Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program

Community Needs Assessment

2019

SWCAP
Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program, Inc.

LIFT rides
1-608-930-2191 SWCAP

Table of Contents

Summary: 2019 Community Needs Assessment

Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program (SWCAP) utilizes a planning cycle based on a Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) framework. All parts of this cycle are guided by the agency's Strategic Plan which, in turn, is informed by the Community Needs Assessment (CNA) every three years.

The Community Needs Assessment is a study that gathers community data from quantitative and qualitative sources to assess how well SWCAP is addressing the needs of the community. The CNA assists SWCAP Staff and Board Members in understanding, improving, and/or expanding existing programs in order to meet the overall organization's Mission. In addition to supporting strategic planning, evaluating existing programs, and assessing needed programs, the CNA is also useful in developing priorities for SWCAP and supporting the need for funding.

SWCAP partnered with Southwestern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission to gather data and develop the Community Needs Assessment. The data collection and review process was guided by SWCAP's recently created Planning and Review Committee. The Planning and Review Committee reviewed and suggested adoption of the plan on September 24th, 2019. The Board of Directors of SWCAP adopted the Community Needs Assessment at their regularly scheduled monthly meeting on September 26th, 2019.

Data Collection and Analysis

The Community Needs Assessment for Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program is comprised of three sources of data: Quantitative Data, SWCAP Client Surveys, and Interviews with SWCAP Board of Directors and Management Team members. Each of these data sources is further discussed below.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data was gathered from a variety of national, state, and county data sources. The most heavily used sources were the US Census Bureau and County Health Rankings. Information on Demographics, Social Economic Factors, the Physical Environment, Clinical Care, and Health Behaviors was collected and presented in Appendix A. Data was collected for each county and for comparison data was collected for the State of Wisconsin, the United States, and the region. In some instances, a comparable Community Action Program service area in Wisconsin was evaluated for comparison. To evaluate how community needs have changed over time, data was collected for up-to-three years when available.

SWCAP Survey

A survey was distributed to SWCAP clients and all residents of southwestern Wisconsin to gain a better understanding of the needs of the community and to evaluate client satisfaction with how current services are being provided. The survey was active beginning April 29th, 2019 and stayed open until July 29, 2019. The survey was sent to SWCAP program directors to distribute to their partners and clients and to all library directors in the region. The survey was available online and as a hard copy, in both Spanish and English versions.

Survey results show the majority of respondents were from Grant County and some counties had as few as 16 responses. In response to this, an analysis was done to evaluate how the amount of Grant County

responses may have impacted the overall results of the survey. Based on that analysis, it was concluded that overall results are more reflective of Grant County than the region as a whole due to the difference in results of Grant County respondents and the responses of other county residents. We still believe the survey results should be used to understand the greater community needs of the region due to relative similarities that exist across the region.

Results also indicate the greatest response was likely to be from food pantry clients. The regular scheduling of food pantries makes it more likely that clients will return completed surveys. While it is likely that people who use other services of SWCAP are also likely to be eligible for and use the food pantry, the results of the survey indicated that the majority of respondents are familiar with food pantries, while other programs did not receive the same client familiarity.

Interviews with SWCAP Management Team and Board of Directors

Phone interviews were conducted with all SWCAP Board of Directors and Management Team members. Both groups of interviewees were asked the same questions and responses were kept anonymous. Once interviews were completed, notes and transcripts were entered into an analysis software that allowed key phrases and words to be quantified. Keywords were reviewed to identify co-occurrences with other keywords (e.g. "service to maintain" and "transportation"). Board of Director and Management Team responses were analyzed separately.

Needs Assessment Findings

Through the collection and analysis of the three sources of data, community needs and general themes were identified. Identified needs and themes were not only in relation to the services that SWCAP provides to residents of the region but also related to the internal management and governance of the organization. The themes below have been presented to highlight those that are internal to SWCAP management and governance, and those that relate to the services that SWCAP provides. Some findings will relate to both, such as *Comprehensive Approach to Services*. No ranking was established for the findings. The themes presented are categorical and represent several community needs within the larger theme (e.g. Reaching out to the growing Latino Population and a stronger digital presence both are under the theme of Marketing.) The following pages highlight each of these themes.

Client and Community Findings
- Mental and Behavioral Health Services.
- Housing.
- Transportation.
- Food Insecurity.
- Living Wage.
- Childcare.
- Comprehensive Approach to Services.

SWCAP Management and Governance Findings
- Community and Client Engagement.
- Increasing Capacity.
- Educating the Board.

