Community Assessment Tips During COVID-19

A crisis situation, such as a global pandemic, can create challenges for data collection and agency processes such as the Community Needs Assessment for Community Action Agencies. Effects can impact data collection methods, response rates, analysis, and prioritization. Tips and considerations to mitigate these challenges are included below.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

- Keep survey questions consistent and without incorporating too many changes. The goal is to adopt an approach which may be inferior to the original survey, but fills data gaps with reasonable accuracy.
- Recognize the situation when sending out survey requests.
  - **Example**: "We realize this is an unprecedented time, but hope you can give us a few minutes to complete our survey."
- Modify questions by keeping the root intention, but adding phrasing like, "How has X changed since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?"
  - **Example**: "What is your employment status? Has it changed since the onset of COVID-19?" Or, "How much do you pay monthly for childcare? Has the cost or availability of childcare for your family changed since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?"
- Minimize duplication by including language in any survey you've moved online that was once available on paper to avoid duplicate entries.
  - **Example**: "You may have already completed this survey in our office, if this is the case, please disregard this request to complete the survey online."
- Keep core instruments untouched and adding a short "pulse" survey that can be used as a supplement to help gauge emerging issues. Further, consider pausing dissemination of core surveys while pulse surveys are being distributed.

DATA COLLECTION CONSIDERATIONS

→Review internal processes to build in extra time or assess staff capacities if needed.

→Be mobile friendly for surveys.

→Consider the digital literacy of the audience by method.

→Include specific dates in surveys to quantify the timeframe you are requesting information on.

→Create a hotspot or provide a list of WiFi locations in the survey request to ensure accessibility.

→Use a skilled facilitator for virtual focus groups.

DATA ANALYSIS

- Recognize that fear and uncertainty may cause shifts in survey responses especially in domains such as financial stability, food security, or childcare.
- Look for patterns over time and themes across data
  - Note what issues shift the most and the issues persistent across all phases (pre, during, post COVID-19)
- Prioritize based on COVID-19 vulnerabilities such as age 65+, population density, and those who are uninsured.

For more on COVID-19 Community Assessment, access this template and these online data tools.