

Local Needs Assessments: Laying the Foundation

LGPs don't need to wait to begin the LNA process. Community Table meetings, local events, and day-to-day interactions are opportunities to build relationships and engage in authentic listening to better understand the lived experiences of families in your community. Here are a few suggestions to help LGPs and Community Tables begin thinking about the LNA process.

Here are a few examples from LGPs in CT:

- Host a Community Table, "Parent Group," or "Caregiver Connection." Provide a range of age-appropriate activities for caregivers and children to engage in together. Station Community Table members and Parent Ambassadors at each activity, where they can build relationships and learn more about local families with young children. Providing food always helps!
- Attend other local, child or caregiver-centered events. For example, church dinners, PTO meetings, playgroups, community dinners, and library story hours may offer opportunities to meet families where they are.

Have your Community Table think about the following questions:

- **Where are families already showing up?**
 - Everyday Community Spaces
 - Parks, playgrounds, splash pads
 - Libraries (story time, play groups, ESL classes)
 - Grocery stores, laundromats, food pantries
 - Faith-based spaces (services, playgroups, community meals)
 - Community centers, recreation departments
 - Housing complexes or common areas
 - School pick-up/drop-off areas (including siblings)
 - Health clinics, WIC offices, pediatric offices
- **What events or activities do families participate in locally?**
 - Cultural festivals or neighborhood events
 - Back-to-school nights or school fairs
 - Family nights, open gyms, or rec programs
 - Community meals or cookouts

- Parent workshops, support groups, or playgroups
- Seasonal events (holiday drives, summer programs)
- **How do families communicate/share information?**
 - Local Facebook groups or WhatsApp chats
 - School or neighborhood listservs
 - Text chains or parent networks
 - Flyers posted in familiar places
 - Word-of-mouth through family and friends
- **Whose voices are less visible, and where might they be more reachable?**
 - Which families are not attending traditional meetings?
 - Are there language, work schedule, transportation, or trust barriers?
 - Where might these families already be connected (even if not to early childhood systems)?
 - Who do we need to be more intentional about reaching?
- **What could we ask?**
 - ***Start with strengths!***
 - What are families doing that's working well right now?
 - Example - "What supports, programs, or resources in this community are working well for families with young children?"
 - What do families here do to support each other?
 - Example - "How do families in this community help each other with care, information, or finding services?"
 - What do families value most for their young children?
 - Example - "What do families here say is most important for their young children?"
 - ***Explore needs and gaps:***
 - Where do families say they need more support?
 - Example - "If you could get more help with one thing for your child or family right now, what would it be?"
 - What feels hardest for families with young children right now?
 - Example - "What feels most stressful or challenging for you as a parent of a young child these days?"
 - What services are confusing, hard to access, or missing?

- Example - “Are there programs or services you’ve heard about but weren’t sure how to use or sign up for? What about programs that you wish existed but don’t?”
- ***Focus on access and belonging:***
 - Where do families feel welcome?
 - Example - “Are there places or programs in this community where families feel particularly welcome? Why?”
 - Where do they feel unsure or hesitant?
 - Example - “Are there places or programs families tend to avoid or feel unsure about using? Why?”
 - What would make it easier for families to participate or share their ideas?
 - Example - “What do you think would help us get more families involved?”
- ***Look ahead:***
 - What do families hope will be different in the future?
 - Example - “If you could change one thing for families and children in this community, what would it be? Why?”
 - What would make this community better for raising young children?
 - Example - “What would make this community an easier place to raise young children?”
 - What advice would families give to people planning programs or services?
 - Example - “What advice would you give to the people who plan programs for families? What do you wish you could tell them?”

Reflection and Documentation

After engaging with families and community members, take time to reflect together on what you are hearing. Consider which themes are coming up repeatedly, what insights or perspectives were unexpected, and whose voices may still be missing. Use these reflections to inform how findings are documented and to shape additional priorities for the LNA.