

Interactive practical exercise: Planning a community needs assessment for your library

Objective: Help library staff identify an underserved community group and develop a practical plan for conducting a simple community needs assessment that can inform future library services.

Step 1. Map your community (10 minutes)

As a group, discuss the following questions:

Q1. Who uses your library most often?

List all the groups that regularly use your library. Examples may include students, children, teachers, job seekers, regular readers, university students, or entrepreneurs.

Q2. Who in your community is least likely to use the library?

Think about people who could benefit from library services but rarely visit. Examples may include farmers, informal workers, older adults, parents with young children, people with disabilities, unemployed people, migrants, or out-of-school youth.

Step 2. Select one priority group (10 minutes)

Together, choose one underserved group to focus on. Discuss:

- Why did we choose this group?
- Why is it important to reach them?
- What do we already know about their needs?
- What assumptions are we making?
- What information is still missing?

Step 3. Design your community needs assessment (15 minutes)

Discuss:

- What do we want to learn from this group?
- Who should we speak with?
- Where can we reach them?
- Which data collection method would work best?

Possible methods include:

- Short survey
- Individual interviews
- Focus group discussion
- Observation
- Conversations with community leaders, teachers, employers, health workers, or local organisations

Then develop a simple plan:

- Who will collect the information?
- Where will it happen?
- Approximately how many people will you speak with?
- When could you do it?

Step 4. Develop interview or survey questions (15 minutes)

Work together to create **5–8 open-ended questions** that will help you better understand the selected group's needs. Possible questions include:

- Where do you usually go when you need information or support?
- What challenges do you face in your daily life that the library might be able to help with?
- Have you ever visited the library? Why or why not?
- What prevents you from using the library?
- What library services would be useful to you?
- When and where would it be easiest for you to participate in library activities?
- How would you prefer to receive information about library programmes?
- Is there anything else you would like the library to know?

Step 5. Reflection and next steps (10 minutes)

Finish by asking:

- What is one action your library could take within the next month to begin this community needs assessment?