

DEFINING PROJECT NEED

Prepared by Sinclair Community College

Adapted for use by the faculty and staff of College of DuPage.

NEED ASSESSMENT APPROACHES

Here are the three most commonly used approaches for assessing and documenting the need for your project.

1. Key Informant: Provide a quote from an external expert

See example A

2. Statistical Analysis: Use data from public records or internal sources

See examples B and C

3. Studies and Journals: Conduct a literature search of published documents on the subject.

See example D

Through your research you will be able to form a compelling need statement and show your command of current knowledge in your field.

In addition, your need statement should also document the urgency of addressing the problem and answer the question: "So what?"

ANSWER THE QUESTION: "SO WHAT?"

Why is it important for your project to happen? A strong proposal uses quantitative (numbers) and qualitative (quotes from external experts-see example below) data to support why the project is necessary.

Review the data your research uncovered, and ask yourself:

- What is the urgency in solving this problem now?
- What happens if the need is not addressed?

WHAT PROBLEM DOES YOUR PROJECT ADDRESS?

After completing your research, you are now in a position to make a strong need statement:

- What are the problems (or gaps) that exist that require solutions?

RESEARCHING THE COMPETITION

It is an excellent idea to spend some time determining if this project has been done elsewhere, and what approaches were used to deliver the services. This “market analysis” will become part of your Business Plan, if you need one. If you do not know who your competition is, you might begin by searching for comparable projects (both internally and externally) through:

- Web searches
- Peer contacts

Then answer the following questions:

- What did past projects learn?
- Is the market for this project steady, increasing, or decreasing?
- What makes *your* project unique?

KEY CHANGES EXPECTED FROM MY PROJECT

A strong proposal presents a clear vision of what exists now compared to what ought to or could be. A table, such as the one below, might be a good one to include in your final proposal.

KEY CHANGES EXPECTED FROM MY PROJECT	
As-Is	To-Be

Example A Key Informant: Quote from an External Expert

The following is an example of an external “expert” report used in a National Science Foundation proposal to document the need for the project:

“On August 12, 1999 the U.S. Secretary of Education commissioned The National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century. Chaired by astronaut and former Ohio Senator John Glenn, the Commission analyzed the state of mathematics and science teaching in the United States and issued recommendations for improvement. The final report, entitled, *Before It’s Too Late: A Report to the Nation from the National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century*, paints “a vision of high-quality teaching.” The following key tenets are excerpted from this vision (National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century, 2000):

- *High-quality teaching requires that teachers have a deep knowledge of subject matter. “For this there is no substitute.”*
- *The process of inquiry, not merely “giving instruction,” is the very heart of what teachers do. Inquiry not only tests what students know, it presses students to put what they know to the test. It uses hands on approaches to learning, in which students participate in activities, exercises, and real-life situations to both learn and apply lesson content. It teaches students not only what to learn but how to learn.*
- *High-quality teaching, especially in the sciences, focuses on the skills of observation, information gathering, sorting, classifying, predicting, and testing. A good science or mathematics teacher encourages students to try new possibilities, to venture possible explanations, and to follow them to their logical conclusions.*

The report further recommends creating “Summer Institutes” as a near-term solution to teacher professional development. It recommends two-week Summer Institutes to “address the most pressing problems, such as providing opportunities for upgrading content knowledge for out-of-field teachers, conducting subject-based workshops for all science and mathematics teachers, integrating technology into the teaching of mathematics and science, introducing new teaching methods, and improving skills for teaching specific subject matter by grade,” (National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century, 2000).

Source: Sinclair Grants Office, a National Science Foundation Proposal: *Connecting Mathematics, Science and Technology* (2001).

Example B
STATISTICAL ANALYSIS: USE OF DATA FROM PUBLIC RECORDS
OR INTERNAL SOURCES

According to the Dayton Business Committee, approximately 5,600 Montgomery County youth aged 15 – 19 are not in school. This includes 4,800 dropouts, 600 truants per day, and 200 suspensions/expulsions (Dayton Business Committee, presentation to the Out-of-school Youth Task Force, August 26, 1998). It is important to note that while urban areas across both Ohio and the entire nation have the largest number of dropouts, the Task Force found that virtually all school districts (urban, suburban, and rural) in the county are affected by the problem. These out-of-school youth are predominantly from neighborhoods characterized as low-income, with significantly high dropout rates, poor school performance, and other risk factors:

Low Income

High levels of poverty are characteristic of many Dayton neighborhoods:

- 1997 U.S. Census estimates 15% of Montgomery County youth live in poverty.
- There is approximately twice the percentage of low-income families in the City of Dayton (22%) as compared to the rest of Montgomery County (10%), the State of Ohio (10%), and the nation (12%) (*Statistical Abstract of the U.S.*, 1997 and *HHES Income and Poverty Statistics*, 1996).

Other Risk Factors

In 1998 the Montgomery County Out-of-school Youth Task Force contracted with Strategic Vision Inc. to conduct interviews of forty Montgomery County youth between the ages of 13 and 26 who were at risk for dropping out of school, or who already had dropped out. Results of the focus group study indicated the following characteristics of dropouts and potential dropouts.

