

# Identifying local community needs

It is important for a parish to discover the real needs of its local community, for it to be able to respond to its community context in a creative and sustainable way. A community profile is a snapshot of the significant features of a community.

The following tasks can be attempted to develop an in-depth community profile. They are presented in a suggested order. When time is limited, a selection of the tasks can be attempted.

## 1. Observation

Physically move around the area (walking where possible), using your five senses.

Think about the lens from which you are viewing from. Think about different lens you could use. For example, what you would notice if you were representing each of the following professions or points of view:

- Social worker
- Town planner/architect
- Environmental scientist
- Entrepreneur
- Local political member
- New resident from interstate or overseas

Use the following to record/collect information:

- Notes
- Photos
- Video

## 2. The Geography

A good starting point is to get a map of the local area in as large a scale as possible (e.g. 1:2500 or 1:10000). These are not always easy to get, but there are some specialist map suppliers for commercial maps. Maps are published by various government departments. Council libraries are also a useful port of call for more information on these.

To complete this task:

1. Determine the physical boundaries of the location.
2. Ascertain the administrative and other boundaries (e.g. Council Ward).
3. Mark on a map the land uses and facilities of the area:
  - Housing, different sorts
  - Industries and businesses
  - Retail
  - Leisure and cultural facilities
  - Health facilities
  - Education: schools, colleges, universities, etc
  - Public transport
  - Faith organisations: churches, mosques, synagogues, etc
  - Council resources: libraries, social services, etc
  - Post offices
  - Refuse and recycling facilities



Community centres are rich sources of information about a local area. Subscribe to your nearest centre's newsletter, and read their annual report. Spending some time visiting your nearest community centre can also be a valuable way of connecting with a range of people that may not visit your church. Visiting a centre in person can provide an additional opportunity to link with other community organisations and resources, using community noticeboards and other information on offer. Talking with workers from community centres is also a rich source of information and ideas.

You can find your nearest neighbourhood and community centre on the [Queensland Government website](#).

### 3. Statistics

Research the following statistics:

- Population make up: households, gender, age, ethnicity, faith
- Socio-economic data: employment, income, etc
- Housing stock

Resources to assist with data collection include:

- Council libraries
- City hall/central council information
- Real estate agents
- [The Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)
- [Queensland Regional Profiles](#)
- [NCLS Community Social Profile](#)

The NCLS Community Social Profile (CSP) is a 28 page profile of your local community, showing key information about the people living in your neighbourhood, using data from the 2016 National Census. Presented in a format that's easy to read, the CSP identifies what's changing in the social make-up of your community, helping your church or organisation to understand your community better.

Local council members have well-developed networks that give them an oversight of their suburbs' needs and profiles. Develop familiarity with your councillors and council services. Contact your local councillors letting them know you're wanting to engage more with your community. Some parishes even invite them to an event to enhance the relationship and also to give opportunity for informal contact from which other opportunities might develop.

For data collection and presentation, use:

- maps
- bar/pie charts
- tables
- description

### FOR INFORMATION COLLECTION

- use camera
- take notes
- make entries on large scale map



## 4. History

Write a summary of the local history. This is a chance to share stories and capture the feel of the area.

Include:

- Local First Peoples groups
- Key events
- Population mobility
- Socio-economic growth/decline
- Building spread

Resources:

- Council libraries
- Museums
- Historical societies
- Newspapers
- Internet



## 5. Human impressions

Seek out responses to the following questions:

1. What is good about living here?
2. What do you feel about the neighbourhood?
3. How would you improve it?
4. What community facilities are needed?
5. Where do you travel for work/shopping/leisure/family?

Methods:

- Choose samples with representative people e.g. teachers/nurses/social workers, etc
- Approach people in the street/at home/cafes/pubs/etc (this needs to be done with discretion and an eye to respecting people's privacy).
- Use questionnaires/formal or informal interviews
- Form focus groups

Record by:

- filling in forms
- note taking
- analysing both as statistics and impressions

## 6. Presenting the profile

Present material in a form that communicates best with the intended audience. A range of quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (non-numerical) information is usually presented using tables, graphs, quotations, stories, pictures, and various other approaches to thicken the representation.

Ask:

- what are strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats?
- do any possibilities for action begin to appear?

## Additional resources

Ballard, P., & Husselbee, L. (2007). *Community and Ministry: An Introduction to Community Development in a Christian Context*. London: SPCK, pp. 72).

--- (2017). *Stats have Faces: Helping your Congregation Engage its Community*. Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod.