

Tips for Needs Assessment

The central question driving needs is “Why are we doing this activity?” Early in the planning process, it is important to determine the specific gaps in knowledge and/or practice that the certified activity will attempt to address.

Robust needs assessment accomplishes the following things:

- Helps establish clear rationale for the activity.
- Allows potential participants and leadership to provide their input in the design of the program thus ensuring program relevance and strengthening the likelihood of behavior change following the program.
- Utilizes a variety of different needs assessment approaches, including input from potential target participants (required for nursing), leadership perspectives, and other data sources.
- When multidisciplinary – a needs assessment includes data for each profession

The longer the CE activity, the more diverse and robust the needs assessment should be. After looking at a variety of needs assessment sources and types of data, identify the most significant two to four defined needs for the activity.

Guidance as to what to include in a Needs Assessment:

- Statement of unmet educational need, (i.e., what is the identified educational void?)
- Sources consulted to determine need. Cite actual references/sources.

Examples of ways to elicit potential target participant perspectives:

- E-Mail questions to a sample of target audience with response strongly requested
- Brief phone interviews with a sample of the targeted participants
- Discussion at peer group meetings
- Review evaluation forms from past programs to identify what additional educational needs the participants identified

Examples of useful Needs Assessment questions:

- What would you like to be able to do in your practice that is prevented by the absence of skills, information, or resources (barriers)?
- Which aspects of diagnosing and/or treating <insert topic> do you feel the most uncomfortable diagnosing or treating yourself (as opposed to referring)?
- Note: Asking what clinicians find challenging in their practice will yield more useful information than asking what topics they want addressed

Examples of ways to elicit leadership and other perspectives

- Interview or e-mail local, regional, and national experts
- Review documents, organizational newsletters, etc.

Examples of data which highlight gaps in desired practice and actual practice

- Quality goal data, prescribing data (e.g., IMS resources)
- Data that illustrate variation in practice between physicians/geographic locations
- Data/documentation that suggest a particular practice is desired but has not yet been introduced.
- External requirements or forces that require performance change and evidence that the required change has not taken place

Other useful needs assessment information

- New best practices that have not been implemented consistently
- Research findings
- Legal information
- Marketplace data
- Committee activities and action plans