Maricopa County Community Action Program

2021
Community Needs Assessment

Appendix: Methods

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OVERVIEW

By federal statute (Community Service Block Grant Act) the Maricopa County Community Action Program is required to complete an inclusive community needs assessment every three years to support development of a robust and active strategic plan. The CSBG Organizational Standards guide this research and planning work, as well as all other aspects of Community Action Program (CAP) administration. The Organizational Standards were designed to ensure that local CAPs have the capacity to provide high-quality services to low-income families and communities. The CSBG Organizational Standards relevant to this work were cited in the Maricopa County Community Action Program requested scope of services and are presented in the table below. They fall within the following categories:

- Category 1: Consumer Input and Involvement, which asserts the value of elevating the voice of people with lived experience.
- Category 2: Community Engagement, which cites the importance of cross-sector, cross-agency partnerships and transparent communication with the community.
- Category 3: Community Assessment, which outlines the need for regular, inclusive assessment of community needs and resources.
- Category 4: Organizational Leadership, which delineates the role of a well-functioning board and key administrative functions.
- Category 6: Strategic Planning, which guides CAP strategic planning.

Figure 1. Maricopa County Community Action Program Needs Assessment Required CSBG Organizational Standards

Standard	Description
1.2	Analyze information collected directly from low-income individuals as part of the community assessment.
2.2	Utilize information gathered from key sectors of the community to assess needs and resources, during the community assessment process. These sectors would include at minimum: community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, private sector, public sector, and educational institutions.
2.3	The organization communicates its activities and its results to the community.
3.1	Conduct community assessment and issue a report every 3 years.
3.2	Collects current poverty data and its prevalence related to gender, age, and race/ethnicity for their service area(s).
3.3	Collects and analyzes both qualitative and quantitative data for all community service areas.
3.4	Includes key findings on the causes and conditions of poverty and the needs of the communities assessed.
3.5	Governing board formally accepts the completed community assessment
4.2	Informs an outcome-based and anti-poverty focused Community Action Plan
6.4	Customer satisfaction data and customer input is collected as part of the community assessment and included in the strategic planning process.

These standards, as well as specific requests by Maricopa County in the scope of services, guided the selection of research questions and the methods identified to answer those questions. The resulting research questions and methods are provided below in Figure 2. To respond to these research questions, the research team employed a mixed methods approach consisting of primary and secondary sources, including extant data, administrative data, focus groups, community survey, provider survey, and community vetting sessions. The following sections detail the data collected and the purpose and limitations of those datasets.

Figure 2. Maricopa County Community Action Program Needs Assessment 2021 Research Questions

Research Question
Context
1.   What are the demographic characteristics of people living in poverty, including age, gender, and race/ethnicity compared to the state and national averages?
2.   What are the economic, social and health characteristics of the community, including unemployment rates, economic indicators, housing data, education data, and access to health care?
3.   What are the key conditions of people living in poverty?
4.   What are the key causes of poverty?
Community Assets and Barriers

5.   What are key community assets and strengths that support progress on CSBG National Goals, including:
      a.   individuals and families with low incomes are stable and able to achieve economic security?
      b.   communities where people with low incomes live are healthy and offer economic opportunity?
      c.   people with low incomes are engaged and active in building opportunities in their communities?

6.   How satisfied are customers (clients or service recipients) with the services they receive(d)? Are customers better off?
7.   What are the barriers to meeting the needs of those not accessing or utilizing available services (underserved)?
Unmet Needs
8.   What are the key unmet needs of people living in poverty across service domains?
9.   What are the community-level needs resulting from the impacts of COVID-19, including impacts on health, employment, education, human service provision, and community resources? What are the anticipated near- and long-term impacts *(including to funding or budgets)*? What are the equity implications of the variation in impacts for people of different race/ethnic identities?
10.   How have energy prices or household energy bills changed overtime and has the proportion of household income allocated to energy bills (i.e., energy burden) changed over time?
Funding Recommendations
11.   How can available funds be used to address priority needs?

EXTANT DATA

The needs assessment includes extensive extant, population-level data, which was disaggregated when possible. In addition to the geographies cited in the table below, countywide analysis also includes state and national overall extant data for the variables sourced to the 2019 5-Year American Community Survey.

