

ASSESSING AND MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

GENERAL

1. St. John Ambulance members serve their communities by providing training in various health care programs to individuals and groups, and through direct service using volunteers skilled in first aid, health care and health promotion. St. John Ambulance is a non-profit organization, and to remain viable, relevant and strong, it must be operated in a business-like manner. Each functional unit, whether provincial/territorial, area, branch or division, should have a business plan. The resources and actions necessary to meet the needs of the community and the objectives of St. John Ambulance must be stated. Once formulated and implemented, the plan must be evaluated from time to time to make sure that it is on track. Ultimately, the outcome must be compared to the stated plan.
2. This instruction offers step-by-step guidance to assessing the needs of the community in which your unit operates. The objective is to provide community service relevant to the community's needs.

DEFINITIONS

3. A *need* is a circumstance, requirement or potential problem that requires some course of action.
4. *Needs assessment* is an attempt to find out what people need or want, and how St. John Ambulance can best address them. It is a systematic process for finding out who has the need, how important it is that the need be filled, and how many people are experiencing the need. Needs assessment should also examine why a particular need exists to help determine some possible solutions for meeting identified needs.
5. *Evaluation* is the systematic and objective assessment of performance. It is necessary to carry out evaluations throughout a project, to ensure goals are being met, to determine what works and what doesn't, and to provide guidance for developing the most appropriate next steps. Evaluations determine whether the project is successful, both throughout its development and after its completion.
6. The *business plan* addresses three questions:
 - a. Where are we now?
 - b. Where do we want to go?
 - c. How can we get there?

OVERVIEW OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS

7. Effective implementation of needs assessment within your community involves progress through five phases: entry, needs assessment, planning, action, and evaluation and renewal

ENTRY PHASE

8. Focus on the existing situation: *Where are we now?* Areas to cover are:
 - a. *Historical Background*
Determine what programs are currently offered by St. John Ambulance, what services are provided, and how they are provided.
 - b. *Client Analysis*
Determine:
 - i. those clients presently receiving St. John Ambulance services;
 - ii. other client groups not being served;
 - iii. whether the size or composition of these client groups will be changing;
 - iv. what services might be expected and what demands might be made.
 - c. *Competitor Analysis*
Ascertain which competitors are servicing the client base, and what programs or services they offer. Determine if the competition is effective, and what their marketing strategies are (price, promotion, etc.).
 - d. *Environment of the Target Community*
Learn as much as possible about the environment in which you want to introduce a new program. Look for:
 - i. physical characteristics (area layout, visible barriers, where people gather);
 - ii. population (proportion of age groups, seniors, families with children);
 - iii. economy (prosperous, level of unemployment, etc.);
 - iv. power structure (the most powerful and influential people in the community, and how they react to social and health concerns. How can they best be approached? What are the appropriate communication channels? How can the power structure help or hinder? How is St. John Ambulance perceived in the community?).

NEEDS ASSESSMENT PHASE

9. Focus on health needs and public acceptance: *Where do we want to go?* The following tasks should be undertaken during this phase:
 - a. Identify the issue and initiate action;

- b. Gather facts, opinions and perceptions about community health needs. Whenever possible, involve people in gathering information about themselves to heighten their commitment to supporting your project;
- c. Determine community priorities;
- d. Learn what skills and resources already exist, including people, services, facilities, materials, programs and funding available in the community;
- e. Ensure acceptance of the proposed project from key individuals, to gain legitimacy for it;
- f. Decide which issues to tackle first. Choose a priority and identify the target group;
- g. Increase public awareness of the issue. Convince others that the problem exists;
- h. Gain commitment to action;
- i. Move to the planning phase.

PLANNING PHASE

10. Focus attention on how to respond to the needs: *How can we get there?* Explore and choose methods of responding to health needs, and acquire necessary resources. It is essential to ensure the groundwork is done, that both the entry and needs assessment phases are complete before planning specific strategies.
11. The planning phase has three major tasks:
 - a. Develop an initial business plan. Include:
 - i. statement of need, with background information about the focus of the proposed project;
 - ii. basic values upon which the plan is based;
 - iii. overall goal of the plan;
 - iv. target group to receive the service;
 - v. objectives: the desired behaviour change or awareness to be achieved;
 - vi. roles, tasks and timelines required to carry out the plan;
 - vii. budget and other resource requirements, and how they will be acquired;
 - viii. evaluation plans.
 - b. Review the business plan with relevant individuals and groups. Involve people who are helpful and interested, people with influence, and people from the target group to keep the plan realistic and relevant.
 - c. Finalize the business plan, based on the review. Include:
 - i. *tasks and timelines*:
 - who is responsible for what;
 - dates for completion of steps of the project;
 - how the service will be provided.

- ii. *resource plan:*
 - how many volunteers;
 - recruitment and retention strategies;
 - volunteer training (type of training and how to carry it out);
 - materials;
 - facilities;
 - financial impact of the plan, and necessary funds;
 - budget preparation, including who has spending authority;
 - how to acquire resources.
- iii. *evaluation plan:*
 - marker for completion of plans;
 - staying within resource limits;
 - accomplishment of goal;
 - client satisfaction.

ACTION PHASE

- 12. During the action phase, attention is focused on community action.
- 13. The major task is implementing the plans developed during the planning phase. It is now time to call in the commitments people made, and to mobilize resources so that the plan can be carried out.

EVALUATION AND RENEWAL PHASE

- 14. This phase focuses on evaluation and rejuvenation. After each phase, ongoing evaluation provides answers to what has been done, what the next immediate objective should be, and alternative methods for reaching the objective. The final evaluation examines the new existing situation, determining where the project is currently, and where it should go in the future.
- 15. Evaluations should lead to a re-examination of the new situation, which may result in changes and renewal of some aspects of the project.