



Maine's Comprehensive State Literacy Plan

www.maine.gov/doe/literacy-for-me

Community-Based Literacy Needs Assessment

A *Literacy Needs Assessment* is a planning tool used to determine the gap between a community's current literacy capacity and its goals. It takes stock of what services are available and how well they are working. The needs assessment also helps a community determine its unmet literacy needs. It should provide information and analysis of the literacy landscape from a social, demographic, economic, and educational perspective. This information can then be utilized to inform the development of a comprehensive community-based literacy plan that capitalizes on the community's resources and addresses identified needs in an effort to raise literacy achievement across the community.

An Overview of the Needs Assessment Process

Before developing and completing a needs assessment to inform the planning work, the Community Literacy team will craft a literacy vision for their community and will draft literacy goals for their comprehensive plan. These steps will help to guide the needs assessment process. After conducting the needs assessment, the team can use the information to refine goals and develop a plan. Members of the Community Literacy Team can develop and administer the needs assessment, and may want to seek input and assistance from other community partners with expertise in literacy.

The first step in crafting a needs assessment is to decide what information would be useful to collect. Once that is determined, methods for collecting the information can be considered along with deciding who within the community can provide the information. Once the information has been collected, it can be analyzed and used to inform goal setting and plan development. Details about how to engage in each of the parts of the needs assessment process are described here.

Step 1: What does our team need to know?

In order to plan what is best for your community, you will need to take action in response to the following questions:

1. What do we need to learn about literacy in our community?

Action: Using the expertise of literacy team members and other community partners, brainstorm the information the team wants to know and from whom. When brainstorming, be sure to consider the six components of comprehensive planning across the continuum of birth to adulthood:

- Leadership
- System-wide Commitment and Partnerships
- Standards and Aligned Curriculum
- Instruction and Intervention
- Assessment
- Professional Learning

Action: Identify your community's strengths related to literacy.

Action: Identify all literacy challenges facing your community.

2. Where can this information be found?

Action: Develop a list of the agencies or organizations that will have this information and their contacts.

3. How will we gather the information?

Action: Determine how information will be gathered. Match information gathering methods (e.g. survey, focus groups) to the various groups/sources from which it will be collected.

Action: Advertising the literacy planning effort will help community members be prepared to receive a survey or be invited to a focus group.

4. Who will gather the information?

Action: Literacy team members should divide up the information gathering tasks. Consider experience of team members with particular information gathering strategies as well as knowledge of particular audiences.

5. Who will analyze and report the findings?

Action: Based on the type of data collected, determine who will analyze the information.

6. What should the final report look like?

Action: Consider how the information will be presented in a way that is supportive to the planning process and which is easy to understand.

7. How will we use this assessment and analysis?

Action: The findings from the Community Literacy Needs Assessment should guide the goal setting and planning process.

Action: The information collected may also be helpful in writing grants to obtain funding for plan implementation

Step 2: What sources of information should we access?

Your team will want to collect information/data from a wide range of sources. This is one of the reasons it is important to have a diverse group of participants. Your team will want to gather information about what is currently happening (or not happening) that supports the six components of comprehensive literacy planning across the birth-adult continuum.

- Leadership
- System-wide Commitment and Partnerships
- Standards and Aligned Curriculum
- Instruction and Intervention
- Assessment
- Professional Learning

Additionally, you will want to explore the effectiveness of these services and activities by collecting specific data. The following are sources of data you may want to collect from specific groups:

Early Childhood Educators

- End of preschool assessment information
- Number and/or percent of children receiving CDS (special needs) services
- Number and/or percent of teachers with associates, bachelors, or masters in early childhood education

K-12 Teachers & Administrators

- Kindergarten entry data from screenings
- Literacy assessment scores at the end of each grade
- Number or percent of children who were proficient, needed additional help, or required intensive instruction in relationship to literacy achievement measures
- Percentage of students receiving special education and English Language Learner services
- Poverty rates for school system
- NECAP scores at 4th, 8th, and 11th grades
- High school graduation rates
- School Attendance rates
- College attendance rate

Higher Education Faculty & Administrators

- Percent of students who need remedial English courses
- Percent of students who do not complete degrees and why

Local Government

- Unemployment rates
- Incarceration rates
- Earnings data
- Census data:
 - Number of years of schooling.
 - Number of people who speak a language other than English,
 - Number of community members born outside the US.

