



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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Community Needs Assessment: Douglas County 2002

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Purpose

The mission of University of Nevada Cooperative Extension is “to discover, develop, disseminate, preserve, and use knowledge to strengthen the social, economic and environmental well-being of people.” To that end, Cooperative Extension is charged with developing, implementing and evaluating educational programs that address critical needs and issues in Douglas County. Comprehensive need assessments are used to direct programming efforts.

Not all needs identified in this assessment process may be addressed by education. Some needs may be better addressed through regulation, service, entitlements, etc. Furthermore, some needs may be better addressed by entities other than Cooperative Extension. The results of this study, therefore, should be useful to other organizations.

Knowing which needs are most important to our community is critical to effective planning. If we focus our energies on high

priority needs, our chances of improving the quality of life are greatly enhanced. Hopefully, many will see the value of this information and use it to benefit citizens of Douglas County.

Methodology

Three community leaders were asked by the principal investigator to recommend potential participants. The principal investigator used the list of potential participants to select fifty individuals based on their knowledge of living conditions, health and education, public services, business and industry, or human resources. The objective was to select a representative panel of Douglas County citizens in terms of expertise, as well as gender, geographic location and ethnicity. Of the 50 participants, 22 were female and 28 were male; 42 were located in the valley and eight were from the Lake Tahoe basin; one was Latino, two were American Indian and the remainder was Caucasian.

The principal investigator contacted all participants by phone. The study's process and purpose were described, and prospective participants were asked if they were willing to commit their full participation. All 50 participants expressed interest in being involved. It was also explained that those participating would remain anonymous and strict confidentiality would be practiced.

The Delphi technique was used to assess community needs. This technique is one way of obtaining citizen input for ideas and problem solving. It uses a series of carefully designed questionnaires generated from feedback information from preceding responses. As with all community needs assessment models, there are advantages and disadvantages. The Delphi technique allows participants to remain anonymous and is relatively inexpensive. It is conducive to independent thinking and gradual formulation, and is free of social pressure, personality influences and individual dominance. However, the Delphi technique may be criticized for forcing a middle-of-the-road consensus, producing results from relatively few participants, being dependent on the judgment of a select group of people who may not be representative of the population and requiring substantial time and participant commitment.

The first of two questionnaires was called round one. Participants were asked to list up to four possible endings, in no particular order of importance, to the following question.

What are the most important NEEDS facing you, your family and your community in the next five to 10 years?

A cover letter accompanied the round one questionnaire, which further explained completion directions. Each letter was personally addressed and signed by the study administrator. The cover letter, round one questionnaire, and return envelope were sent out Aug. 28, 2002 and were due

back by Sept. 6, 2002. All participants were mailed a reminder postcard on Sept. 3, 2002.

The round two questionnaire was prepared from the round one responses. No attempt was made to place needs into individual, family or community categories. Duplicative responses were combined and wordy statements were paraphrased. Care was taken not to delete or change the meaning of the needs submitted in round one. One hundred fifty-four statements were represented in 11 subject categories in the round two questionnaire.

The objective of this round was to rate the importance of each need statement on a scale of 1 (most important) to 9 (least important). This questionnaire, cover letter, and return envelope were sent to the same 50 participants on Oct. 30, 2002, and were due back on Nov. 8, 2002. All participants were mailed a reminder postcard on Nov. 5, 2002.

Need statements were prioritized based on the importance rating averages. Needs with lowest average values were ranked the highest priority, while those with the highest average value were ranked the lowest in priority. Needs with identical averages were assigned the same priority rank.

Limitations of the Study

The following outlines the limitations of this study.

- The principal investigator selected participants he knew in the community based on his knowledge of their expertise, gender, ethnicity, and place of residence. This may have introduced some bias in the responses.
- The intent was to select a panel of participants that mirrored the county demographics, however, no measure was made to validate the representativeness of the sample population.

- No attempt was made to compare the opinions of the non-respondents to that of the respondents. Bias may have been introduced through the missing response of participants representing specific expertise, gender, ethnicity, and place of residence.

