Information Management Resource Kit

Module on Building Electronic Communities and Networks

UNIT 2. UNDERSTANDING NEEDS AND ASSESSING OPPORTUNITIES

LESSON 3. ASSESSING THE USER'S NEEDS

NOTE

Please note that this PDF version does not have the interactive features offered through the IMARK courseware such as exercises with feedback, pop-ups, animations etc.

We recommend that you take the lesson using the interactive courseware environment, and use the PDF version for printing the lesson and to use as a reference after you have completed the course.

Objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

• identify the importance of the needs assessment for an online community building project;

• recognize the types of information to be collected during the assessment;

• illustrate the methods for collecting information; and

• recognize people's hesitancy or resistance.

Introduction

In this lesson we will discuss the second activity of a needs analysis: the **needs assessment**.

Defining your idea: building up your team and identifying goals

Needs assessment: assessing the needs of the potential online community members

Capacity building assessment

Analysing technical, financial, institutional and social barriers

What a needs assessment is

A **needs assessment** is a learning effort that consists of research and analysis of data collected **from potential users** to develop steps for implementing the online community.

It results in **clear answers to well developed and relevant questions**.

The information you collect for your needs analysis will help define the functional requirements, outreach strategy, training and other elements for your online community that are developed later in the process.

Why needs assessment is important

It is critical to the success of your online community project to identify **the needs of those who will be served by and participate in the community**.

Online activities need to focus around their needs.
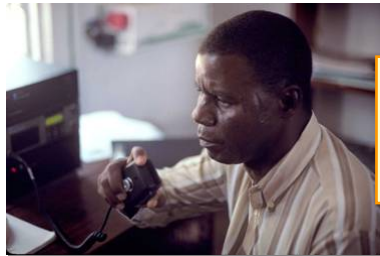
For example, an online community project for a community radio should be focused on the needs of its members: the radio broadcasters.

Many people assume that those most likely to be part of the online community will automatically want to participate - that "if you build it, they will come."

Unfortunately, this is not always true.

Why needs assessment is important

For example, let's consider the following problems emerging during the implementation of an online community building project. What questions have been forgotten?

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| Women don't use the online community at all. | Will members generate knowledge that needs to be captured, processed, and distributed? | 1 |

| People can't use the chat function, as they are never connected to the PC at the same time. | What are the gender issues that might influence use or rejection of your online community? |

| People don't use the function for creating and publishing online content. | Do members need synchronous (same time) and/or asynchronous (different time) interactions? |

Click on each option and drag it in the corresponding box.

When you have finished, click on the Confirm button.

Information about potential community members

Which kind of information do you need to collect in your assessment?

First, you should identify who your potential online community members will be. You need to collect information about their **general characteristics**:

- **What type of area they live in (rural, urban, etc.) (see next slide)**

- **What region of a geographic area they are from**
- **Gender**
- **Age**
- **Main source of livelihood**
- **Health status**
- **Literacy level**
- **Education level**
- **Personal interests**
- **Professional interests**

It is also useful to understand how people view the host organization's role in the project: Is there a strong degree of trust?

Information about potential community members

**Questions related to remote rural areas**

Following are other questions to consider particularly related to remote rural areas:

• What core communications services do local residents need and are willing to pay a modest fee for if a shared technology resource (e.g. telekiosk, shared computer) is place in their village?
• What other services can a shared community technology resource provide that meets a community need and motivates local people?
• What is the best way to describe the core communication services provided by the shared resource to local people to gain acceptance?
• What is the best location for a shared resource to ensure project acceptance and ensure gender equity?

Information about the communication context

At the heart of an online community project is person-to-person communication and sharing. That is why you need to assess the **communication context**.

This means collecting and analyzing information on the following areas:
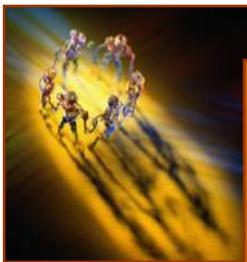
- • **Access to ICT**
- • **Culture**
- • **Language**
- • **Gender**
- • **Sociability**

Having a firm understanding of these issues is critical later on in your design/implementation process when you are selecting the right technology tools and strategies for your community.