Figure 3. Extant Data Included in the Maricopa County Community Action Program Needs Assessment

Variable	Disaggregation	Geography	Source
Population	age, race/ethnicity, gender	countywide, service areas	2019 5-Year ACS
Poverty	age, race/ethnicity, gender[1]	countywide, service areas	2019 5-Year ACS
Median Rent		service areas	2019 5-Year ACS
Rent Burden		service areas	2019 5-Year ACS
Point-in-Time Homeless Count	age, race/ethnicity, gender[2]	countywide, service areas	MCAG 2020 PIT Homeless count
Nutrition Assistance	poverty status, race/ethnicity[2]	countywide, service areas	2019 5-Year ACS
Uninsured	age, race/ethnicity, gender[2]	countywide, service areas	2019 5-Year ACS
Childcare Cost		statewide	Child Care Aware
Unemployment		countywide, service areas[3]	U.S. BLS
Median Household Income	age, race/ethnicity, gender[2]		2019 5-Year ACS
Air Temperature		countywide	NOAA
Electricity Costs		statewide, Phoenix metro	U.S. EIA; U.S. BLS
Internet Access	age, race/ethnicity, gender[2]	countywide, service areas	2019 5-Year ACS
Educational Attainment	age, race/ethnicity, gender[2]		2019 5-Year ACS
Worker Vehicle Access	gender	countywide, service areas	2019 5-Year ACS

Abbreviations: American Community Survey (ACS); National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); Maricopa County Association of Governments (MCAG); Point-in-Time (PIT); Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS); Energy Information Administration (EIA).

Purpose

The extant population-level data provide community context for the county overall and each service area. It also serves to surface sociodemographic, educational, economic, or other variations between areas. These contextual features, such as poverty or communities of color, may drive variation in service need and, as such, is relevant for policy and program decision-making. In addition to baseline community context information, the extant data also served to augment, validate, or challenge the qualitative data results.

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[1] Small sample sizes in some service areas precluded the ability to disaggregate data reliably.
[2] Disaggregated data only provided at countywide level.
[3] Unemployment data is not available for the smaller service areas.

Limitations

Small sample sizes in some service areas led to results with large margin of error ranges and should be interpreted with caution. Large margin of error ranges are noted in the report when relevant, but it is important to consider that margin of error is present with all sampled datasets.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

For each service area, the 2019/20 unduplicated count of clients served by the local CAP is presented. For the countywide summary, three years of unduplicated counts are provided (2017/18-2019/20) and additional service count detail was provided by age, gender, and race/ethnicity for the 2019/20 service year. In addition, for the countywide summary, three months of "Calls for Service" data (January 2021, February 2021, March 2021) was gathered from 2-1-1 Arizona monthly program summaries submitted to VSUW. The data were sourced to service reports from the Maricopa County Human Services Department, Community Services Division.

Purpose

When compared to population-level data for context, service client counts can provide a sense of the reach of services into the community. For this analysis, the service client count data were compared to the count of people in poverty to give a rough estimate of the population in need and the extent to which CAPs are meeting the need. While CAPs can serve populations earning above the poverty threshold, persons below poverty are a key target population and the comparison provides context for the counts of clients served.

Limitations

Comparing client counts to the population in poverty can only provide a rough sense of program reach. Eligibility criteria for different programs limit who can be served, and people in need may have their needs met by other agencies or services. Therefore, the comparison should be viewed as primarily providing context for the service client counts.

FOCUS GROUPS

In early 2021, a total of 12 focus groups were conducted via the Zoom platform in CAP service areas across Maricopa County, including the areas listed below. The number in parentheses reflects the number of participants. Most town hall and focus group participants were providers, with occasional participation by clients. VSUW worked closely with provider organizations to promote convenings, which included:

- AZCEND (Chandler, Gilbert, Sun Lakes, Queen Creek and Higley service areas)
- City of Avondale (Goodyear, Avondale, Litchfield Park service areas)
- City of Scottsdale
- City of Surprise (Surprise and El Mirage service areas)
- City of Tolleson
- Foothills Food Bank (Cave Creek, Carefree, New River, and Anthem service area)
- Foundation for Senior Living (Aguila, Circle City, Morristown, Peoria, Sun City, Sun City West, Youngtown, Waddell, Wickenburg, and Wittman service areas)
- Maricopa County Community Services Commission
- Tempe Community Action Agency (Tempe and Fountain Hills service areas)
- Town of Buckeye (Buckeye, Harquehala, Palo Verde, Rainbow Valley, Tonopah, and Wintersburg service areas)
- Town of Guadalupe
- Town of Gila Bend

The focus groups were centered around surfacing greatest unmet needs, community assets and barriers, issues around equity and COVID, and program needs. The focus group protocol included the following questions, with instructions for the facilitator to probe for additional issues or context.

