



National League of Cities

EARLY CHILDHOOD NEEDS AND RESOURCES
COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT TOOL

National League of Cities

Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

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COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD NEEDS AND RESOURCES

NLC's Early Childhood Needs and Resources Community Assessment tool is designed to help city officials and other community leaders gain a better understanding of how young children (ages 0-5) and their families are faring and where assistance is needed. It can be used as the first step in developing a local agenda around early childhood; to evaluate the success of current initiatives; or to focus future strategies to help improve outcomes for young children.

The community assessment is not a survey to be submitted to NLC, and there are no right and wrong answers. It is meant to be a flexible guide for city leaders to investigate the state of early childhood in their community. Therefore, cities should feel free to adapt the tool to their specific goals. For example, a mayor or city councilmember could ask a staff member to spend just a few hours completing the inventory of local resources for children ages 0-5. Cities interested in more intensive review could use the tool to collect baseline data to track over time, guide community consultations, and serve as a starting point for a local early childhood task force charged with making policy recommendations.

The community assessment has three sections:

- 1) **Conditions of Young Children:** A set of ten data measures aimed at giving an overall summary of the well-being of children ages 0-5. A Data Guide provides assistance with data sources and alternate measures.
 - *Use the indicators listed as a guide.* If your locality does not collect some of these data, or does not have it broken down at the city-level, do not be overly concerned. Use alternate measures or add other available data that will help provide a picture of the conditions of young children in the community.
 - *Work with local colleges* or child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) to locate or analyze data.
 - *Save time* by having staff from "data collecting agencies" work together to complete this section.
- 2) **Inventory of Local Resources to Promote Early Childhood Success:** A check-off list of programs, activities or other resources available for young children and their families.
 - *Create a more comprehensive inventory* by using the blanks under each category to record specific program names, services, or other activities that are not listed. Identifying key contacts at these organizations or programs can also be helpful.
 - *Consider collecting detailed information* about each program in the community. For example, in Louisville, KY, the city used the inventory process as an opportunity to create a central catalog of written information (pamphlets, publications etc) about community programs.
- 3) **Open-Ended questions:** A list of questions that can be used to help focus discussions with various community stakeholders, including parents, early childhood service providers, and other stakeholders.
 - *View as an opportunity for engaging constituents* in a meaningful way around early childhood issues. For example, staff from Richmond, VA's Department of Human Resources, met with parents at a local family resource center to solicit feedback on the needs of families with young children in the city.

Listed below are some general suggestions about the community assessment process:

- **Consider using a team approach** to the assessment. Since data and other information about local resources will most likely come from a variety of sources, it may be helpful to bring key experts (both within and outside city government), data suppliers and other knowledgeable partners together to work on the assessment as a group, rather than requiring one person to track down all the information
- **High-level leadership** from a mayor or city/town councilmember can help secure buy-in from the agencies and partners needed to collect data and other important information for the assessment. For example, in Houston, TX, a city councilmember convened a group of key community leaders to work on the assessment.
- **Provide opportunities to reflect on the information gathered.** After completing the community assessment, do not just file it away! Instead, set aside time to discuss the results with other municipal leaders, staff from key city agencies, and stakeholders. Use these sessions to determine priorities, develop strategies, and build support for taking the next steps to address early childhood needs identified by the assessment.

PART I: CONDITION OF YOUNG CHILDREN

For each measure, it will be most helpful to locate city-level data on children ages 0 to 5 years old (under age 6.) However, when this is not possible, data may be available for a different age range or at the county level. Refer to the Data Guide at the end for assistance with data sources and alternate or additional measures.