The following is a table showing the major themes gleaned from this process and where the information was gathered from.

Key themes and sources.				
Themes.	Survey.	Report Data.	Board Interviews.	Management Interviews.
Mental and Behavioral Health Services	✓	✓	✓	✓
Housing.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Transportation.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Food Insecurity	✓	✓	✓	✓
Living Wage.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Childcare.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Comprehensive Services.	✓		✓	✓
Community and Client Engagement	✓		✓	✓
Increasing Capacity			✓	✓
Board Education			✓	✓

Mental and Behavioral Health Services

A growing demand and inadequate resources for Mental and Behavioral Health Services is found in the following data sources:

Theme.	Survey.	Report Data.	Board Interviews.	Management Interviews.
Mental and Behavioral Health Services	✓	✓	✓	✓

Mental and behavioral health was in the top six issues discussed by both the board of directors and the management team. It was mentioned often in relation to recent and growing issues, services to expand, and services to maintain. Since 2016, SWCAP has begun offering services related to behavioral and mental health, including addiction recovery but the data suggests that more needs to be done.

Nearly all management team members identified behavioral and mental health as a need they see regularly. The universal need in southwest Wisconsin was often discussed in relation to several growing trends including farmer suicide, opioid addiction, and growing mental health issues among children. From 2016 to 2019, the ratio of total population to mental health care providers improved slightly in every county, yet the ratio remains higher than the State of Wisconsin as a whole.

Ratio of Total Population to Mental Health Care Providers.	
Location	2019
Grant	1,020:1
Green	1,080:1
Iowa	1,480:1
Lafayette	560:1
Richland	920:1
Wisconsin	530:1
US (Median)	440:1

Additional key figures that highlight the increasing need for access to mental health care providers include the following:

- Of the issues survey respondents reported being *Very Present* in their lives, "*Feeling increased levels of stress*" and *"Having depression and/or other mental health issues"* were #1 and #3 respectively. Over 70% of respondents said that increased stress was *very present* or *slightly present* in their lives and over 50% stated that having depression and/or other mental health issues was *very present* or *slightly present* in their lives. [1]
- 17% of residents in the region are lacking social and/or emotional support.
- Nearly 26% of high school students, in each reporting county, responded that at some point they, "felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that they stopped some usual activity."
- Between 16% and 19% of high school students, in the reporting counties, reported, "seriously considered attempting suicide in the last 12 months." [2]
- Approximately 16% of the region's Medicare population report suffering from depression.[3]

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[1] See Appendix B. Page 107.
[2] Appendix A. Page 81.
[3] Appendix A. Page 94.

Housing

Issues and needs associated with housing are present in the following sources of data:

Theme.	Survey.	Report Data.	Board Interviews.	Management Interviews.
Housing.	✓	✓	✓	✓

"The need for affordable housing is very important, especially when there is a living wage issue." – Management Response.

In 2016, the high cost of housing and the stagnation of wages were presented together in the CNA. The data results in 2019 suggest these issues remain intimately tied but will be discussed separately due to additional information gathered on each. Housing was the #5 most discussed issue of the management team at SWCAP and was most often discussed as a service to expand. Issues co-occurring with housing were diverse and included the lack of affordable housing, a growing homeless community, additional need for assistance with existing homeowners to complete repairs, and issues associate with affording housing utility costs.

While the percentage of cost burdened households decreased in the region between 2014 and 2017, approximately one quarter of households remained cost burdened in 2017.[4] Comments from interviews identified the supply of affordable housing is the most constrained and much of the housing that may be affordable is often not safe or clean. Interviews identified that workforce and senior affordable housing are the most needed. SWCAP has begun efforts to address workforce housing in the region. Interview responses suggest that this effort should be expanded.

Approximately 18 survey respondents stated that addressing issues associated with housing would have the greatest impact in becoming more economically self-sufficient. Of these responses, approximately half were in relation to the costs of owning a home or home repairs. This response suggests that additional low-cost and low-maintenance housing is needed in the region.[5] Additionally, a response from the management team suggested a lack of independent living facilities for seniors in the region is a cause of poverty. This lack of facilities requires seniors to live in and maintain a single-family house on a limited income.

Homelessness was discussed more frequently in interviews than during the 2016 CNA and was often discussed in terms of shelters and services being expanded. SWCAP currently has a homelessness prevention program, interviews suggested the program should be expanded to address homelessness growing in the region. [6]

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[4] See Appendix A. Page 73.
[5] See Appendix B. Pages 127 – 129.
[6] See Appendix C.

Transportation

The need for transportation services in the region is discussed in the following data sets:

Theme.	Survey.	Report Data.	Board Interviews.	Management Interviews.
Transportation.	✓	✓	✓	✓

Comments directly related to the challenges of transportation in rural southwest Wisconsin were common in interviews. Transportation is the third most stated issue among the management team and the first and second most common service to expand for the management team and board respectively.

In relation to income, transportation was often mentioned. Statements from interviews identified the need for transportation to access higher paying jobs in larger cities outside of the region and that transportation is often a significant, but hidden, part of the household budget.

Much of what was stated about SWCAP's transportation program was positive, identifying the LIFT and Working Wheels programs as highly successful. The positive results of the transportation program encourage its expansion because of a growing need in the region. The need for transportation services is likely to grow as the region continues to grow older and services become more concentrated in the larger cities, leaving smaller villages isolated from services. Many interviewees expressed the difficulties of providing efficient and effective Public Transportation in rural regions.

Survey results identified that a dependable form of transportation was a key aspect of allowing people to get their groceries. Yet, very few people identified utilizing public transportation services for this basic need. In the region, less than 0.25% of residents use public transportation, this is very low in relation to the state and the next most similar region.[7]

Southwest Wisconsin is rural in character and does not currently have a lot of options for public transportation for individuals that live outside of the region's cities. Existing public transportation options include: taxi services in each county's larger cities, ADRC buses with fixed routes in each county, and SWCAP's Lift for demand response throughout the region. Each of these have limited hours of service and are not widely accessible or known by the public.

"The lack of Public Transportation makes everything more difficult." – Board Member Response.

More information regarding the state of transportation in the region including all transportation providers can be found through the region's Locally Developed Regional Transportation Plan at:
https://www.swwrpc.org/services/transportation-planning/Regionally-Coordinated-Transit-Plans.

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[7] See Appendix B. Page 146.

Food Insecurity

Issues of food insecurity are present in each data set reviewed.

Theme.	Survey.	Report Data.	Board Interviews.	Management Interviews.
Food Insecurity	✓	✓	✓	✓

Survey respondents were more likely to be aware of SWCAPs Food and Nutrition programs than any other SWCAP programs, yet approximately 27% of survey respondents stated that within the past 12 months they often worried whether their household's food would run out before they had money to get more. Additionally, *Needing Food* was the fourth most common *Very Present* issue of the survey respondents. Additional responses regarding food insecurity identified the inaccessibility for many to get to grocery stores due to a lack of transportation options.[8]

Interviews with management and the board of directors indicated seniors and children as the most likely to be food insecure. Over the past three years, the number of children eligible for free and reduced lunch increased year over year in every county in the region. Interviews stated that while students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch during the school year are being served, students may be going hungry during evenings, weekends, and during the summer months.

In 2017, between 9.8% and 13.3% of households were receiving Food Stamp/SNAP benefits, depending on the county.[9]

Access to quality and nutritious food was a concern expressed in interviews, especially among the management team. Nutrition concerns were mostly related to children and seniors but was mentioned in general terms for all residents as well. Interviews mentioned that the food pantries are able to provide food to residents in need, but much of that food is dense with calories and low in essential nutrients. Comments suggested that additional efforts should be made to provide nutritional and perishable foods at pantries.

In response to where residents are likely to purchase their food, over 50% of respondents included "Convenience Store/ Gas Station" as location they have purchased food from in the past 30 days.[10] These locations are less likely to provide fresh and nutritious food than full-service grocery stores. Although in many of the small communities in the region, these are likely to be the only option in the community and stores such as Kwik Trip have made efforts to provide more fresh produce, meats, and dairy. In addition to not providing nutritious food, Convenience Stores and Gas Stations are also likely to be more expensive than the traditional grocery store.

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[8] See Appendix B. Page 143.
[9] See Appendix A. Page 71.
[10] See Appendix B. Page 136.

Living Wage

Low incomes in relation to the cost of living is a common issue across all data sets.

Themes.	Survey.	Report Data.	Board Interviews.	Management Interviews.
Living Wage.	✓	✓	✓	✓

The median household and per capita incomes for the five-county region grew in every county between 2014 and 2017, and the percent of the population below 100% and 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) decreased. At the same time, unemployment rates decreased throughout the region. While these data points are encouraging, a complete review of the data available shows that the increase in income is not shared among all residents or households and that modest increases in income are not keeping pace with the increasing cost of living.

