

Partnering4Health Assessing the Needs of Communities

As part of the Partnering4Health project, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) selected three national organizations -- [the American Heart Association](#) (AHA), the [American Planning Association](#) (APA), and the [National WIC Association](#) (NWA) - to work with 97 communities and address one or two priorities for improving their population's health: improved access to healthy foods and beverages, more access to physical activity opportunities, more smoke-free environments, or improved access to clinical preventive services. The lead group in each community gathered new data or leveraged existing sources to identify the assets and needs in those communities. That information provided guidance for selecting strategies that could improve the health of at-risk populations

Table 1: Sources of Data National Organizations Used for Assessing Community Needs and Assets

- [U.S. Census](#)
- [Community Commons](#)
- [Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#)
- Hospital admissions
- Health department data
- Law enforcement data
- Utilization of government programs such as WIC or SNAP vouchers
- [Geo mapping](#)
- Non-personally identifiable health records from insurers or providers.

In addition to the information the national organizations gathered early in the project, many communities supplemented that information with local data. Among APA's communities, planners working in governmental units often had access to infrastructure and transportation-relevant data. For instance, planners in [Austin Texas](#) had information on the transportation patterns of its Hispanic community as it decided on strategies. Madison Wisconsin created a [data and modeling tool](#) to assess physical activity opportunities and needs. Some planners mentioned *Dangerous by Design* as a good resource.

Several communities that conducted surveys partnered with local universities that could provide survey design expertise, student workers, and data analysis. One university student spent three summer months interviewing WIC clients in waiting areas and gathered helpful qualitative information.

The American Heart Association developed a Hublet on Community Commons that facilitated communities' ability to pull data that was specific to its areas of focus. Additionally, AHA contracted with a national polling firm to [collect data](#) about the effectiveness of various communication strategies in the AHA-funded communities.

Table 2: Sources of Information Gathered by Local Community Coalitions

<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Surveys▪ Focus Groups▪ Interviews of<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ a County community development department○ clients in WIC waiting areas○ people attending a town hall meeting○ a translation service for information about locations of non-English speakers○ elementary school students and their parents about their physical activity▪ Planning/infrastructure data<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ level of traffic stress data○ transportation inventory○ sidewalk inventory○ locations of grocery stores, farmers markets, produce markets, produce drops, healthy retail store, parks○ locations mentioned in police reports▪ Sales Data<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ EBT (food stamps) sales at farmer's markets – number of customers, frequency, trends○ grocery store sales of produce▪ WIC Redemptions▪ Dot voting at community events -- farmers markets, county fairs, malls, and at some coalition meetings
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"Nobody really listened to students or our voices. They just wanted to hear what adults said... Our voice, us students, we can be heard. We can make what we want to happen, happen."

Anastasia Thanpaeng 11th Grade Student Hiram Johnson High School, a participant in APA's Sacramento California project

Even though the communities had only a little more than one year for their funded project(s), taking the time to do assessments up front provided important direction and focus. Assessments that engaged members of targeted communities also helped gain buy-in and support for the interventions.