	<i>City</i>	<i>- OR -</i>	<i>County</i>
Number of children under age 6 (or under age ____)	_____		_____
Percent of families with children under age 6 (or under age ____)	_____%		_____%
Percent of children under age 6 living in poverty (or under age ____)	_____%		_____%
Percent of infants born with low-birth weight	_____%		_____%
Percent of children immunized by age 2	_____%		_____%
Child abuse and neglect rate for children (0-5 or ages: ____ to ____) (reported cases per 1,000 children)	_____		_____
Percent of children covered by health insurance (0-5 or ages: ____ to ____)	_____%		_____%
Total number of children served in:			
• Head Start	_____		_____
• School-based Pre-School	_____		_____
• Private Profit or Non-Profit Child Care	_____		_____
• Family Child Care	_____		_____
Total number of children receiving subsidies for child care	_____		_____
Percentage of first graders promoted to next grade (Indicator of school readiness)	_____%		_____%

PART II: INVENTORY OF LOCAL RESOURCES TO PROMOTE EARLY CHILDHOOD SUCCESS

Under each category, use the space provided to specify the type of activity, the name of the program(s), or additional activities. For each activity that is available in your city or town, check all entities that are engaged or provide this service.

	City	County	For-Profit	Nonprofit	Not Available
<i>Planning/Public Awareness</i>					
▪ Task force/coalition	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
▪ Public awareness campaign	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
▪ City-wide needs assessment	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Parent Education/Support
 (Specify, e.g. family resource centers, home visiting, parenting classes, family literacy programs, etc).

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Early Care and Education
 ▪ Quality Initiatives (Specify, e.g. provider training, programs to enhance provider wages/benefits, etc.)

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

▪ Child Care Access/Supply (Specify, e.g. resource & referral, facility development, transportation, direct provision of early childhood programming, etc.)

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

PART II: INVENTORY OF LOCAL RESOURCES (continued)

	City	County	For-Profit	Nonprofit	Not Available
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Early Care and Education (continued)

- Affordability (Specify, e.g. child care benefits for city employees)

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Child Health and Safety

- Health Outreach (immunizations, information about low-cost health insurance, food stamps, or WIC)

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

- Safety Programs (safety seat program, smoke detector distribution, lead abatement)

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

- Child abuse prevention

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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Other

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

PART III: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

These questions are provided to help you gain a deeper understanding of the local context through discussions with parents and other community stakeholders.

General:

1. How would you assess your community's readiness to tackle early childhood issues? What is the evidence of this?
2. Is there a general awareness of the importance of successful early childhood in your community? How do you know this?
3. What types of people/organizations in your community are important to have "at the table" when designing an early childhood agenda?
4. Do you anticipate sources of resistance to municipal action to promote early childhood success? What is the nature of the anticipated resistance?
5. What are some potential barriers to, and opportunities for, reaching out to parents of young children in your community?

For Meetings with Parents:

- What are the most important sources of information and support for you as a parent? (i.e. extended family, church, pediatrician, family resource center, etc.)
- What programs/services in the city/town have been most helpful to you, if any, in raising your young children?
- What do you find to be the hardest part of raising a child in this city/town?
- If you could make one suggestion to help make the system work better to support families of young children, what would it be?

For Meetings with Early Childhood Providers and Other Stakeholders:

- What services do each of you offer? Do all of these services function as a cohesive system? If not, why?
- Is there an existing coalition or other mechanism that promotes communication and coordination among providers of early care and education, health services, and parent support programs in the city/town? If so, what is it? How does it work?
- What is the nature of your linkage with the schools?
- What are the biggest unmet needs for young children and families? How do these relate to the data on the condition of young children in our city that we've collected?
- What roles could the city/town play in order to improve outcomes for young children?

DATA GUIDE: SOURCES AND ALTERNATE MEASURES

❖ Number of children under age 6

Sources: State/City Department of Human Services/Planning or US Census Bureau

For Census 2000 data:

- 1) Go to www.census.gov and click on “American Fact Finder” on the left-hand side.
 - 2) In the “Basic Facts” box, choose “Tables.”
 - 3) In the “Show Me” drop-down menu, choose “General Characteristics: Population & Housing” under “Census 2000 Quick Tables (QT).” Wait for page to re-load.
 - 4) In the “For” drop-down menu, choose “City or Town.” Wait for page to re-load.
 - 5) Next, select your state from the drop-down menu. Wait for page to re-load.
 - 6) Finally, select a place (your town/city) from the drop-down menu that appears after the page re-loads and click the: “GO!” button
 - 7) Population figures are at the top of the table. *Note: Data are for children under age 5.*
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❖ Percent of households with children under age 6

Sources: City/State Department of Human Service/Planning or US Census Bureau.