To help uncover these issues, this CNA utilized the United Way's ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) Data. The purpose of this data is to evaluate those who are unable to afford a basic budget and are above the federal poverty level. Since 2010, the households in the region above poverty levels and under the ALICE Threshold increased over 20%, while the number of households above ALICE thresholds declined by 6%.

Regional Poverty, ALICE and Above ALICE Threshold Households					
SWCAP Region	2010	2012	2014	2016	% Change 2010-2016
Poverty Households	6,267	6,905	6,912	6,588	5.1%
ALICE Households	12,633	12,228	13,222	15,393	21.8%
Above ALICE Threshold	38,338	38,698	37,843	36,034	-6.0%
Total Number of Households	57,238	57,831	57,977	58,015	1.4%

The survey also identified the issue of living wage. The *need for well-paying jobs* was the second most present issue identified by respondents in the survey. Nearly a quarter of respondents stated it is an issue very present in their lives. Many respondents also identified that better paying jobs would help them become more self-sufficient. The survey response related to wages is not unexpected, but the combination of the survey response and the ALICE data shows that wages in the region are not keeping pace with the cost of living.

The issue of a living wage is well-known among the management team and board directors. The low wages of the region were often identified as a cause of poverty. While it is well-known issue, few are able to express SWCAP's role in addressing the region's low wages. Low-wages in the region were often expressed in combination with the need to expand skills-training or the changing economy of the region. At least one response identified the role of SWCAP as a legislative advocate for increase wages in the region.

Childcare

Issues associated with Childcare are present in the following data:

Theme.	Survey.	Report Data.	Board Interviews.	Management Interviews.
Childcare.	✓	✓	✓	✓

"Childcare is a big challenge for the region because it costs as much as the low-paying positions that are available." – Management Team Member.

Thirteen of the open-ended responses asking residents what will have the greatest impact on their family becoming self-sufficient stated that affordable childcare was needed.[11]

Childcare data in Appendix A shows that between 2009 and 2019 the number of childcare workers in the region has decreased significantly, following a statewide trend. The decrease in childcare workers may likely be to the low wages that childcare workers receive as indicated by the median hourly earnings in Table A.104. While childcare workers tend to make less than the median wage, childcare costs represent a large part of a household budget. Throughout the region annual childcare costs are between $12,996 and $15,516. Figure A.71. shows that the cost of childcare is often creates an annual household budget higher than the median household earnings.[12]

Childcare is a significant theme in the interviews with the board and management team. Many related the need for affordable and quality childcare to other needs such as education, workforce, living wage, and causes of poverty. Childcare's most common co-occurrence in the interview results was with *Causes of Poverty*. Interviews continuously recognized the need for affordable childcare, quality childcare, and childcare in general. Many saw the lack of affordable childcare as a cause of potential income earners not being in the workforce. Others drew connections between the low wages of the region and the lack of childcare.

Childcare was mentioned in relation to the importance of the Headstart program, considering the program plays two functions, education and childcare. Childcare was at times mentioned as a program for SWCAP to start or to expand Headstart to include those that currently do not qualify or consider a year-long program.

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[11] Appendix B. Pages 127 – 129.
[12] Appendix A. Pages 101 - 102

Comprehensive Services

Issues associated with Comprehensive Services are present in the following data:

Theme.	Survey.	Report Data.	Board Interviews.	Management Interviews.
Comprehensive Services.	✓		✓	✓

Comprehensive services, in the context of the CNA, is being defined as the ability of SWCAP to evaluate the need of each client in relation to all services that SWCAP currently offers. Comprehensive Services was a common theme in interviews, although it was referred to in different ways. Management team members often stated that programs operate in a silo and both interview groups identified that more needs to be done to connect clients to services that they are likely eligible for. Some spoke of the need for case workers, social workers, a holistic approach, wrap around services, or a central intake for clients. A comprehensive approach was identified as one of the potential best ways to help people get out of poverty.

Comprehensive Services was identified in the interviews as a potential solution to address both the needs of clients and issues associated with SWCAP's program management structure. Many management team members stated that programs at SWCAP operate within a silo and employees do not have an adequate understanding of the programs that they do not work with. This creates problems with staff turnover and implementing organization wide policies and procedures.

The public survey reinforces the potential need for comprehensive services. The majority of respondents were either unaware or did not use programs they are potentially eligible for. Many of SWCAP food pantry clients are eligible for other types of assistance, yet the majority of respondents stated they are familiar with SWCAP's food pantries but are unfamiliar or did not use many of SWCAP's other programs. Additionally, when asked why clients did not use SWCAP services, 50% of respondents stated that they are unaware of what services are available. [13]

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[13] See Appendix B. Page 104.

