could be improved. In contrast to those who are living the experience, these experts can often step back and see patterns. Front-line staff or direct service providers often identify changes which make things easier or more difficult for their clients, even before the broader community recognizes the shift or it shows up in external data. They can identify opportunities—leverage points which might be exploited to improve services or their delivery—and the challenges—obstacles to making progress on a particular issue or for a population. To gather intelligence from experts, we conduct a provider survey, undertake key informant interviews, or hold a focus group.

Once Community Solutions has collected different kinds of information from a number of sources, we typically analyze them separately, then bring them together to draw conclusions and identify challenges and opportunities. The exact approach we take to any particular research project is determined by the questions we are seeking to answer, but we always rely on several sources of data and intelligence. We have found that health, social, and economic issues are complex, and so is the process needed to assess them.



Meet the Author: Emily Campbell

Emily Campbell joined The Center for Community Solutions in May, 2007. As Associate Director she provides direction and maintains oversight of Community Solutions’ programs, projects, processes, and functions. She also directs the Applied Research Team, guiding staff members who examine a variety of health, social, and economic conditions. Her research and analysis includes work on poverty, public and private funding of health and social services, and budget

the community or country more broadly which is impacting clients? For example, Medicaid expansion provided a payer for a wide range of clients who were previously uninsured. On the other hand, long waiting lists for housing vouchers means that many clients who would qualify for these services cannot access them.

While external data, internal measures, and environmental context are important, none of that analysis can replace the valuable intelligence gained from posing questions directly to experts or clients. Often the questions that an organization is seeking to understand via a needs assessment can only be answered by the people who are experiencing the issue. Community Solutions has been building our capacity to survey clients and vulnerable populations directly. This is not only a powerful way to ensure that the recipient voice is included in the process, it also provides information that is simply not available from other sources.

For example, when we ask about services, we often ask people to choose between “I did not need this service/ I needed this service and got it/ I needed this service and did not get it.” In this way, we are able to identify met and unmet needs as perceived by those who are

and fiscal issues. She has consulted with numerous nonprofits, foundations, and government agencies to provide data and public policy decision support.

The State Budget Evolves Quickly!
Follow its progress with CCS Budget Blogs



New! Ohio Congressional District Profiles

By Kate Warren, Policy & Planning Associate/Research

This week, Community Solutions released [detailed profiles of all Ohio Congressional districts](#). As congressional representatives consider important legislation that impacts Ohioans, these profiles shed light on the number of people who could be impacted by policy changes. The profiles include basic demographic information about each district, as well as data on employment and income, poverty, education, housing, and health. For example, they include the number of persons enrolled in Medicaid, the number eligible to receive assistance from a food bank, and teen birth rates. [Find them here](#).

Legislative Profile: Ohio House District 2
Representative Mark J. Romanuk
Berkshire County

Demographics	Ohio's 2
Total Population	122,312
Under age 18	21.5%
Age 18-64	66.6%
Age 65+	11.6%
Racial/Ethnicity	
White	87.0%
Black/African American	7.9%
Asian/Pac. Islander	0.7%
Other (more than one race)	0.3%
Hispanic or Latin (of any race)	1.7%
Disability Status	
Works a Disability	14.6%

19,504 People in House District 2 lived in poverty. For a single parent with two kids, their annual household income was below \$19,096.

Employment & Income	District 2
Labor Force Participation (Age 16+)	58.4%
Median household income	\$48,817
Public benefits income	17.1%
Households with social security income	17.1%
Households that received SNAP (food stamps)	17.1%

Poverty	District 2
Persons living below poverty	17.0%
Children (Age 0-17) living below poverty	26.7%
Families with children living below poverty	23.7%
Seniors (Age 65+) living below poverty	7.8%
Persons in deep poverty (under 50% of poverty)	6.6%
Persons in or near poverty (under 200% of poverty)	21.0%

44,768 People are eligible to receive assistance from food banks in House District 2. In Ohio, people who live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level are eligible to receive food bank benefits.

Note: The right hand column of each table contains a (1) or a (2) for each variable. (1) indicates that the value is equal or higher than the median district. (2) indicates that the value is lower than the median district.

John Corlett, CCS president and executive director, noted, “There are people in every congressional district around the state who are struggling to make ends meet. These profiles can give legislators valuable perspective on how important health and human services are to their constituents.”