Let's look at what information is relevant to the assessment in each of these areas.

Information about the communication context

- **Access to ICT**
- **Culture**
- **Language**
- **Gender**
- **Sociability**

Real access is more than just physical access.

Computers and connections are insufficient if the technology is not used effectively because it is too expensive, misunderstood, discouraged from being used or not sustainable. Other then the physical access, you need to check:

• if the technology is appropriate and affordable for people to use,

• if people understand how to use it,

• if they are limited in their use of technology by socio-cultural factors,

• how people feel about technology,

• if the economic/political environment can sustain technology use and integration.

Real Access – QUESTIONS LIST

Information about the communication context

- **Access to ICT**
- **Culture**
- **Language**
- **Gender**
- **Sociability**

In many cultures, information retrieval and presentation (the recording of wisdom and history) is still done through speech, drama, painting, song, or dance.

The use of writing and the invention of the printing press made mass communication easier. More recent technological innovations further increase the reach and speed of communication, culminating, for now, with digital technology.

Understanding what the **influence is of these innovations**, particularly the Internet, is critical to consider as you determine what the needs are of those who might join and participate in the online community.

Culture – A REAL EXAMPLE   **Culture – QUESTIONS LIST**

Information about the communication context

- **Access to ICT**
- **Culture**
- **Language**
- **Gender**
- **Sociability**

At this stage of assessment your aim is to determine what language challenges exist that will affect the building and maintenance of the online community.

Online communities need to have messages and information that provide opportunities for local people to interact and communicate with each other, expressing their own ideas, knowledge and cultures in their own languages.

Knowing about language issues will influence your design and functional considerations.

Language – A REAL EXAMPLE

Language – QUESTIONS LIST

Information about the communication context

- **Access to ICT**
- **Culture**
- **Language**
- **Gender**
- **Sociability**

Women constitute half of the world's population, yet their access to ICTs remains marginal.

It is important to address the root cause rather than the symptom, which is the low level of access of women to ICTs.

The solution does not lie in simply providing women with computers, but to try and identify the factors determining women's marginal use and control over ICTs.

Gender – A REAL EXAMPLE

Gender – QUESTIONS LIST

Information about the communication context

- **Access to ICT**
- **Culture**
- **Language**
- **Gender**
- **Sociability**

Sociability is how a community's purpose, its members and governing structure influence the group and person-to-person online interaction.

Questions relating to sociability need to be explored with stakeholders during the needs analysis to identify the opportunities and barriers to social interaction.

Specifically, you will need to fully understand what will motivate the targeted population to participate in the project, how they could be segmented (by geography, development area, or other interest area), which individuals could play the role of online helpers, thought leaders or moderators.

Sociability – A REAL EXAMPLE

Sociability – QUESTIONS LIST

How to collect information

Now you can start to think about a strategy for finding the answers, in order to apply the results to refine your goals.

In your opinion, which of the following questions must be asked directly to potential online community members?

- ☐ What type of area do people live in?
- ☐ What is their literacy level?
- ☐ What is the percentage of women?
- ☐ How do people interact with one another?
- ☐ Do they have confidence in and understand the implications of the technology?

Click on the answers (two or more) of your choice

How to collect information

How can I be sure that information will be collected in a systematic way?

Collecting information from potential members of an online community can be challenging.

First, it is often difficult to get people to share their desires with you.

Beyond that, when they do share, the information they give you may not be totally accurate. Always be aware of this as you analyse the information you collected. Discuss as a team if the information seems accurate or not.

If you sense it isn't, make sure you have collected information through a variety of methods. Then look for trends.

How to collect information

It is also helpful to segment the information you have collected by the **type of people** whom you collected the information from.
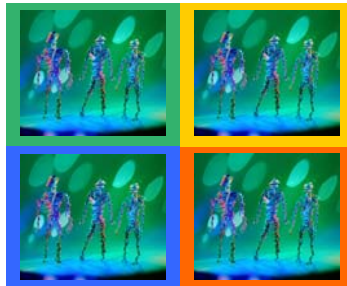
For example, you can consider what information you have from people who **work in organizations**, and what bias they bring that may affect the way they responded to questions.