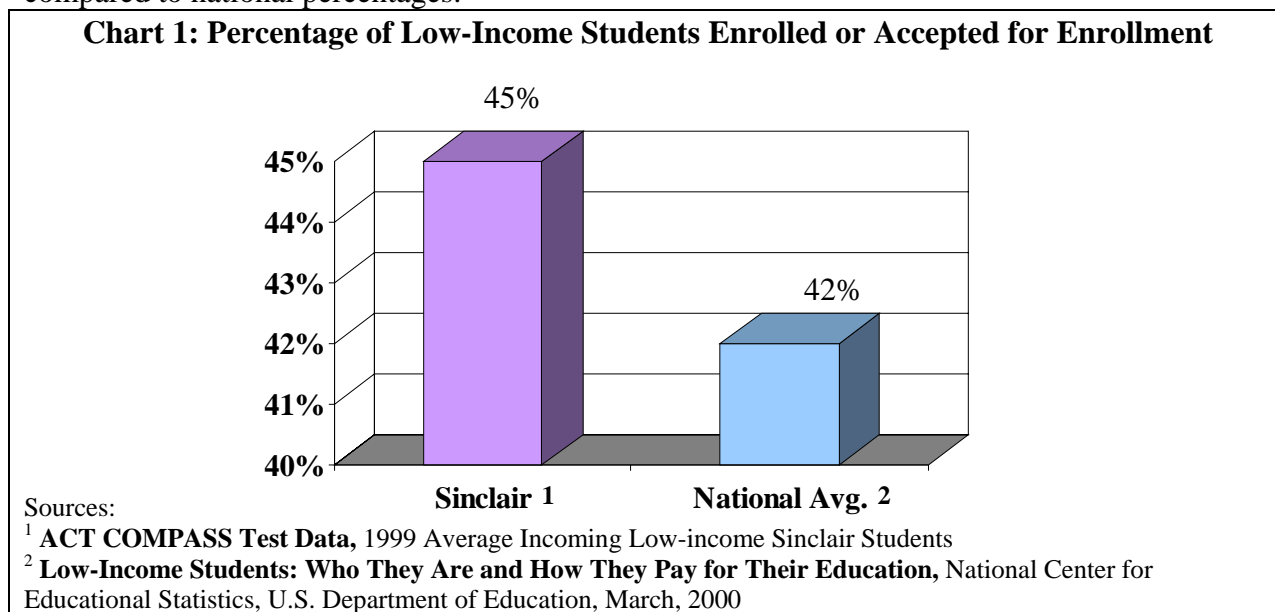
CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUTH AT RISK AND THEIR FAMILIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frequently, youth who drop out have parents who dropped out.• Youth and their families distanced themselves from the educational world.• There often are addictive behaviors in the home.• Often, someone in the home has a disability causing inconsistent employment patterns.• Youth often have attended a large number of schools in different districts.• Youth and their families have no concept of the types of jobs that are available.• In many households, the young person is the stable person taking care of the family, including siblings.• Generally, the youth and their families do not know how to access needed services.

Example C Statistical Analysis: Use of data from public records or internal sources

There is a great need for a Student Support Services Program at Sinclair due to the large enrollment of low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities.

Approximately 45% (9,314) of Sinclair students in the fall of 1999 were categorized as low-income, reflecting the urban economic conditions of students attending the college. This is slightly higher than the national average for two-year colleges (Chart 1).

Low-Income Students - Chart 1 shows the percentage of low-income students at Sinclair compared to national percentages.



High levels of poverty are characteristic of Dayton where Sinclair is located. In fact Dayton was ranked by *Governing* magazine (July 1993) as having the sixth highest poverty rate among the 100 largest U.S. cities. Table 2 provides local income information compared with the nation and the state of Ohio.

TABLE 2: INCOME LEVEL OF FAMILIES IN DAYTON, MONTGOMERY COUNTY, AND OHIO			
Target Area	Population	No. of Low-Income Families	% of Low-Income Families
City of Dayton	172,947 ¹	9,691 ²	22% ²
Montgomery County	570,490 ³	15,551 ²	10% ²
Ohio	11,186,000 ⁴	289,522 ²	10% ²
National	267,636,000 ⁴	27,376,000 ⁵	12% ⁵

Sources:
¹County and City Extra 1994, ²HHES Income and Poverty Statistics, 1996, ³USA Counties, 1996, ⁴Ohio Department of Development, Office of Strategic Research 1996, ⁵Statistical Abstract of the U.S. 1997

Example D
STUDIES AND JOURNALS: LITERATURE SEARCH OF
PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS ON SUBJECT

An ERIC Review publication, *Early Intervention: Expanding Access to Higher Education* (2000), presents the issues and challenges addressed by early intervention programs such as *Think College*. The *Think College* program employs “best practices” that have proven to be predictors of college enrollment:

How Can Early Intervention Programs Help Promote College Enrollment?

- Target students from low-income families.
- Help students see that college is a realistic option by providing mentors, encouraging campus visits, and offering support for college.
- Provide academic enrichment remediation, tutoring, and/or study skills course work.
- Provide academic and career counseling and access to peers with similar goals.
- Involve parents in program activities to increase their level of knowledge about college and their ability to be supportive of their children.
- Provide families with facts about applying to college, attending college, and paying for college.

Source: Perna, Laura. *Understanding Early Intervention*, ERIC Review (Vol. 8, Issue 1, Fall 2000)

Source: Sinclair Community College Grants Office proposal to the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, 2001.