

Sustainable Community Development Step 2: Conduct a Community Assessment¹

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Overview

This document explains why it is important to conduct a community assessment during a sustainability project and gives guidelines and suggestions about where to obtain needed information.

Conduct a Community Assessment

A community assessment helps lay the groundwork for a sustainability project by providing information on the status and availability of resources and by identifying and prioritizing problems to address. Filling out a table like the sample table, listing community strengths, weaknesses, resources, limitations, opportunities, and barriers, may assist you in identifying those issues of greatest concern for which data should be collected while allowing you to assess the resources at your disposal and the potential challenges faced. It is important to include the stakeholders identified in [Step 1](#) in the process of completing this table. (See Table 1 for sample table and Table 2 for a table to fill out.)

Once the table is completed, work with stakeholders to prioritize the issues listed under “weaknesses”. Begin by gathering baseline data on those issues your community identifies as the highest priorities. It is often essential to step into the community’s routines in order to gather information from the stakeholders themselves. Visit the local diner, a barber shop, coop, an extension meeting, gardening

club, Kiwanis meeting, and/or other routine gatherings of community members.

The information from the community assessment will later be used for measuring progress and can help identify the key goals of a sustainability campaign. It is advised that community assessments be performed periodically throughout the life of the sustainability project to assess the changing needs and assets of the community.

The information for a community assessment can come from many sources, including interviews, focus groups, and print, electronic, and other media. Often a literature review provides a solid foundation upon which your project can build. Researching other communities that have undertaken sustainable community initiatives will expose your team to the varying approaches taken and the successes and failures achieved.

The following guide for obtaining local information focuses on print and electronic data sources. While emphasizing Florida, it also provides resources that are applicable to researching other areas of the country.

Background and Historical Information

- Search the community’s local library for planning commission documents, directories, and local histories.

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- Look at archives and recent issues of local newspapers and other periodicals.
- *National Register of Historic Places in Florida*: Search for historic places by county. (<http://www.nationalregisterof-historicplaces.com/fl/state.html>)

Government

- Refer to phone books to find federal, state, and local offices in the area.
- Visit the local City Hall for government records, maps, and comprehensive plans.
- *2012 Census of Governments* provides information on government expenditures down to the county level. (<https://www.census.gov/govs/>)
- *The Florida Government Information Locator Service* is a catalog of local and federal government information available on the Internet and beyond. (<http://dos.myflorida.com/library-archives/research/florida-information/government/>)

Demographics

- *Census 2010*: American FactFinder provides Census 2010 data to the block level. (<http://factfinder2.census.gov/>)
- *Florida Office of Economic & Demographic Research*: Provides state and county demographic data. (<http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/population-demographics/data/>)

Crime and Justice

- *US Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics*: Provides state-level statistics on crime and victims. (<http://www.bjs.gov>)
- *Florida Department of Law Enforcement Florida Statistical Analysis Center*: Provides crime data and trends. ([http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/cms/FSAC/Data-Statistics-\(1\).aspx](http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/cms/FSAC/Data-Statistics-(1).aspx))

Economy

- *US Census Bureau Economic Census Profiles*: Provides economic and business data to the zip code level from the 2012 Economic Census. (<https://www.census.gov/econ/>)
- *Government Information Sharing Projects Regional Economic Information System*: Presents state and county level economic data sources on a wide variety of subjects such as income, employment, industry sectors, and more. (<http://www.econdata.net/>)
- *US Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics*: Includes regional wage data, state and local wages,

unemployment rates, and additional economic information. (<http://stats.bls.gov/>)

- *Census of Agriculture*: Provides a complete picture of the agricultural sector in the US economy by county, state, or ZIP code. (<http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/>).
- *Florida Agricultural Statistics Service*: Provides information on Florida aquaculture, citrus, economics, field crops, horticulture, livestock, poultry, and vegetables. (<http://www.nass.usda.gov/fl/>)
- *Florida Research and Economic Information Database Application*: This database from the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation provides economic indicators at the county and metropolitan area levels. (<http://freida.labormarketinfo.com>)
- *Florida Statistical Abstracts*: This reference book, compiled annually by the University of Florida's Bureau of Economic Business Research, provides economic and demographic data about Florida. University of Florida, Bureau of Economic and Business Research, 720 SW 2nd Ave #150, Gainesville, FL 32601, 352-392-0171.

Education

- *National Center for Education Statistics*: Includes information on public schools, school district finances comparisons, and school district demographics. (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)

Environment

- *EPAs Search Your Community*: Allows you to enter your zip code and choose from four databases to retrieve environmental information about your community. (<https://www3.epa.gov/epahome/whereyoulive.htm>)
- *EPAs Surf Your Watershed*: Search for citizen-based groups working on your watershed conservation efforts and other environmental information. (<http://cfpub.epa.gov/surf/locate/index.cfm>)
- *Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission*: List of endangered species, threatened species, and species of special concern as of January 2017. (<http://myfwc.com/media/1515251/threatened-endangered-species.pdf>)
- *Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Geologic Survey*: Includes county and state maps and GIS data. (<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/geology/>)
- *Florida Department of Transportation's Traffic Data*: Transportation Statistics Office reports on annual average daily traffic (AADT) by county for every segment of Florida's State Highway System. (<http://www.dot.state.fl.us/planning/statistics/trafficdata/>)

- *University of Florida's Geographic Data Library*: Provides free geographic data to download. (<http://www.fgdl.org/>)

Health and Social Services

- *FL Department of Health Public Health Indicators Data System*: The Division of Public Health Statistics & Performance Management offers current public health indicator data and the ability to create your own custom reports. (<http://www.floridacharts.com/charts/default.aspx>)
- *FL Department of Health Vital Statistics Annual Reports*: Include records of live births, deaths, fetal deaths, marriages, and dissolutions of marriages. (<http://www.flpublichealth.com/VSBOOK/VSBOOK.aspx>)
- *Kids Count*: This project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation is a national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children in the US by providing benchmarks of child well-being. (<http://datacenter.kidscount.org>)
- Directories or inventories of agencies: Available at public libraries, UF/IFAS Extension offices, mental health centers, and United Way offices.
- Surveys of community-based organizations (YWCA's, YMCAs, churches, cultural organizations, non-profits, etc.).

Table 1. Sample table.

<p>Strengths: <i>Low population density</i> <i>No long-term debt</i></p>	<p>Weaknesses: <i>Aquifer contamination</i> <i>High poverty rate</i></p>
<p>Resources: <i>Large land area</i> <i>Historic downtown</i></p>	<p>Limitations: <i>Outdated technology</i> <i>Limited budget</i></p>
<p>Opportunities: <i>Room for "smart growth"</i> <i>Agro-tourism potential</i></p>	<p>Barriers: <i>Lack of civic participation</i> <i>Short-sighted development</i></p>

Strengths:

Resources:

Opportunities:

Community: _____

Weaknesses:

Limitations:

Barriers:

Date of Assessment: _____