Community Agencies/Health Care

- Literacy programs available, populations served & data on success
- Civic organizations and services provided
- “Raising Readers” and other health care based literacy initiatives available, level of participation, and data on success

Business Leaders

- Percent of workers who require literacy supports and methods of supplying that support



Step 3: From whom do we collect the information we need?

Although this will vary among communities, the following is a sample list of potential groups/individuals who might be involved in a community needs assessment and their spheres of influence:

Early Childhood

- Family child care
- Center-based child care (for-profit, non-profit, & faith-based)
- Public Pre-K
- Head Start
- Home visitors

K-12

- Superintendent(s)
- Principals
- Literacy specialists
- Librarians
- Curriculum coordinators
- Teachers
- Parents

Adult Literacy

- Adult literacy/Adult education
- Family literacy
- Senior literacy

Higher Education

- 2 & 4 year colleges-faculty, students, administration

Community Members

- Refugee & Immigrant population leaders
- Native American population leaders
- Arts and culture-museums, galleries
- Local newspapers or media
- Potential funders-philanthropic organizations, local businesses
- Community members enrolled in literacy programs

- Community members not enrolled in programs

Local Government

- Mayor
- Town Council representatives
- School Committee
- Social Services-DHHS, foster care
- Correctional programs

Community Agencies/Health Care

- Pediatricians and family practice providers
- Public health nurses
- Salvation Army
- Goodwill
- Regional United Way
- Library
- Lions Club
- Rotary Club
- Elks Club

Business

- Chamber of Commerce
- Local business leaders (small or large)
- Technology/computer businesses & training programs
- Workforce investment system-local training sites

Religious institutions

- Churches
- Synagogues
- Mosques



Step 4: How do we gather the information we need?

There are four major methods for gathering information when conducting a needs assessment.

1. Online or written questionnaires or surveys
2. Local data collection
3. Oral interviews (in person or by phone)
4. Focus groups

The Guide to Performance Management for Community Literacy Coalitions provides in-depth information on using surveys and questionnaires. This guide can be obtained at: <http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/NIFLCommunityLiteracyReport.pdf>.

Sample surveys and focus group questions are included in the Appendix.

Community Assessment Tools from Rotary International has more suggestions and details on the various ways to collect community information, which can be applied to the literacy needs assessment: http://www.rotary.org/ridocuments/en_pdf/605c_en.pdf.

Step 5: How do we analyze and organize our data?

After collecting information, it will need to be analyzed. This can be accomplished by team members with particular expertise related to the types of information collected. Teams might also consider securing a researcher or consultant to assist them with this analysis, depending on the amount and detail of the data collected.

Once information collected in the needs assessment is analyzed, it will be helpful to organize it in a manner that will enable the team to use it for refining goals and constructing the plan. Your team may want to organize using the six critical components found in *Literacy for ME: Maine's Comprehensive State Literacy Plan* and develop a chart around each sphere of influence or stakeholder cluster (e.g. early childhood, school age, higher education, community providers, etc.). Tables 1 and 2 (page 7) are examples of organizational structures. Table 1 is set up to focus on six components as they apply to spheres of influence. Table 2 is designed up to compare information across spheres of influence against one component. These can be modified for spheres of influence and components.

