Document Review: A Method for Conducting a Needs Assessment

Description

Document review is considered the foundation of the needs assessment. It is generally performed at the initial phase of the needs assessment process. Document review is a beneficial starting point for a comprehensive needs assessment, as it allows reviewers to understand the existing data related to the topic, problem, or program in question. During document review, various earlier materials relevant to a specific need or problem must be examined. These include reports and datasets (e.g., gray literature, census-based data, program logs, funding proposals, performance ratings, newsletters, marketing materials, meeting minutes, etc.). Documents are available in hard copy and digital form, at local public libraries, in media reports, etc. Reviewers should also analyze national, state, and county data to understand the nature and context of the problem.

Tips for Optimizing the Document Review Process

- It is important to assess and verify the accuracy of existing documents.
- It is recommended to report aggregated data rather than individual datasets to understand the full picture of the problem.
- It is recommended to appropriately acknowledge and cite the support of various agencies when using their datasets and reports.
- It is necessary to consider the timeframe the document data was collected.

Pros

- Document reviews help Mississippi State University Extension professionals gain a more comprehensive understanding of a specific issue or problem across different time periods. This can help identify common trends and issues in communities.
- Document reviews provide an opportunity to compare various documents on a specific issue or topic, ultimately helping to authenticate or verify information with multiple sources at the same time.
- Document reviews do not require a lot of money to conduct.

Cons

- Document reviews cannot solely provide a comprehensive understanding of a specific issue or problem. Therefore, additional needs assessment methods must be conducted by Extension professionals.
- Document reviews could be outdated, which may lead Extension professionals to receive incorrect or distorted information about a specific problem.
- Accessing document reviews might be challenging, especially if some documents are not readily available, which can prevent easy access to recent data about specific issues or problems.

References

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