FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT
COMMUNITY NEEDS AND RESOURCE ASSESSMENTS

What is a community needs and resource assessment?
A community needs and resource assessment is a systematic process that helps an agency, coalition, or other organization determine the nature and extent of a certain problem (or problems) in a community, how the problem is perceived among diverse groups, how the problem is currently addressed, and what resources are available to create positive change.

Why should I do a community needs and resource assessment?
Our resources for prevention are limited, so what we do have should be addressing the most pressing needs of our communities. Programming that is correctly targeted at real needs has a better chance for showing positive outcomes than something that doesn’t need to be addressed as greatly.

How do I gather the information I need?
Community needs and resource assessments can involve many different methods of gathering data. The common ones are gathering archival data (statistics), interviews, focus groups, surveys, and policy reviews.

How hard are community needs and resource assessments?
Community needs and resource assessments may not be hard so much as they can take a lot of time. Even small communities have lots of different groups within them that need to be talked to and have lots of important information that may be stored in different places. Spending less time on one, however, will usually mean that you don’t learn as much. It’s also important to remember that collecting information is just one part; it still needs to be analyzed into useful conclusions.

What am I trying to learn when I do a community needs and resource assessment?
A good needs and resource assessment can answer all kinds of questions, such as “What is the extent of the substance abuse problem in my community?”, “Who has the greatest problem?”, “Why are people using ATOD?”, “What are the available resources and partners?”, “What community issues will determine the kind of programming that will succeed?”, and “What are the policies that affect ATOD use in this area?”.

What if I already know my community?
That’s something that needs to be taken into consideration before spending the time necessary to do a good community needs and resource assessment. However, it is difficult to ever completely know a community. People always almost learn at least a few new important pieces of information each time they do a needs and resource assessment. It’s possible that new information could have a real effect on your programming decisions.
When should I conduct a community needs and resource assessment?
   There is not necessarily a right time of year to do a community needs and resource assessment, but they should be done at the beginning of a planning process. The results from the assessment should drive the selection of a target population, the development of goals and objectives, and the selection of programs or environmental strategies.

Are their tools available for conducting a community needs and resource assessment?
   There are tools in many different places. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has some good tools. DAODAS prevention staff can put you in touch with those and many tools that have been used by coalitions across the state.