The large number of people in every district around the state receiving Medicaid is particularly striking. In District 16, which has the fewest number of Medicaid recipients, there are over 76 thousand people on

Medicaid. District 11, which borders District 16, has the highest number of Medicaid recipients, with over 240 thousand people receiving their health insurance through this vital program. For a variety of reasons, we believe that the Census estimates of Medicaid recipients are lower than the actual number of people on Medicaid, so in all likelihood, these districts have even more people who would suffer if there was a change to the program.

The profiles are also a valuable tool for people engaged in advocacy efforts around the state. While poverty rates, educational attainment rates, teen birth rates, and other figures included in the profiles vary by district, changes to federal policy related to the health and human services safety net would impact hundreds of thousands of people around the state who are struggling.

Meet the Author: Kate Warren



Kate Warren joined Community Solutions in May, 2014, and serves as a policy and planning associate with the Research team on applied research, analysis, mapping, and data visualization. She has created resources for the community including county

health and human services profiles, Cleveland neighborhood profiles, and neighborhood asset maps. She has worked with a variety of organizations in Greater Cleveland to help them assess the communities they serve, build capacity, and better utilize data to inform their work.

Repeal of ACA Would Deepen “Benefit Cliff”

Emily Campbell (March, 2017)

The “let’s face it we all have those days where we drop our phones in the toilet (and yeah sometimes forget to take our birth control)” birth control.

Whoops-proof in NEO: Findings from Implementation of Long-acting Reversible Contraception Awareness Campaign

Melissa Federman & Emily Campbell (February, 2017)

SAVE THE DATE: October 20, 2017
Annual Celebration of Human Services!

8a-1:30p / Hilton Garden Inn, Cleveland Downtown

McCullough Lecture, \$25K Anisfield-Wolf Memorial Award,
MTV Awards, Public Service Awards

Annual Awards Schedule

Each year, Community Solutions invites nominations for special community awards at our **Celebration of Human Services**. They include:



Anisfield-Wolf Memorial Award: A \$25,000 prize to a nonprofit organization for outstanding service.



Most Treasured Volunteer Awards: Honoring people who help people in Northeast Ohio.

To help you plan for and prepare your nominations, here is the schedule for this year's awards submissions:

- **May 1:** Nomination forms available online at www.CommunitySolutions.com
- **June 30:** Deadline for nominations
- **October 20:** Award presentations

Recent Media Notes

- The *Akron Beacon Journal* editorial, "[House Republicans apply the Medicaid squeeze](#)," cites *Per Capita Cuts: Proposed American Health Care Act Costs Ohio \$19-26 Billion*, by Policy Fellow **Loren Anthes**, (3/13/17) The same report was quoted in 89.7 WKSU's "[Ohio House Democratic Leaders Says It's Possible to Save Medicaid Expansion](#)" and 91.7 WXU/88.5 WMUB's "[House Dem Leaders Says It's Possible to Save Medicaid Expansion in Ohio](#)," (3/15/17).
- Policy Fellow **Loren Anthes** was a featured guest on 90.3WCPN *Sound of Ideas*' "[Elementary Suspensions: Medicaid Impact from GOP Proposal; St. John Passion](#)," (3/9/17)

- Research Fellow **Joe Ahern's** [Demographic Profile of the Labor Force in Northeast Ohio, 2011-2013](#) report was incorporated in the regional workforce plan mentioned in *Crain's Cleveland Business* "[Regional workforce plan will put emphasis on collaboration](#)," (3/5/17)
- [Legislative District Profiles](#) were noted and Policy team members **Tara Britton** and **Kate Warren** were quoted extensively, including: *The Columbus Dispatch's* "[Stark differences divide Ohio's GOP, Democratic legislative districts](#)" (3/5/17) and "[Database: Ohio legislative district demographics](#)" (3/2/17), [WCBE](#), [WCPN](#), [WKSU](#), [WOSU](#), [Capitol Monitor](#), [The Hannah Report](#), and [Gongwer](#).
- Research Fellow **Emily Muttillo** was quoted in *Freshwater Cleveland's*, "[Northeast Ohio Agencies Prepare for Booming 'Silver Tsunami'](#)," (2/9/17)
- President and Executive Director **John Corlett's** op-ed, "[No Repeal - Without a Clear Replacement that does No Harm](#)," was featured in the *Akron Beacon Journal*. (2/8/17)
- Data from a survey Community Solutions developed, conducted, and analyzed was featured in *ThisWeek Community News'* "[Age-Friendly Columbus survey: Elderly like city but say bus stops difficult to reach](#)," (2/7/17)



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Community Solutions is proud to sponsor #CIFF41's "Fight Hate With Love."

For more information on times and dates, as well as how to get tickets, [click here](#).

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info@CommunitySolutions.com
www.CommunitySolutions.com