



Supported Education

3.3 Needs Assessment

While implementing a Supported Education program, it is essential to perform a needs assessment if you want to design relevant intervention for a specific population. Making sure consumers have a say in services that will affect their future is fundamental. A needs assessment can be defined as a methodical and in progress process offering useful information and knowledge about the needs—in this case, about the needs of students with psychiatric disabilities (Unger, 2007; Mowbray et al., 2006).

The first goal of a needs assessment is to understand what the target group already knows and thinks so you can determine what educational services are required. The second goal is to establish how your SEd program can be more useful for and accessible to consumers (McCawley, 2009).

Performing a needs assessment can provide benefits for your program (Mowbray et al., 2006), such as:

- Decisive information on areas that need intervention
- Effectiveness in program planning
- Help with funding for a new program
- Priority analysis regarding needs
- Students' personal stories can be powerful advocacy testimonies
- Can have political implications

We recommend that before you conduct a needs assessment you develop a plan and determine the what, why, when, who, where and how of your program (McCawley, 2009):

- Define your goals: What do you want to obtain from the needs assessment?
- Choose a target group and stakeholders: For whom is your program and which stakeholders is it also important to involve?
- Method of collecting information: How will you collect data and who will be the respondents?
- Analyze that collected information: How will you analyze it?
- Make decisions: What will you do with the information you gathered?

While conducting a needs assessment, you can collect information directly from the consumers/students and complement this with information that has already been

collected. To collect information regarding the students'/consumers' needs, you can use quantitative methods such as a survey applied to students, consumers, families or different stakeholders; or use qualitative methods such as a focus group or open interviewing. Always keep in mind while conducting a needs assessment that the people involved are answering according to their needs and creating the expectation that this program will exist (Mowbray et al., 2006).

Other beneficial results can be achieved by applying a needs assessment concerning the development of a SEd program (Mowbray et al., 2006):

- Ascertain who are the people interested in being part of a SEd program.
- Describe what will be the success factors for each of the different stakeholders, especially to consumers.
- Make clear what the specific characteristics of the community are in which your program will be implemented.

Needs assessment can address the following questions. To understand to whom your services will be provided, it is important to define your target group. Socio-demographic information is required, as well as their specific needs.

- What are the needs or problems in this community or of these students?
- How many consumers with educational goals exist in this community or setting?

What services do they benefit from?

- How many of these consumers are still in college/university or have dropped out?

Other questions to take into consideration (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005) could be:

- What are the resources and strengths available that can be used to resolve these needs or problems?
- What can we do to address the problems and meet the needs?

To complete the process of a needs assessment, consider that all stakeholders should have the opportunity to give feedback about the identified needs, so that you may define what are the priority needs and the barriers to implementation of a successful SEd program. To conclude the process of needs assessment, you should make a list of needs, concerns or barriers that will affect the implementation of your SEd program (Mowbray et al., 2006).

Checklist for needs assessment

Steps in the Needs Assessment Process	Completion Date
Step 1. Define your goals: What do you want to obtain from the needs assessment?	
Step 2. Choose a target group and stakeholders: For whom is your program designed and which stakeholders is it also important to involve?	
Step 3. Create your list of questions.	
Step 4. Select your method(s) of collecting information: How will you collect data and who will be the respondents? (Consider surveys, record reviews, focus groups, individual expert interviews.)	
Step 5. Analyze that collected information: How you will analyze it?	
Step 6. Make decisions: What will you do with the information you gathered? Prioritize needs and propose solutions to needs and barriers.	

McCawley, P. (2009). *Methods for conducting an educational needs assessment: Guidelines for cooperative extension system professionals*. University of Idaho Extension. Retrieved from <http://www.cals.uidaho.edu/edcomm/pdf/BUL/BUL0870.pdf>