

# LOUISIANA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NEWSLETTER

## WHY COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT IS IMPORTANT

When you think of economic development success in a community, it is important to note that it does not happen overnight, but is the result of community leaders working together toward specific targets to achieve an overall vision of a community. These leaders target specific industries to build the community, retail and services needed



to improve quality of life amenities that draw new and retain existing residents. For purposes of creating a strategic plan, a community assessment is critical and one of the most vital parts of the **Louisiana Development Ready Community program**. The community assessment gives an honest outlook of a community, engages stakeholders and often opens the eyes of leaders and citizens in any town or parish. It also serves as a foundation for a community-wide dialogue for citizens to identify the strengths and weaknesses in their community and carve out steps to address these issues. The results of a community assessment serve as a momentum for change that focuses a community's efforts on the best use of its available resources and establishes a benchmark for measuring a community's progress.

All assessments require both an internal and external review of the community as a whole. Internally, communities gather input from local organizations, residents, business owners, land owners and youth to help leaders understand how the stakeholders view themselves within the community and why they choose to stay. It is equally as important to find out how the community is perceived

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externally by surrounding areas, potential investors and residents, outside developers, state partners and companies who eliminated the community for a project. A combination of the two is a great beginning of a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis of the community.

Data collection is the most intensive and critical stage of the assessment. The technique data is collected will depend on the best avenue that allows for the community to give the most feedback. Traditional techniques include:

- **Surveys** – business, residential, stakeholder
- **Driving tours** – using an outside source is always best
- **Photographs** – taking and posting pictures of the community for feedback
- **Focus groups** – open to the public and key stakeholders
- **Interviews** – one-on-one or group
- **Demographic and industry data**

The final step in the assessment process is analyzing all of the data and presenting findings to local leaders. This data is the key to setting goals for community growth.

There are many ways to complete a community assessment and using a combination of different methods can prove to be most effective. LED's [Community Development Toolkit](#) includes a handbook for different types of assessments and ways to collect data to ensure that the entire community has a voice in the strategic plan. Those interested are encouraged to look at assessment options and decide which is the best fit for your community.



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