STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT SUCCESSFUL NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

In December 2024, the Integrated HIV/AIDS Planning Technical Assistance Center (IHAP TAC) facilitated a peer sharing event on effective needs assessment activities, including what has worked to strengthen community engagement. This document outlines key themes from the discussion.

What are the key elements of a successful Needs Assessment?
- Gains the perspective of a racially and ethnically diverse population to inform resource allocation and decision making.
- Diverse in methods, relying on multiple tools and approaches to reach different populations.
  - Using both surveys/questionnaires and community forums/town halls can increase the reach of needs assessment activities.
  - Medical Monitoring Program is useful to provide broad, demographically diverse quantitative data while community forums can be useful to get more nuanced information from harder to reach groups.

What are strategies to increase community participation in surveys?
- Sending text message-based surveys was successful in reaching a larger portion of the population.
- Providing surveys in the languages represented in your respective communities, including, but not limited to, American Sign Language.
- Engaging community influencers and local agencies to share survey links on their social media and speak to the importance of the Needs Assessment process.
- Implementing incentive-based models.
- Recognize that some individuals may be hesitant to engage in services due to perception of connection to LGBTQ identity and associated stigma.
  - Share QR codes as a discreet method to encourage feedback or needs assessment activities from individuals that may not feel comfortable addressing in person.

Which communities have you had the most difficulty engaging in Needs Assessments?
- Transgender and gender nonconfirming communities are underrepresented in surveys, and many jurisdictions report not having built relationships with this community.
- Youth 18-24 have been difficult to reach and engage with questionnaires and survey tools.
- Communities that are not virally suppressed are typically outside of the RWHAP care system and have fewer touchpoints to assess need.
- People experiencing homelessness.

What strategies can increase engagement of hard to reach communities?
- Leveraging provider and community-based organization (CBO) relationships to conduct key informant interviews or focus groups.
- Using focus groups as a strategy to engage individuals for which survey access/completion is a barrier (e.g., youth, persons experiencing homelessness).
- Hosting an annual summit for people with HIV, covering the cost of hotel, travel, and food, and including needs assessment activities as part of the summit.
- Framing in-person or online sessions as a networking and/or professional development opportunity to increase representation of people with HIV in the workforce.
- Building needs assessment activities into existing events and meetings throughout the year.
- HRSA requires 330-funded community health centers conduct a needs assessment at least once every three years for the purposes of informing and improving the delivery of health center services. Coordinate with health centers to have them collect information on unmet needs related to HIV care and services if they do not do so already.

- Providing mini-grants to CBOs working with these communities to conduct needs assessment activities.
- Targeting social media outreach, focusing on platforms/organizations that have an active online engagement with target populations.
- Coordinating a youth game day with game trucks to encourage youth participation.

What types of incentive models are programs using to increase participation?
- Using ADAP rebate funding or 340B funding to purchase and distribute gift cards.
- Developing retail and thrift store collaborations to provide material incentives on a shorter budget.
- Providing toiletry bags in lieu of gift cards.
- Offering food at meetings.

How have programs tailored their Needs Assessment methods to incorporate whole person and status neutral models of care?
- Shift the focus of services to lead with whatever concern or health issue brought the individual through the door as a way to remove barriers to care that are associated with false perceptions and/or stigma.
- Status neutral social media campaigns have been helpful for engaging individuals who do not identify as LGBTQ (e.g., reaching military members in a community with a base).

What are some methods to avoid fraud in online surveys?
- Snowball sampling: sharing individualized codes with known individuals and encouraging them to share it with their network, but not posting the link openly online.
- Monitor IP addresses of survey respondents to identify bots/fraud.