

Community Needs Assessment

A structured way for a chapter to learn what its community actually needs before deciding what to do about it.

Why this comes first

Chapters that start with a project often solve a need nobody had. Chapters that start with an assessment build credibility, find real partners, and choose initiatives residents will show up for. Complete this before your first initiative and refresh it once a year.

Step 1 — Define your community

Community name	
Approximate households or students	
Boundaries or scope	
Who already organizes things here	

Step 2 — Desk research

- What does the HOA, school, or partner organization already run?
- What has been tried before, and what happened to it?
- Which nearby nonprofits, senior organizations, or civic groups already serve this area?
- What community communication channels exist — newsletter, email list, notice board, group page?

Step 3 — Listen to residents

Aim for at least fifteen short conversations across different ages and households. Use these five questions.

- 1 What do you like most about living here?
- 2 What is one thing that would make community life better?
- 3 Is there a group of neighbors you think gets left out?
- 4 What would make you personally show up to something?
- 5 Who else should we talk to?

Step 4 — Record what you heard

Need or theme	How often it came up	Who is affected	Existing efforts	Could a chapter help?

Step 5 — Prioritize

Score each candidate need from 1 to 5 on the four criteria below. Start with the highest total that your chapter can genuinely finish.

Criterion	What a 5 looks like
Resident demand	Multiple unrelated residents raised it unprompted.
Chapter capacity	Your members can do this with the time and skills you actually have.
Partner support	An HOA, school, nonprofit, or advisor has already offered help.
Visible result	Neighbors will be able to see the outcome within one quarter.

Step 6 — Write the one-sentence brief

Our chapter will...	
...because residents told us...	
...and we will know it worked when...	

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