



Conducting a Housing Needs Assessment

In rural communities, housing needs can be difficult to quantify. Seeing a rundown house here and hearing about a homeless family there can be indicators of housing issues. But what kind of information do you need to gather to get a clear picture of the housing situation in your community? To research housing needs, you should determine:

1. A housing region.

What are the physical boundaries of the area you wish to study? The housing region could consist of a community, county or geographically related cluster of communities. Base your region on real estate listings, lending and commuting patterns and the scope of the program you wish to implement.

2. The current inventory of housing.

How many houses exist in the area? This information can be collected in the form of reports from the county assessor's office.

3. The approximate value of housing.

What is the lowest house value in the area? What is the highest? And what is considered average? This data should be available from the county assessor's office. Loan officers at banks and mortgage companies can help determine what size loans are being requested and issues that buyers face when requesting financing.

4. The condition of housing.

How many substandard houses are in the area? What types of problems do these houses have? Again, your county assessor or the county clerk at the courthouse may be able to identify housing problems. You might also check with local housing organizations and social service agencies.

5. The type of housing.

Are there single family units and apartments? How many mobile homes are in the area? Are homes owned or rented? Check with your county assessor for this information.

6. The availability of housing.

How many units are currently available for occupancy? How many families are currently seeking quality housing? Local real estate agents often have a good sense of what kinds of homes are for sale or rent and who is looking for housing.

7. Labor needs that are affected by lack of housing.

Is industry having trouble finding workers due to lack of housing? How many new workers can't find affordable housing? Industry can help determine housing needs of their labor force, both current and future. They can identify commuting patterns, growth trends, unmet needs and wage levels of workers.

8. Infrastructure constraints on housing.

What kinds of zoning restrictions are placed on housing development? How many neighborhoods and what areas lack water, sewer or other services?

9. Land availability for constructing new housing.

How much usable land is available for new housing? What is the county or city's approach to planning for responsible development? The County Extension Office will have information on local land use, and planning and zoning boards and local officials can speak to planning issues.

Armed with the information from a housing needs assessment, a community can project population and housing needs for the next three to five years and plan to meet those needs.