Assessment Methodology

The Community Action Partnership of North Alabama conducts a formal Community Needs and Resources Assessment (CNRA) every three years as directed by CSBG Organizational Standards. The CNRA is conducted by collecting data from our communities to determine the top key needs of individuals, families and communities. The input of community members reveals where services are utilized and where service gaps exist, identifies the most valuable community resources and ultimately guides the strategic planning of the agency.

The Community Needs and Resources Assessment Committee (CNRA) included the following staff members from The Partnership: Michael Tubbs, Cindy Anderson, Jennifer Carroll, Nathan Curry, Holly Hicks, Stephanie Johnson, Amber Jones, Laurie Lincoln-Swaim, Lorrie Mauro and Allison Speegle. The CNRA Committee began meeting in March of 2017 to discuss the framework, process and survey product of the CNRA. The Committee began setting the stage for the CNRA by determining the goals, identifying the components of the document and process, designing a survey instrument, crafting the proposed timeline and reflecting on the 2014 Community Needs Assessment. The committee determined that the Community Needs and Resources Assessment would gather information using community and partner surveys, focus groups, publicly available community-level data, agency and programmatic results, and customer satisfaction data.

Instrument designs focused on components that included family and community needs and most valuable resources available to families and communities. The Committee developed the process of the CNRA as a collective effort involving a cross-section of key staff; input from the Board, community partners, ROMA trainers and others; full use of the ROMA cycle; survey sampling that provided a valid sample of the community; acquisition of partner Community Needs Assessments for process validity and overall insight; resources and guidance from the National Community Action Partnership and a realistic timeline.

The Committee identified sources of survey sectors to include education institutions, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, plus private-sector and public...
sector entities. Once survey audiences were identified, the Committee collaborated on the survey instrument designs and media for distribution. With the input of non-Committee agency staff combined with a report from 2-1-1, the Committee identified community resources for inclusion in the survey instruments. Two instruments were designed for distribution: one for community members in the 16-county service area and one for partners and businesses throughout the 16-county service area. A Spanish version of the Community Survey was created. The Committee elected to utilize Survey Monkey for both CNRA surveys, opting out of additional paper surveys for both identified groups. The opportunity to have committee members with agency iPads or laptops was available to partners, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations and any group/organization needing assistance accessing the electronic surveys. Finally, a timeline was finalized and presented to the Board in April 2017.

The April 2017 Board meeting provided a summary of the goals of the CNRA process as well as links to the two survey drafts created through Survey Monkey. Feedback was solicited from Board members for edits and/or changes to the instruments. Others solicited for edits included a cross-section group of community partners from educational institutions, community- and faith-based organizations, private- and public-sector entities, plus ROMA trainers from the state and national network.

The next step involved finalizing the methodology of each survey focusing on how many responses of each type of survey were needed and/or anticipated for valid results. At the June 8, 2017, CNRA meeting the committee’s initial methodology was agreed upon as 25 partner surveys per county (minimum) and 100 community surveys per county (minimum). The Committee then agreed upon the consistency to cover the five sectors across 13 counties through identified outlets: Emergency Management Agencies (EMAs) and/or Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), school systems (with a focus on the liaison for the homeless), inter-agency groups, customers, Board/staff, hospitals/medical facilities, utility companies, chambers of commerce, juvenile courts/SOS, social
media marketing, and direct email. Marketing strategies for areas with low returns were to be developed and utilized as needed. Both the Partner Survey and the Community Survey were launched via Survey Monkey in May and responses were collected until August of 2017. Strategies were developed to increase participation that included: distribution at Head Start Health Fairs across the entire service area, Coffee/Donuts gatherings, Get On The Bus Tours in partnership with United Ways, and through Meals on Wheels & More volunteers. Social media posts were crafted with target areas selected and boosted for a monetary fee to reach the maximum number of potential participants. Because of the lower-than-expected participation levels for community surveys in the 13-county expanded service area, the methodology was updated, reducing the responses from 100 responses to 25 responses from each of the 13 non-core counties.

The Committee implemented additional strategies to reach participants by incorporating partnerships. Flyers were distributed through The Link of Cullman County in early July and a team of agency staff spent an evening at The Link for a community meal and gathering where surveys were completed via iPads. The Committee on Church Cooperation hosted Committee members on two Soup Kitchen dates providing opportunities for their clients to be surveyed. Community surveys were completed by volunteers with the Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion programs at their monthly meetings during July and August with the assistance of Partnership staff. Two Lawrence County Senior Centers hosted Committee members providing opportunities for senior citizens to complete surveys via iPads. Head Start staff implemented a mass email/text message through the ChildPlus data system for enrolled families.

Updates to the Partnership website were made that included an exclusive web page for the surveys with links to all available surveys (English and Spanish) as well as a linked image in the home page slideshow. Upon the return of Children’s Services staff in early August, all staff received an email and video message instructing them on how to participate in both the partner survey and the community survey as members of both communities.
Surveying of both partner agencies and communities ended on Friday, August 11, 2017, and the top six (6) needs from the survey were shared with the Board at the Thursday, August 24, 2017, Board Meeting.