Table 1: Sphere of Influence: Early Childhood Educators

<i>Literacy for ME Component</i>	Evidence/Strengths	Challenges/Needs
1. Strong Leadership		
2. System-wide Commitment & Partnerships		
3. Standards & Curriculum		
4. Instruction & Intervention		
5. Assessment		
6. Professional Learning		

Table 2: Literacy for ME Component: Strong Leadership

Sphere of Influence	Evidence/Strengths	Challenges/Needs
Early Childhood Educators		
K-12 Educators		
Adult Literacy		
Higher Education		
Community Members		

Resources

The *Literacy for ME* Community-Based Needs Assessment was developed by utilizing the following resources. These resources contain many helpful tools related to needs assessment tool development and may be useful to explore as a community-based literacy needs assessment is being constructed.

A Community Assessment Guide: A Brief Guide on How to Conduct a Needs Assessment
http://www.luc.edu/curl/pdfs/A_Community_Needs_Assessment_Guide_.pdf

A Quick Guide to Community Literacy Needs Assessments
http://www.nald.ca/library/learning/sln/lit_needs_assessments/lit_needs_assessments.pdf

Community Assessment Tools – A Companion Piece to Communities in Action: A Guide to Effective Projects
http://www.rotary.org/ridocuments/en_pdf/605c_en.pdf

Community Literacy Planning Guide
http://www.2010legaciesnow.com/fileadmin/user_upload/Embrace_Learning/PDF/LiteracyNow_Guide.pdf

The Guide to Performance Management for Community Literacy Coalitions
<http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/NIFLCommunityLiteracyReport.pdf>

Appendix

Sample questions for a survey for organizations that provide literacy services/resources:

1. Logistical information:

Organization	Zip Code
Chief Executive Name	Phone
Mailing Address	Literacy Program Coordinator Name/Position
Physical Address	E-mail
City/Town	Website
State	

2. 501(c3) status? Yes/No

3. Type of Literacy Services provided (select all that apply):

Home Visiting	Vocational English for Speakers of Other Languages (VESOL)
Early Childhood (Birth to 5 years old)	Native Language Literacy
Homework Help	Volunteer Tutoring Literacy for Incarcerated Youth Adults
Subject Tutoring	GED Instruction/Test Preparation
Literacy Testing	GED Testing On-Site
Out-of-school	Workplace Literacy Citizenship
Youth Literacy Programs	Parent Education
Learning Disability Assessment	Family Literacy
Learning Disability Tutoring	Health Literacy
Adult Basic Reading and Writing (ABE) Basic Math	Financial Literacy
ELL Instruction	Computer Literacy

4. Approximately how many clients did your organization provide literacy services to in the past fiscal year?

5. Does your organization provide literacy services at the physical address provided in Question 1, or at other locations?

On site only On site and at other locations Other locations only

6. If literacy services are provided at other locations, please list the locations where literacy services are provided.

7. What percentage of your staff involved in literacy initiatives hold appropriate certification for their roles?

8. If your organization requires a pre-test for new clients to determine their baseline literacy levels prior to receiving services, please describe your pre-test procedure, including types of assessments used. If you do not use pre-tests, please describe the metrics or measurements you use.

9. Please describe the tracking system or database that your agency uses to evaluate the success of your program.

10. Which of the following funding sources did your literacy services receive in the last fiscal year? (Select all that apply)

Foundations or Corporations (please list by name)

Foundations (e.g. community foundation, corporate, United Way)

Local Government (e.g. Community Block Grant)

Individual Donors

Public Schools

Events/Fundraising

State Government (please specify)

Other (please specify)

Federal Government (e.g. Workforce Investment Act I or II)

11. Describe the external factors in your literacy organization that affect provision of literacy services, your thoughts on collaboration, and your recommendations for change.

12. Describe the internal factors in your organization that affect provision of literacy services, your thoughts on collaboration, and recommendations for change.

13. Please enter the name of each organization you partner with and, if applicable, the name of any grants that jointly fund that collaborative effort. If you do not collaborate with any organizations, simply write N/A.

