

Needs Assessment

Needs assessment is always crucial, and right now, during COVID-19 quarantine, it is even more so.

However, especially during these stressful days, burdening families, communities and/or administrations with lengthy surveys is not necessarily the most humane solution.

These 6 assessment questions provide the greatest information with the lowest burden:



QUESTION 1

The Diagnostic Question

The first question is obvious: What is the most salient issue? However, answers will almost always be symptoms and not causes. Use root cause analysis such as asking **“Why?”** (the 5 Whys technique). When a solution fails to deliver value, it can often be traced to a lack of problem definition. It is imperative to ask questions that reveal potential root causes.



QUESTION 4

Hurdles and barriers

If this was easy to address, or within the control of your conversant, your role would likely be unnecessary. What systems issues are preventing straightforward resolution? What adaptive problems are hard to see from inside the system? What are the tightest knots? The wicked problems? In other words, **“What barriers are you facing?”** and similar questions are crucial. The answers may define your scope of work.



QUESTION 2

Is this new? Or newly realized?

There are certainly new issues to tackle. However, many problems that are more apparent now actually existed prior to the COVID-Quarantine context—under the radar. This new situation could be illuminating an old issue. For example, the change to an online formats may have driven up attendance at coaching or peer support sessions, revealing an accessibility concern that wasn't fully realized before. Continue the conversation by asking, **“What (data) has changed?”**



QUESTION 5

Feel free to fantasize

Especially after outlining the difficulties, it is nice to end on a hopeful note with this question: **“What would perfect look like?”** It's not just enjoyable to fantasize about what the ideal would be: it provides clear direction. It's very easy (and cathartic!) to complain about what is wrong, but delineating what right would look like may require some thought. That thought is likely to outline your next choices.



QUESTION 3

Protect the positives

When the entire focus is on issues or problems, it can be easy to overlook the things you don't want to break by fixing. **“What is working?”** is a good question to highlight the processes you want to nurture and grow while implementing other changes.



QUESTION 6

The Powerful Closing Question

During a rapid needs assessment, there is almost certainly highly valuable information left unshared. **“What questions should I have asked that I haven't?”** may motivate your conversant to share any last minute details that are relevant to untying some thorny knots.