Needs Assessment

Determining Community Needs

To establish a strong and effective afterschool program, it is essential to identify the specific needs of the community and design a high-quality program that directly addresses those needs. Conducting a needs assessment is a critical first step in this process. This involves collecting input from all relevant stakeholders to evaluate the extent of the need and to inform the program's development and implementation.

It is not necessary to start from scratch—existing data and prior assessments can be valuable resources. However, the focus of the needs assessment should remain on areas that an afterschool program is capable of addressing. Be sure to review any recent needs assessments conducted within your school or local community.

A comprehensive needs assessment for afterschool programming should explore the following areas:
- The rationale for initiating a new program
- Availability—or lack—of current program options
- The specific needs of students and families
- Existing service gaps or unmet needs
- Interests and preferences for programming

When conducted collaboratively, the assessment process not only yields useful data but also fosters engagement, allowing staff to better understand the community and initiate meaningful dialogue with stakeholders.

Local Needs Assessment Sample Questions

- Do you need care for your child between school being out and you getting off work?
- What is your current after school childcare arrangement?
- Indicate what before/afterschool program elements are most important to you (i.e., homework help, social skills, snacks/meals, STEM opportunities, arts, recreation, keeping my child safe and supervised, enrichment activities, tutoring).
- Having my child receive homework help and/or tutoring after school is important to me.
- My child would benefit from additional support in reading and mathematics.
- My child would need transportation home from the afterschool program.

Resources

https://www.wiafterschoolnetwork.org/assets/StartingProgram/Assessing-the-Need.pdf
https://bsbtoolkit.org/file_download/inline/0b2c3e6f-bc43-422a-be56-7077d6e7af71
https://www.iowaafterschoolalliance.org/_files/ugd/c427a3_b536da20bb5a44f1ac7275798544dbbb.pdf