Community and Client Engagement

Very similar to Comprehensive Services, Marketing is identified as an internal need for SWCAP.

Theme.	Survey.	Report Data.	Board Interviews.	Management Interviews.
Community and Client Engagement	✓		✓	✓

From the interviews conducted with the board and management, there is a common concern that SWCAP is not effectively reaching populations most likely to need their services. The populations most commonly associated with the need for marketing included the senior and Hispanic/ Latino populations, which are growing populations in southwest Wisconsin.

The number two theme identified in management team interviews was communication and the most common co-occurrence for this theme was technology. Among the management team, the issue of communication was often seen as an issue of adopting new technology to reach clients. Many stated they have noticed many people utilize mobile phones and texting as a preferred communication. Other statements regarding communication and technology included improving the provision of digital content and updating the website.

The board of directors also identified that SWCAP can do more to reach out to the rural population in the region. Among the existing population, the use and need for digital content is growing yet seniors, a growing population, still rely on traditional forms of marketing. These statements show that existing services remain important and that marketing should be expanded into the digital and social media platforms.

A common theme associated with marketing and communication is addressing the stigma associated with the use of services in the region. This was commonly identified as an issue among the senior populations who may have never had to use public services in the past. This may also be a reason why many people do not actively seek out services. Both sets of interviews identified that stigma is a barrier to providing services and SWCAP should do more to address this through marketing and communication.

Increasing Capacity

Additional Staff is a comment often seen in Board of Directors and Management Team interviews and is a need internal to SWCAP.

Theme.	Survey.	Report Data.	Board Interviews.	Management Interviews.
Increasing Capacity			✓	✓

Board and Management interviews identified additional staff as a need internal to SWCAP. It was commonly stated that SWCAP needs additional administrative staff to support the director and the program managers. The additional administrative staff position comments were often stated in relation to programs being in a "silo." Some management team members stated that additional administrative staff would allow them to focus more of their time improving their programs rather than on administrative and human resource tasks. Since starting the Community Needs Assessment, work has begun to hire a deputy director.

Additionally, volunteers were discussed as a need in the region for SWCAP. Some SWCAP programs rely on volunteers, yet have a difficult time finding enough volunteers to meet the demand of the program. Another response was specific to better utilizing volunteers to achieve specific goals. These would be more involved volunteers that are focused on programmatic outcomes rather than tasks. SWCAP should evaluate the ability to partner with AmeriCorps for regional goals related to addressing poverty.

Board Education

Board Education is a very common response during Board Member interviews and, to some extent, in management team interviews.

Theme.	Survey.	Report Data.	Board Interviews.	Management Interviews.
Board Education			✓	✓

Overall, many board members believe the board functions well. Of the few issues identified with how the board functions, the most common is that board members do not receive adequate training when they first come on to the board. It was stated that the board is beginning to address this issue with consistent training on the programs that SWCAP offers. Some board members stated that they are unsure of their role and responsibility with the organization and many stated that it took them a long time to become familiar with all of the programs that SWCAP offers.

Overall, the management team was satisfied with the board. Some management responses indicated a perception the board is looking for additional information on each of the programs. One response suggested that board members should meet with program directors.

Several interview responses stated that the organization should be doing a better job of educating potential board members of the expectations and requirements of board members. Many of those that are interested in being on the SWCAP Board may likely be on other public boards and committees, especially in the case of County Board members. It is important for potential members to know that SWCAP board requires a significant commitment of time that they may not be able to afford in relation to the other public boards and committees they are on.

Lessons Learned for future Community Needs Assessments

- The Planning Committee suggested that future Community Needs Assessment surveys should ask follow up questions. Examples of this include following up on why respondents are unsatisfied with specific services or asking respondents to explain their disability.
- Distribution of the survey will need to be improved throughout the region. This was evident when reviewing the county distribution of survey respondents for the 2019 survey. Distributing the survey and receiving a good response is a challenge of time and resources. The Planning Committee suggested utilizing annual surveys of key community members to build a regular data set for use in strategic planning. The Planning Committee believes that regular distribution will help create strong responses.
- Additional data from a variety of key community members was discussed as an important role of SWCAP. This may include sending the surveys to religious institutions and groups, local libraries, schools, and county social services. Efforts will need to be made to build these distribution lists.
- The Planning Committee suggested asking a question in the survey regarding the use of financial institution's education resources.
- The review of quantitative date over time was an addition to this CNA. Future CNAs should utilize the existing data sets and build upon them to determine how needs have changed over time and if the organization is effectively address stated goals.