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| **Defining the Community**Your community should be within a specifically designated geographic location.One must clearly delineate the following dimensions before starting the process of community assessment:• Describe the population that is being assessed?• What is/are the race(s) of this population within the community?• Are there boundaries of this group? If so, what are they?• Does this community exist within a certain city or county?• Are there general characteristics that separate this group from others?• Education levels, birth/death rates, age of deaths, insured/uninsured?• Where is this group located geographically…? Urban/rural?• Why is a community assessment being performed? What purpose will it serve?• How will information for the community assessment be collected?**Assessment**After the community has been defined, the next phase is assessment. The following items describe several resources and methods that can be used to gather and generate data. These items serve as a starting point for data collection. This is not an all-inclusive list of resources and methods that may be used when a community assessment is conducted.The time frame for completion of the assessment may influence which methods are used. Nonetheless, these items should be reviewed to determine what information will be useful to collect about the community that is being assessed. It is not necessary to use all of these resources and methods; however, use of a variety of methods is helpful when one is exploring the needs of a community.**Data Gathering** (collecting information that already exists)*Demographics of the Community*• When demographic data are collected, it is useful to collect data from a variety of levels so comparisons can be made.• If the population that is being assessed is located within a specific setting, it may be best to contact that agency to retrieve specific information about that population.• The following resources provide a broad overview of the demographics of a city, county, or state:• American Fact Finder—Find population, housing, and economic and geographic data for your city based on U.S. Census data: [http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml](http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml%20)• State and County Quick Facts—Easy access to facts about people, business, and geography, based on U.S. Census data: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045216>• Obtain information about a specific city or county on these useful websites:[www.epodunk.com](http://www.epodunk.com/) and [www.city-data.com](http://www.city-data.com/)*Information from Government Agencies*• Healthy People 2020—this resource is published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It identifies health improvement goals and objectives for the country to be reached by the year 2020: <http://www.healthypeople.gov/>• National Center for Health Statistics—this agency is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; this website provides statistical information about the health of Americans: [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss.htm%20)• Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—The CDC website contains a large amount of information related to the health of the American population. The search engine within this website can be used to find relevant information: [http://www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov/)• Federal agencies with statistical programs: <http://www.fedstats.gov/agencies>• Every state in the United States has its own specific health improvement plan and goals that are based on the Healthy People 2020 document. This information may be available on the state health department website.• State and local health departments provide information related to vital statistics for the community.**Data Generation** (data are developed that do not already exist)*Windshield Surveys*With the use of public transportation or by driving a vehicle around the community, one can observe common characteristics of the community.Examples of key observations to make when one is assessing the community through a windshield survey include the following:*Participant Observation*Spend time observing the population that is being assessed. Through observation of interactions among group members, much can be learned about the community, including the following:* Developmental level of the population

*Informant Interviews*Informants could be people who are familiar with and interact with the population on a regular basis.Examples of questions that may be asked of key informants include the following:* Strengths/assets of the community
* Areas of improvement for the community
* Concerns of community members

*Focus Groups*Focus groups (usually small groups of 6-12 people) can be helpful when one is gathering information about specific areas of concern within the population. Use of a focus group involves open dialogue about the population, whereas an interview or survey yields only individual responses.* Focus groups may be effective for assessing the following:
* Satisfaction with services provided
* Community resources used

*Surveys*Surveys may be used to collect data from the community. Selecting a sample of the target population may prove helpful in the collection of data that are easier to analyze. It is important to ensure that the sample is representative of the target population.A survey should be developed that takes into consideration the developmental level of the group that is being assessed. Questions should be written at the appropriate developmental level, so they are answered in a way that makes the data useful. Surveys might include closed-ended (yes/no), multiple choice (several responses to choose from), Likert scale (Strongly Agree/Agree/Neutral/Disagree/Strongly Disagree), or open-ended (“why”/“how”) questions. |  |  |