1. UNMET NEEDS: What is the most important issue that needs to be addressed today to help the community?
2. ASSETS: What are the best things our community has going for it that help us address community needs?
3. BARRIERS: What are the biggest barriers in our community to being able to meet everyone's needs?
4. EQUITY: Do you think that communities of color are impacted differently than white communities? If so, how?
5. COVID-19 (COVID): What are the community-level impacts of COVID? Are these impacts short- or long-term? Are communities of color more adversely affected than white communities?
6. PROGRAM NEEDS: What programs or services are needed more these days than other programs or services?
7. ENERGY: Have prices for utilities increased over time such that you or people you work with are struggling to keep up?

Purpose

The focus groups provided an opportunity for community members to offer more detail and depth than could be captured in a survey and, because they are live discussions, they enabled the facilitator to probe for additional explanation. The focus group data also provided contextual information that can help elaborate on findings from extant, administrative, or survey data. Focus groups honor the contributions of each participant and are not intended to arrive at consensus or majority points of view. As such, focus groups are a key strategy for building equity into research methods.

Limitations

Attendance in focus groups varied from community to community and yet, we were able to host one in every community including one with the Maricopa County Community Services Commission. The service areas of Peoria and Wickenburg combined the administration of their focus groups. The pandemic, which caused increased demand on existing service providers, may have impacted the ability of providers to participate in focus groups.

As with all qualitative data collection methods, a different group of people may have different views or insights.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

The community survey was fielded in English and Spanish in early 2021. Overall, it elicited 371 responses from clients, providers, and community members.

Respondent Characteristics

Most respondents (45 percent) identified as someone needing community services within the past year:

Survey Respondent Self-Identification	
Resident needing community services within the past year.	45%
Resident needing community services with the past three years.	18%
Resident familiar with available community services, but has not needed or received services in the past three years.	19%
Service provider, nonprofit or government staff member, CAP member, or elected official.	18%

Survey respondents represented all services areas in the region, with the highest percentage of respondents coming from the North (13 percent of all respondents), Central East (15 percent), Scottsdale (16 percent), and Buckeye (19 percent) service areas. The service areas with the lowest proportions of respondents were Wickenburg (2 percent), Central West (2 percent), and Northwest (2 percent). In the middle was Gila Bend (4 percent), Surprise (5 percent), Guadalupe (6 percent), Southeast (6 percent), and Tolleson (9 percent).

Survey respondents were fairly evenly distributed by age from 25 to over 75 years old. More female respondents completed the survey (77 percent) compared to male (23 percent). Most respondents (53 percent) identified as White, followed by Native American (11 percent), and Black (9 percent). Twenty-one percent did not list their race. Forty-seven percent of respondents identified as Hispanic or Latino; 52 percent did not.

Age		Race		Ethnicity	
Younger than 18	1%	White	53%	Hispanic or Latino	47%
18 to 24	7%	American Indian or Alaska Native	11%	Not Hispanic or Latino	52%
25 to 34	19%	African American/Black	9%	Gender	
35 to 44	16%	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1%	Female	77%
45 to 54	10%	Asian	1%	Male	23%
55 to 64	16%	Two or more races	5%		
65 to 74	19%	Not listed	21%		
75 or older	13%				

As summarized in the table below, most respondents reported low annual incomes. Nearly one-quarter of respondents (22 percent) cited annual income of less than $10,000, and more than three-quarters (77 percent) cited incomes less than $50,000. Over one-quarter (27 percent) of respondents identified as a two-parent household, while 26 percent identified as single, and 18 percent each identified as a female single parent or two adults, no minor children household.

Annual Income		Household Type	
Less than $10,000	22%	Two-parent household	27%
$10,000 to $14,999	18%	Single person	26%
$15,000 to $24,999	14%	Single parent / female head of household	18%
$25,000 to $34,999	12%	Two adults, no minor children	18%
$35,000 to $49,999	11%	Other	9%
$50,000 to $74,999	8%	Single parent / male head of household	3%
$75,000 to $99,999	7%		
$100,000 to $149,999	3%		
$150,000 to $199,999	2%		
$200,000 or more	2%		

Survey Administration and Recruitment

The survey was offered in two formats: online and paper. The questions were identical in the two formats except for a few instances where the different administration methods required modifications. The paper version included a QR code that linked to the online version of the survey to give users the option to complete the survey on their phones. To reduce survey fatigue, most questions were close-ended; however, there were several opportunities for respondents to add open-ended responses.

Respondents were recruited by community-based organizations that were closest to the work within each community. VSUW asked partner organizations in each of the service areas to distribute our survey to service recipients, front-line staff, and administrative staff. Outreach was conducted in English and Spanish languages via front-line staff and advertising in common areas at community-based organizations. VSUW send reminders and extended the deadline for survey responses on three occasions and made special outreach to organizations will limited resources.