For Census 2000 data:

1. Go to www.census.gov and click on “American Fact Finder.”
 2. Under the “Data Sets Menu,” box choose “Summary File 1.”
 3. Choose “Quick Tables” from the list on the right-hand side of the page.
 4. On the next screen, make sure “List” is indicated for “Choose a Selection Method.”
 5. Choose County or Place (city) from the drop-down menu for “Select a Geographic Type.” Wait for the page to re-load.
 6. Next, choose your state from the “Select a State” drop-down menu. Wait for the page to re-load.
 7. Choose the area(s) you wish to see data for under “Select one or more geographic areas” and click “Add” button and then click “Next” button.
 8. Make sure “Show All Tables” is selected under Search.
 9. Scroll down the “Select one or more tables” drop-down menu and choose “QT:P10 Households and Families 2000”, then click the “Add” button and the “Show Table” button.
 10. On the table, look for the “Family Type and Presence of Own Children” category. To capture all families with children under age 6 you must add together the percentages for “Under 6 years only” and “Under 6 & 6-17 years.”
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❖ Percent of children under age 6 living in poverty

Sources: *City/State Department of Health/Human Services may calculate or estimate this figure. The US Census Bureau is also a main source for poverty statistics and 2000 Census data (the most recent) have been released.*

For Census 2000 data:

1. Go to US Census Bureau at www.census.gov and click on “American Fact Finder.”
2. Under the Data Sets Menu, choose “Summary File 3.”
3. Choose “Quick Tables” from list on the right-hand side of page.
4. On the next screen make sure “List” is indicated for “Choose a Selection Method.”
5. Choose County or Place (city) from the drop-down menu for “Geographic Type.” - Wait for the page to re-load.
6. Next choose a State from the drop-down menu – Wait for the page to re-load.
7. Choose the area(s) you wish to see data for under “Select one or more geographic areas.” Then click the “Add” button and the “Next” button. - Wait for page to load.
8. Make sure “Show all tables” is selected under “Search.”



9. Scroll down the “Select one or more tables” drop-down menu and choose “QT-P34 Poverty Status in 1999 of Individuals: 2000” Then click the “Add” button and the “Show Table” button.
10. On the table, look for “Related children under 6 years.” The percentage below poverty level will be listed in the far right column.

▪ *Alternate measure: Percent of families with children under age 5 living in poverty*
Follow directions 1-8 above. When asked to select a table, choose “QT-P35 Poverty Status in 1999 of Families and Nonfamily Householders: 2000” and continue from there. *Note: The data for families in poverty uses a different child age range. It will have families “with related children under 5.”*

- ❖ **Percent of infants born with low-birth weight** [*Alternate measures: Percentage of women receiving prenatal care in the first trimester; Infant mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 births)*]
- ❖ **Percent of children immunized by age 2**
- ❖ **Child abuse and neglect rate for children ages 0-5 (reported cases per 1,000 children)**
- ❖ **Percent of children covered by health insurance** [*Alternate measure: Uninsured children*]

Sources: City or State Department of Health and Human Services

- ❖ **Total number of Children Served in:**
 - Head Start**
 - School-based Pre-K**
 - Private child care**
- ❖ **Total number of children receiving subsidies for child care**

Sources: If not collected by a Health and Human Services agency in your city, the local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) should have this information. To find the CCR&R that serves your city, you can contact Child Care Aware at 1-800-424-2246 or on-line at www.childcareaware.org.

- ❖ **Percent of first graders promoted to next grade**

Source: Local school district

Alternate measure: Percent of children held back in first grade

- ❖ For questions about the Community Assessment Tool or for more information about NLC's work to support municipal leadership on early education, please contact:

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- ❖ To download the Community Assessment Tool, go to: www.nlc.org/iyef