Response Rate

Forty responses were received from the round one questionnaire mailing, for an 80 percent response rate; while 37 responses were received from the round two questionnaire mailing, for a 74 percent response rate.

Results

One hundred fifty-four need statements, identified in round one and prioritized in terms of importance in round two, are represented in Table 1. Twenty-six need statements had identical averages and were assigned the same priority rank, thus producing a total of 128 priority ranks. The widest gap or difference between averages was between needs 22 and 23, thus creating a logical break in the data demarking a “top” set of needs. Of the top 22 need statements five were related to the environment, four to growth, four to safety, three to health care, three to citizenship and three to the economy.

Conclusions

It must be recognized that this assessment represents a picture of the perceived needs in Douglas County for the next five to ten years. Care should be taken not to read too much into the results. Certainly some needs have been ranked more important than others but it is not possible to draw a line to separate the most from the least. Where would one draw that line?

These results provide a good starting point from which to embark upon a comprehensive planning process. The results most certainly should not be treated as a total solution to forecasting. It is recommended that others use this information in the following manner:

- First consider the mission or purpose of your group. Start from the top of the list of prioritized need statements and check the needs you feel are mission related. These are the needs that your organization could positively impact. Write these out on a separate piece of paper.
- Prioritize this list and determine the top three needs. A representative group rather than a single individual should conduct this process. It may also be advantageous to involve members-at-large or other community citizens to bring a new perspective to the discussion.
- Next, brainstorm to generate ideas how your group could effectively address those specific needs. The Delphi technique could be used at this time to gather ideas.

References

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Table 1. Prioritized needs for Douglas County, Nevada in 2002.

Order of Priority	Need Statement
1.	Clean, drinkable water for all inhabitants
2.	Affordable health care/insurance
3.	Access to health care
4.	Growth/development planning using master plan
5.	Children's safety in community/neighborhood
6.	Safe school environment
7.	Availability and continued assurance of enough water for all uses, municipal, agricultural, domestic, recreational, etc.
8.	Air quality protection
8.	Water conservation
9.	Respect for American values
10.	Controlled, planned growth
11.	Housing affordable for young families
12.	Protection of wetlands to improve ground and surface water quality
13.	Maintaining a low crime rate
14.	Stable, cost-effective government
14.	County commissioners who listen to the community and the voice of the majority
15.	Zero tolerance for gangs
16.	Health insurance that covers higher percentage of care costs
17.	Home ownership for young families
18.	Income opportunities that would allow for home ownership
19.	Stable tax base
20.	Responsible citizenry
21.	A feeling of confidence that our commissioners will respect the master plan and avoid water/overcrowding issues
22.	Environmental solutions and awareness
23.	Retention of farm and ranch lands, agriculture sustainability
24.	Infrastructure to support anticipated population growth
25.	Income that increases with inflation and keeps pace with family needs
26.	More time for self
26.	Restoration/protection of the Carson River
27.	Employment that provides financial security

28.	Recruitment and retention of quality teachers
29.	Higher education degrees (bachelors & masters) offered locally
30.	Maintenance of Parks and Recreation facilities
30.	Retirement without burdening family
31.	Diverse job market, relying less on service
32.	Increase in undevelopable open space
32.	Cultural activities/opportunities, plays, concerts, etc.
33.	Classes offered in computer programs
33.	Roads/highway improvements
34.	Diversity embraced
35.	Protection of foothill forests from development
36.	More college courses (WNCC & UNR) offered locally
36.	Retirement benefits that cover expenses
37.	Stoplight on corner of Highway 88 and County Road
37.	Less bickering/more cooperative efforts
38.	Economy that meets the demands of higher prices/quality of life
39.	Access to public lands for hiking/biking
40.	Low utility costs; i.e., water, sewer, trash, power
41.	Bike and walking paths/routes linking communities, schools and parks
41.	Improved north/south roadways or alternate routes
42.	Recreation opportunities/activities for youth/teens
43.	Classes offered in job training
44.	Economic climate that supports small, local business
45.	Economic expansion that goes beyond tourism and big boxes, with employers that require college degrees
46.	High technology, clean-air employers
47.	More time for family
48.	Independent-living condominiums for seniors
49.	Recreation opportunities/activities for families
47.	Maintenance of property appearance and condition
48.	Low-cost dental care
49.	Tax structure that doesn't penalize most to benefit a few
50.	Reduced costs for prescriptions, particularly for the elderly
51.	Transportation for youth and seniors

