COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT GUIDE
Understanding Your Community's Assets & Needs

Assessing your community's strengths, weaknesses, needs and assets is an essential first step in planning an effective project. By taking time to learn about your community, you can discover the most relevant opportunities for projects and maximize your club's ability to make a meaningful impact.

This document will guide you towards understanding the needs of and assets available within your community specific to early childhood education and literacy. After exploring each section below, your club should be able to identify priorities for literacy and early childhood projects in your community. This will enable you to implement activities aimed at ensuring that young children enter school ready to learn, that they have a strong foundation for language and literacy skills, and that parents, caregivers and your whole community are empowered to champion and support children's early learning and development. This process will also help to build valuable relationships and encourages community members to actively participate in making lasting improvements. It's a critical first step in creating trust, community ownership and sustainability.

Through **Together, We Read**, Rotary Clubs will collaborate closely with their local communities. By completing this assessment exercise, you will be able to identify specific community needs that your club can address as part of that community partnership. You will also gain a better understanding of the resources in the community that are available to you. At the end of this process, you will be able to make more informed decisions about which activations and awareness building interventions to implement in order to best serve your community.

While exploring the questions listed below, keep in mind that a child's foundational literacy skills and predictors of success can be nurtured and supported in a variety of settings: in the home, childcare programs, school and more. Each of these community-based settings represents an opportunity to reach children through **Together, We Read**.

Rotary's Tips for Conducting Any Community Assessment:
• Remain Open Minded • Choose Participants Carefully • Include Overlooked or Marginalized Groups • Consider Yourself an Outsider • Don't Promise a Project Before You Make A Decision

> A lot of information about your community is already available! Gather and use existing data to develop an informed understanding of the early education and literacy gaps and needs in your area.

Suggested Data Sources

Great Schools (www.GreatSchools.org)
- Offers school/city/county level data on topics like test scores, student progress, teachers & staff.
- Look at the data for your local elementary school(s). How is the school rated for test scores, student progress and equity?

Kids Count Data Center (https://datacenter.kidscount.org)
- State/County/City/Council/Congressional District information on topics such as Demographics/Economic Well-Being/Education/Family & Community/Health/Safety & Risky Behaviors
- Look at the school-age education indicators for your school district especially Kindergarten Readiness and Fourth Grade Reading Proficiency.

State Department of Education websites
- While information varies by state, most sites offer district and school data on test performance, teacher qualifications, parent involvement, educator surveys.
    - California
    - Kentucky
    - Illinois
    - North Carolina
    - South Carolina
    - Tennessee

US Census Bureau American Factfinder (https://factfinder.census.gov)
- County-level data on demographics, housing, income, poverty and much more
- Look at the education data, especially pre-school enrollment and elementary school educational attainment. Information regarding a variety of demographics available.
- You can also examine adult literacy rates in your areas to draw parallels with other data here: https://nces.ed.gov/naal/kf_demographics.asp#3

> Identify community stakeholders with a special knowledge of or experience with early childhood education. Use them as a resource to gather information to better understand your community's unique context and gain perspective on existing programs.

Suggested Individuals Include:
- Early childhood educators, pre-school and kindergarten teachers
- Elementary school teachers and principals
- School district staff
- Librarians
- Agency personnel – child welfare, early intervention specialists (i.e. speech, OT, etc.) health and human services, pediatricians, Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Programs
- Community group professionals – family resource centers, local non-profits, churches, food banks, Boys and Girls clubs.

Methods/Tools for Information Gathering:
- Community meetings and listening sessions
- Interviews and focus groups
- Observation
- Community Mapping
- Asset Inventory
- Survey

For more information about these tools, [please see Rotary's guidance on Community Assessments.](#) What follows is a list of example questions to ask that are relevant to literacy and early learning in your community.

Place extra focus on gathering information from families with young children to understand their awareness of early childhood development, their access to literacy opportunities and their needs.

Suggested Questions to Explore

- Do families have access age-appropriate children's books?
- Do families read regularly to their children and understand the importance of this?
- Are caregivers creating a home learning environment that fosters learning and literacy development?
- What language and literacy experiences are available in the community (school literacy night, story times, mobile libraries)? What is the participation rate?
- What programs are available for parents of infants and toddlers? How are they promoted? What is the participation rate?
- What is the general readiness level of children entering kindergarten? What trends do teachers notice for school readiness?
- What are the biggest challenges that families with young children face?
- What early childcare providers are in your community? What pre-schools or nursery schools are in your community? What extra support do they need to better foster early literacy? Do they have relationships or communicate regularly with the elementary schools they feed into? (Can be private, home or center-based Child Care Programs and/or Head Start, Early Head Start)
- Is it a welcoming and inviting setting for families?
- Do they encourage and support families to promote child development and learning in the home?
- Can families access information about their child's development and work with staff to keep their child on track?
- Do they link families to other needed services?
- Is there a library in your community?
- Are young families accessing the library? What barriers exist to young families accessing the library? What outreach programs encourage participation?
- Does the library offer literacy-based programs for children and families?
- What kind of extra support does the library need to be more family friendly?
- Does this library have a dedicated children's section?
- How many days per week is the community library open? Evening or weekend hours?
- Does the school currently partner with the public library to host joint family events and/or provide resources to children and families?
- Is there a book mobile or mobile library that provides library services in your community?
- Is there a library at the local elementary school? What extra support do they need to better foster early literacy?