Purpose

The purpose of the survey was to capture diverse and widespread qualitative community input, particularly from clients who were less likely or able to participate in the focus groups. The community survey solicited community input on the following: critical unmet needs, how those needs differ by population, the impact of COVID on the demand for services, programs that were particularly helpful, the ease or difficulty of accessing services, satisfaction with services received, and for providers, what services they felt were most in demand and their ability to meet that demand.[4] Basic sociodemographic information was also collected.

The survey centered around an alphabetized list of 15 service categories, including the option for respondents to specify another category. The categories were:

Abuse and neglect prevention and stabilization services	Housing support (such as rental assistance or homeless services)
Childcare (infants, preschool, and school age)	Income support
Education and skills training	Legal counseling
Employment supports (help getting a job)	Social support
Financial counseling	Technology/internet access support

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[4] Not all questions produced usable data. Please see the Limitations section.

Food/nutrition support	Transportation assistance
Health care access: mental health and/or substance use disorders	Utilities support
Health care access: physical health	Other (please specify)

The service category list above was used to solicit feedback on the most critical unmet needs. The same list was used for the questions that asked respondents to select any services they needed and sought out over the past three years and how easy or hard it was to get each of the services they selected. A follow up question asked how satisfied they were with the services they sought out.

Analysis and Presentation

The responses to the critical unmet needs question were summarized using the number of respondents as the denominator (e.g., 53 percent of respondents cited housing support as a critical unmet need). All 371 complete responses to the survey were able to be included in this calculation.

For the questions related to service access and satisfaction, respondents were able to report service access and satisfaction on any number of service categories, which required the results from these two questions to be calculated with the number service sought as the denominator, instead of the number of respondents as the denominator. Consequently, the percentages for these results should be read as respondents reporting in a particular way on the percentage of services sought out (e.g., respondents reported satisfaction with 48 percent of services they sought out). The percentages should *not* be read as the percentage of respondents responding in a particular way (e.g., 48 percent of clients were satisfied). The exception is when access or satisfaction was reported by individual service category. In these cases, it was possible to use the count of respondents as the denominator; therefore, those percentages can be read as the percentage of respondents (e.g., 68 percent of respondents getting housing support were satisfied.)

Responses to open-ended questions were treated as additional qualitative input to be woven into the report narrative in the overall, countywide findings or within individual service area summaries.

Limitations

The purpose of the survey was to capture more diverse and extensive qualitative input than could be reasonably expected using focus groups alone; as such, it was not the intent to identify a representative sample of the Maricopa County population.

Providers reported that the pandemic might have contributed to lower participation than would otherwise be possible since in-person visits to CAP offices were limited and services were being provided virtually, cutting down on foot traffic that enables them to do direct outreach. Email or text outreach may not have been as effective at getting clients to respond.

There were several irregularities in the administration of the survey that compromised the ability to use the data fully. Namely, the data on the needs of different populations was not useable, nor were the data on the questions targeted to providers. Many responses to the service access and satisfaction questions needed to be filtered out of the final dataset. After filtering, useable service access data reflects the responses of between 7 and 92 unduplicated respondents and useable satisfaction data reflects the responses of between 6 and 92 unduplicated respondents. The table below shows the unduplicated count of respondents by service category for the access and satisfaction questions.

Service category	After filtering, number of respondents responding to service access question	After filtering, number of individuals responding to service satisfaction question
Abuse and neglect prevention and stabilization services	8	6
Childcare	23	19
Education and skills training	21	16
Employment supports	16	15
Financial counseling	11	9
Food/nutrition support	92	92
Health care access: mental health/substance use disorder treatment	19	14
Physical health care access	44	36
Housing support	44	43
Income support	12	12
Legal counseling	10	11
Social support	7	8

Technology/internet access	16	12
Transportation assistance	17	15
Utilities support	53	51

By CAP service area, useable service access data ranged from 2 to 52 respondents, while satisfaction data ranged from 4 to 52 respondents by service area. Overall, there were 393 responses to service access questions across all service needs and areas, and 314 useable responses to service satisfaction questions across all service needs and areas.[5]

Further, due to the irregularities, subgroup analysis was not viewed as sufficiently reliable to report at the service area level, but selected subgroup analysis was provided in the countywide presentation of results.

With the lowest quality data omitted, the researchers sought to retain the results that were reasonably stable; however, limitations with these data should be noted, as well.