52.	Multiuse, multigenerational community center
53.	Wages and benefits comparable to other areas in the region
54.	Classes in management
55.	More online (distance) education
56.	Classes in accounting
56.	Community support and county funds for police/fire protection
57.	Protection/preservation of native plant and animal species
58.	Reduced traffic through Gardnerville and Minden
59.	Increased entry-level job opportunities for 20- to 30-year-olds so they may remain in the community
60.	Meaningful paid or volunteer work
61.	Winning the war on terror and protecting the constitution
62.	Sustainable growth policy or plan
62.	Recreation opportunities/activities for adults
63.	Vocational school
63.	Education programs on importance of native flora/fauna
63.	Senior daycare
64.	Diversity of restaurants
65.	Relationships, people, communication
66.	Classes in clerical training
66.	Classes in construction technology
67.	Traffic control to eliminate jams
67.	Streetlights, where needed for safety
68.	Facilities for seniors
69.	Increased resources and financial support for public education
69.	Community service projects that involve native habitat restoration
70.	Preservation of the history of Genoa, Nevada's first settlement, and the history of Carson Valley
72.	Public education programs on conservation easements
73.	Opportunities for professionals to speak with school classes
74.	Health insurance services
75.	Child daycare options
76.	New Senior Center with satellite facilities in the north and south, and Lake Tahoe
77.	Better local information, i.e. newspaper, television news
78.	Diversity of retail stores

78.	Enforcement of the master plan without variation
79.	Cultural facilities for indoor/outdoor musical and theatrical performances
80.	Mass transit system serving neighborhoods on a regular schedule
81.	Access to public lands with parking and restroom facilities
81.	Lower student/teacher ratios in K-12 schools
82.	Assisted living/long-term care
83.	Planning and providing for kids' college expenses
84.	Elder-care services
85.	Religious/spiritual interests
85.	Hospital in the county
86.	Development of natural resources for economic diversification
87.	Subsidies/assistance with child-care costs
87.	Noise reduction in neighborhood
88.	Support services if death of spouse occurs
89.	Access to public lands for equestrians
90.	Increased police presence in neighborhood to cut down on speeding vehicles
91.	Opportunities to meet and commune with neighbors and townspeople
92.	Classes in gardening, botany, ecology
93.	Youth/adult mentor services
94.	Performing arts theater
95.	Jogging/walking tracks
96.	Restricted or limited growth
96.	Stoplight on corner of Highway 395 and Ironwood
97.	Gymnasium/basketball court
98.	Doctor trained for special needs of the aging
99.	Transportation options for tourists
100.	Retirement planning
101.	Assistance with utility costs
101	Tax support for seniors
102.	Meeting rooms
103.	Health education/prevention programs
104.	Charter schools or affordable alternative education
105.	Full-time, paid fire personnel
106.	Diversity of political/government representatives and workers

107.	Flex hours/telecommuting
108.	Mental health counseling without delay
109.	Grand jury investigation every four years on county government conduct, performance and implementation of previous jury' s recommendations
110.	Dependable and competent home repair and maintenance
111.	Free/affordable legal aid
112.	Grocery store in north town, Minden
113.	Aerobic exercise facilities
113	Weight training facilities
114.	Fitness center
115.	Alternative educational services
116.	Hispanic services
117.	Clothing stores for youth and adults
118.	Regionalization of governmental services
119.	Ice skating rink
120.	Sewer plant relocation out of town
121.	Cable access to sporting events
122.	Home mail delivery
122.	Local state welfare
123.	Financial management services
124.	A hardware store in Gardnerville
125.	Less homework for kids in order to have more family time
126.	Water park
127.	Golf courses
128.	Two-year sabbatical to attend seminary

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