Maybe there is a sub-group of people who are less versed in **use of the Internet** and this had a major impact on the way they responded when surveyed. Be aware of the diversity of the people who responded.

How to collect information

The following are some research methods you can apply to obtain information from people.

Focus group discussions take place with a small group of selected people to collect information about an issue.

Some tips for conducting focus groups

• Prepare carefully. Careful planning in advance will help you get the most relevant output.
• Clearly identify your objective(s) for the focus group. What do you want to know?
• Develop questions that match the objective(s). More than one person's perspective is usually helpful in developing the best questions.
• Develop an agenda to guide the flow of the session. Set a timeline for the flow of the session.
• Select a facilitator who will be able to collect useful information from the group and keep the session on track.
• Invite people with relevant information to give and who will actively participate to be part of the focus group. Make sure they know how much of their time you will need.
• Select a good location that is comfortable with minimal distraction.
• Record the session if at all possible. If it's not, have someone there who can focus on the job of note taking.
• Take time immediately after the focus group concludes to jot down any additional notes and observations and to verify that any recording that was done worked properly.
• Conduct your analysis as soon as possible after the focus group concludes so that your own impressions from the session are still fresh.

How to collect information

Questionnaires and surveys are a structured way to gather quantitative information either on paper, by phone, or online.

Some tips for conducting surveys

• Prepare carefully. Careful planning in advance will help you get the most relevant output.
• Clearly identify your objective(s) for the survey. What do you want to know?
• Develop questions that match the objective(s). More than one person's perspective is usually helpful in developing the best questions.
• Think about what you will do with the data. If you can, do some practice analysis on some answers you make up for your survey. This will help you to be sure you have the expertise available to you to get the information you need. It may also help you in refining your questions.
• Decide who you will ask to take your survey. This will help you decide the *best* way for you to collect responses to the survey.
• Keep the questions and the design of the survey as simple as possible. If possible, have at least one other person respond to the survey for practice. This will help you to identify anything that might be confusing about your survey.
• If possible, provide an incentive for those who respond to increase the number of responses.

How to collect information

Semi-structured interviewing are guided conversations where broad questions are asked and new questions are allowed to arise as result of discussion. This method is particularly helpful when you want to gain knowledge from someone who has a unique insight.

Some tips for conducting interviews

• Prepare carefully. Careful planning in advance will help you get the most relevant output.
• Clearly identify your objective(s) for the interview. What do you want to know?
• Develop questions that match the objective(s). More than one person's perspective is usually helpful in developing the best questions. In this type of interview, usually open questions are used the most "What do you think about xyz?"
• Develop a guide for the interview that lays out the questions in a logical order so you can use it to record answers/notes and can easily consult it during the interview.
• Record the interview if at all possible.
• Use follow up questions to get complete answers i.e. "Can you elaborate on what you said about xyz?"

Dealing with people's resistance

Since I have started interviews, I have the impression that some people are not so happy to collaborate...
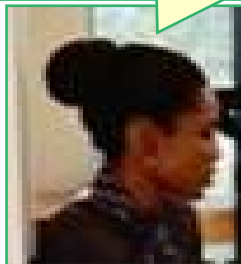
An online community can improve how people interact with one another, share knowledge, raise money, and achieve programme goals. Users can reduce isolation to increase independence. Despite this and many other benefits, ICT often alienates people, increases stress and leaves some people feeling incompetent.

Change means having to acquire new knowledge and skills.

It is important to explore **general attitudes and feelings about technology as well as those about change**. Negative feelings can lead to total rejection of a plan for an online community from within your organizations and the targeted population.

Dealing with people's resistance

People can have different technology attitudes.