First, the critical unmet need question asked for respondents to select their top 3 or 5 critical unmet needs; however, respondents were able to select as many as they wanted. Consequently, when summarizing for the service areas, the selections were interpreted as a "top need" versus a "top 3" or "top 5" need. Further, some survey results suggest that some people may have interpreted the question as asking to identify a "critical need" not a "critical unmet need." The evidence that this may be the case is that Food support was the second most frequently cited unmet need countywide, but among people seeking this service, access and satisfaction was high, suggesting the need is largely met. It is also possible that other factors than misinterpretation of the question explain this apparent contradiction in findings.

Second, due to the need to filter out responses for data quality, the service access and satisfaction questions had a small number of responses in some service areas. In these cases, the response(s) are summarized verbally in the service area summary to ensure that the input is captured, but the results are not charted.

Overall, the irregularities in the survey administration, particularly duplicated questions or other errors, may have had an impact on response quality and the response rate. As such, the survey data should be interpreted with caution.

PROVIDER SURVEY

In part due to the irregularities experienced with the administration of the community survey, a follow up survey of providers was launched in April 2021. There were 66 complete responses recorded. The table below displays the number of providers participating from each service area:

Service Area	Respondent Count
Buckeye (Buckeye, Palo Verde, Rainbow Valley, Tonopah, Wintersburg, and Harquehala)	5
Central East (Tempe and Fountain Hills)	9
Central West (Avondale, Goodyear, and Litchfield)	7
Gila Bend (Gila Bend, Agua Caliente, Paloma, Hyder, and Sentinel)	1
Guadalupe (Guadalupe)	1
North (Anthem, Carefree, Cave Creek, and New River)	4
Northwest (Peoria, Waddell, Youngtown, Sun City, and Sun City West)	2
Scottsdale (Scottsdale)	15
South East (Chandler, Queen Creek, Sun Lakes, Gilbert, and Higley)	12
Surprise (El Mirage and Surprise)	6
Tolleson (Tolleson)	3
Wickenburg (Wickenburg, Wittmann, Aguila, Circle City, and Morristown)	1
TOTAL	66

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[5] The 393 and 314 counts of responses are a duplicated respondent count since an individual respondent could report their service access experience and level of satisfaction for more than one service category. These tallies do not include respondents who selected "not applicable" as their response, whereas the count of respondents by service category in the table does.

Purpose

The intent of this survey was to better understand demand for services from the provider's perspective and to ascertain providers' perspective on the ability of the service system to fulfill the demand. It also sought to understand the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on service demand. Providers were asked what services their agency provides from the list of 15 service categories that is presented in the Community Survey section. Among the services selected, providers were asked to assess how often they "currently" need to turn people away or add them to a wait list for a given service. Response categories were Always/Frequently, Sometimes, or Rarely/Never. Also, for the services selected, providers were asked to assess what impact the pandemic has had on the demand for a given service – increased demand, decreased demand, or no change.

Similar to the community survey presentation of access and satisfaction data, since providers were able to indicate service demand for any number of service categories, the results are reported using the number of services instead of the number of providers. The exception is when the data are being reported for each service category.

Limitations

Low response rates in some communities warrant caution with interpretation of service level results.

COMMUNITY VETTING SESSIONS

Valley of the Sun United Way hosted 10 virtual community vetting sessions in May 2021 with the following communities:

- AZCEND (Chandler, Gilbert, Sun Lakes, Queen Creek and Higley service areas)
- City of Avondale (Goodyear, Avondale, Litchfield Park service areas)
- City of Scottsdale
- City of Surprise (Surprise and El Mirage service areas)
- City of Tolleson
- Foothills Food Bank (Cave Creek, Carefree, New River, and Anthem service area)
- Foundation for Senior Living (Aguila, Circle City, Morristown, Peoria, Sun City, Sun City West, Youngtown, Waddell, Wickenburg, and Wittman service areas)
- Maricopa County Human Services Commission
- Tempe Community Action Agency (Tempe and Fountain Hills service areas)

Purpose

The purpose of the community vetting sessions was to share the preliminary results by service area with the providers in each service area. In these sessions, providers were asked to review the findings, validate or challenge them, and provide context for the findings. They were also asked to reflect on what service, intervention, or investment would have the greatest positive impact on the people they serve. Their responses to these questions, as well as any contextual information provided, were added to the service area sections and summarized in the Key Findings section in the main body of the report.

Limitations

Community vetting sessions could not be scheduled with every service area in Maricopa County, including:

- Buckeye, Harquehala, Palo Verde, Rainbow Valley, Tonopah, and Wintersburg service areas
- Gila Bend service area

This data was gathered via email.