14. Please define the literacy need(s) your organization addresses, the level of need that exists, and your capacity to meet that need.



Sample questions for a focus group survey (Children and Youth):

1. Current literacy habits:
What are you reading right now/what's the last thing you read?
Is/was it for school or for pleasure?
What are you writing currently/what was the last thing you wrote?
Is/was it for school or pleasure?
Do you have time to talk about what you are reading, writing, or learning about with your classmates?
2. What kinds of materials do you read? [show of hands for each choice]
Books? Magazines (which ones)? Newspapers (which ones)?
On the Internet? Other (ask them to specify)? _____
3. Do you see your parents or siblings read?
What do they read? Do they encourage you to read?
Do you see your parents or siblings writing?
What do they write? Do they encourage you to write?
4. How do you feel about reading?
5. How do you feel about writing?
6. On a scale of 1-10, how much do you like to read?
7. On a scale of 1-10, how much do you like to write?
8. Is reading or writing (ever) fun? Why or why not?
9. What do you like to read/write about?
10. What don't you like to read/write about?
11. Are there times when you find reading difficult?
What makes it difficult?
12. Do you think reading and writing are important? Why?
13. How does reading you do today affect your future?
14. If you were to design a reading or writing program, what would it be like?
15. How would you convince your friends to come?
16. What would make you want to read or write more? I would read more if...

Sample questions for a focus group survey (parents):

1. How important is reading to your child's success? Why?
2. How important is writing to your child's success? Why?
3. How are your children doing with reading and writing?
 - a. What do they like to read and write?
 - b. Are they making steady progress as readers and writers?
 - c. What motivates or encourages your child to read?
 - d. What are the barriers or things that keep them from reading or writing more?
4. What are the most important things parents can do to help their children with reading and writing?
5. Is there anything that keeps parents from helping their children with reading and writing?
6. Are there things schools or childcare programs can do to better work with parents on aspects of literacy like reading, writing, speaking, and listening (e.g., better communication about your child's progress, where/how you can get help, what they're expected to know and be able to do in their current grade, after-school programs, etc.)?
7. How can our community help children to be excellent readers and writers?
8. What supports can neighbors, friends, and community organizations provide to ensure your child's success with reading and writing?

Sample questions for a focus group survey (adult English language learners):

1. What do you read (any language) for fun?
Books Magazines Newspapers Internet
2. What do you read in English for fun?
3. When is reading (English) fun and enjoyable? What do you like to read about?
4. When is reading (English) particularly difficult? What are the barriers that keep you from learning English or make it difficult?
5. What life experiences have affected your ability to read and write?
6. What services do you use now to improve your reading, writing, speaking, and listening?
7. How could those be changed to work better for you?
8. Are there other organizations in the city that you wish would offer literacy services? (probe)
9. If you were to start a new reading and writing program for people like you (your friends and family), what would it be like? Where would it be held? When? What type of activities would it involve?

Sample questions for a focus group survey (community-based organizations, teachers, librarians, etc.):

1. What external factors are affecting literacy levels of children, youth and adults in our community?
2. How do you think we can best address these factors as a community?
3. What are the greatest internal strengths of your agency in addressing the literacy needs of your targeted learners?
4. What are the greatest internal challenges your agency faces in addressing the literacy needs of your targeted learners?
5. What are your issues, if any with:
Paid Staff (e.g. recruiting qualified staff, skills training or staff development)
Volunteers (e.g. recruiting, qualifications, hiring, training, etc.)
6. Do you have quality standards/best practices in place? If so, give some examples?
7. How does your agency measure learner outcomes for funders or for your boards?
8. Do you currently have the capacity to accept more learners in your programs/services?
9. Do you see inter-agency collaboration as possible and desirable? What might be the positive outcomes of such collaboration? What might be the challenges?
10. What suggestions do you have about how to better support and enhance literacy for children, youth, and adults?
11. If you could accomplish one thing to promote greater literacy levels, what would it be?