According to research on technology stress, people's general reactions to technology characteristically fall into three "Techno-Types":

Those who are **eager** to use technology.	Those who are **hesitant**.	Those who are **resistant**.
They are technophiles, and the first to embrace new technology tools. They view technology as fun and challenging. They expect to have problems with technology, so when there is a glitch, instead of blaming themselves, they have fun solving the problem.	They prefer to wait until a new technology is proven before they try it. Even then, they may resist until they are convinced it is absolutely totally necessary. This group expects problems, but doesn't enjoy solving problems or think a solution is readily available.	Technology is not fun for resisters. They may feel that they will break the computer if they touch it. They feel intimidated and stupid. They simply can't deal with any problems that may come up and each one that does validates their view that technology is useless.

Dealing with people's resistance

For example, how would you classify **the attitude** of the following radio broadcaster towards the use of Internet in the community?

I'm able to use the computer, but I have always used the telephone from my station when I needed to solve some problems… What do the other community members think? Have they already tried to use Internet? If they have not, maybe there is a reason…

○ Eager
○ Hesitant
○ Resistant

Click on the answer of your choice

Dealing with people's resistance

People can also have different attitudes to adopting **new methods for working**.

Let's consider the following negative approaches. Which are the correspondent open attitudes?

Online community? I don't need it!

Is there a better way to communicate with my colleagues?

Everything is already great.

How can I master it? How can I fit it into my job?

What is an online community?

I'll try to participate, but it won't work…

Click on each option and drag it in the corresponding box.

When you have finished, click on the Confirm button.

Dealing with people's resistance

The best way to deal with stakeholder attitudes about technology and change is to **understand them**.

The role of the **Champions** is central to approaching and solving this problem.

You can gather information from stakeholders informally during regular meetings, or formally using focus groups/discussions and survey forms.

You can find sample questions and worksheets for informal and formal methods of collecting this information at:

http://www.summitcollaborati ve.com/cwpm.html#attitudes

Job aids

From the interactive lesson you can download and print documents
that can help you in your work.

**Form to identify potential online
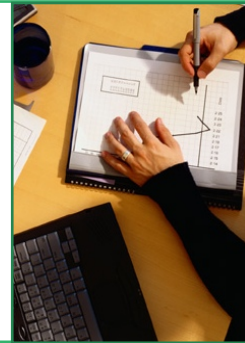community members and their needs**

Work with your team to brainstorm research
questions and create a plan to get information
from those who might be part of your online
community using the following tools:

Research Plan Design Form

Research Findings Summary Form

Summary

A **needs assessment** is a learning effort that consists of research and
analysis of data collected **from potential users** to develop steps for
implementing the online community.

First, you need to identify **general characteristics** (e.g. age, literacy
level, geographic area, etc.) of the potential online community
members.

You also need to collect information about their **communication
context** (access to ICT, gender, language, culture and sociability
aspects).

Research methods you can use to collect information are: **focus
groups** discussions, **questionnaires and surveys**, and **semi-
structured interviews**.

It is important to explore general attitudes and feelings about
technology as well as those about **change**. The best way to deal with
stakeholder attitudes is to understand them.

If you want to learn more...

GEM: Gender Evaluation Methodology for Internet and ICTs
The Association for Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Programme (APC WNSP)
http://www.apcwomen.org/gem/go4gem/index.htm
A guide to integrating a gender analysis into evaluations of initiatives that use Information and
Communication Technologies (ICTs) for social change.

MSP (Multi-Stakeholder Processes) Resource Portal
International Agricultural Centre
http://www.iac.wur.nl/msp/index.php?ID=109&IDsub=190
Practical information on how to facilitate participatory learning processes with various stakeholders. It
provides theoretical foundations, methods and tools to create learning processes, facilitation tips,
examples, literature and links.

Basic Business Research Methods
Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits
http://www.managementhelp.org/research/research.htm
Comprehensive resources and links on research planning, methodology, and analysis

Networked Society Readiness Guide
The Berkman Centre for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School
http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/readinessguide/society.html
http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/readinessguide/societytest.html
Overview on assessing communities for ICT readiness, and ICT readiness assessment tool

bridges.org's 12 Real Access criteria
http://www.bridges.org/digitaldivide/realaccess.html
Describes how access to technology must mean more than just computers and connections.