A Focus Group Committee was formed with Board member participation from the three (3) core CSBG counties. The Board members who volunteered to serve included: Rise Simmons (Cullman), Allen Stover (Morgan), Joe Holmes (Morgan) and Benita Owens (Lawrence). The Focus Group Committee met during the month of September to review the survey results, comparing top needs from the 2017 CNRA to the top needs of the 2014 CNRA, to consider supporting quantitative census and poverty data gathered through Community Commons, and to review best practices and formats for Focus Groups. The committee developed the format and focus that would shape the Focus Groups to further validate the family and community needs gleaned from the survey and delve deeper into the causes and conditions behind those needs. It was important to the committee to craft the Focus Groups in a manner that would allow any pressing needs that might not have surfaced in the surveys to emerge providing an opportunity to cross-check the survey results, as needed. Finally, the committee recognized that the community often is the best source for recommendations on how to address critical needs and wanted the format to offer the opportunity to generate recommendations for consideration in addressing the key needs for individuals/families and the community.

A determination was made that two (2) Focus Groups in each of the three (3) core CSBG counties, Cullman, Lawrence and Morgan would take place. One Focus Group targeted partner and community feedback and the other group targeted clients with a focus on Head Start parents/guardians. Focus Groups in the remaining 13 counties are expected to take place in the two years between the 2017 CRNA and the 2020 CRNA. The Focus Groups began in mid-October and concluded on Friday, December 1st. The partner/community Focus Groups took place at Sara’s Ridge senior apartment complex (Cullman), Alexander Terrace multi-family apartment complex (Lawrence) and at the United Way of Morgan County offices. The client Focus Groups took place at the Garden City Head Start
center (Cullman), Moulton Head Start center (Lawrence) and the Decatur City Head Start center (Morgan).

The community responded well to these Focus Groups and rich information regarding the causes and conditions of the six (6) family/community needs was gained. Analysis of the qualitative data in comparison to the quantitative CNRA data and the programmatic results and customer satisfaction data from the agency began the week of December 4, 2017.

Formal writing of the CNRA report began in January 2018. The preliminary report was presented to the Board at the February 2018, Board meeting. Feedback on format was solicited from the Board members, a cross-section of ROMA trainers, peer agencies, and Jarle Crocker, Director of Training and Technical Assistance at the National Community Action Partnership.

The CNRA Final Report Draft was presented to the Board at the regularly-scheduled June Board meeting for review and to participate in the development of the recommendation section of the final report. The entire Board, the Leadership Team, a cross-section of staff, and ROMA professionals across the national network were asked to review the CNRA quantitative and qualitative data. Based on the findings of the 2017 CNRA, reviewers were asked to make recommendations to guide the agency and community in decisions relating to services, service delivery strategies, prioritization of resources allocated to and create opportunities to leverage current assets to address the top key needs of families and the community.

The 2017 Community Needs and Resources Assessment Final Report was accepted by the Board at the regularly-scheduled August 2018 meeting.
Agency Recommendations

Based on the findings of the 2017 CNRA, the following are recommendations to guide Community Action Partnership of North Alabama in decisions relating to services, service delivery strategies, prioritization of resources allocated to and create opportunities to leverage current assets to address the top key needs of families and the community.

**Childcare: Infants, Toddlers & Preschoolers.** The Partnership is justified in its continuation of Head Start, Early Head Start and other Childcare programs. It is recommended that The Partnership work with the community to:

- explore avenues to reduce the cost of childcare for low-income families
- expand childcare hours of operation to meet the need for childcare that is the most conducive to parental work schedules.

**Food/Hunger Prevention and access to Groceries.** The findings of the CNRA warrant the continuation of The Partnership’s Meals on Wheels & More, as well as the nutrition and meal provision component of the Children’s Services and Foster Grandparent programs. It is recommended that The Partnership:

- acts as a catalyst for gathering food pantry and food assistance providers to consider partnerships and other opportunities to
  - increase food availability
  - provide more nutritious foods
  - greater variety in food choices
  - recipes to help stretch food provisions
• revisits the information pertaining to area food resources shared with clients across Partnership programs designed to increase the knowledge of available community food resources.

Healthcare and Prescriptions. In light of the CNRA data, it is recommended that The Partnership
• continues its partnerships with area healthcare clinics and increase the number of clients funded for wellness care
• explores a community level initiative in its 3 core counties designed to educate employers, bring healthcare providers together to discuss affordability and solutions with the possible (long term) outcome of advocating for a partnership with the community to create a program for those who fall in the age bracket of the coverage gap.

Housing and Home Repair. The findings of the CNRA support the continuance of The Partnership’s development of safe, affordable single and multifamily housing units for low-income renters and those desiring homeownership. Report data justifies the continuance of the Weatherization program and HUD Housing Counseling. It is recommended that The Partnership
• seeks out additional opportunities and partners to explore the possibility of making home improvements and basic weatherization more affordable for low-income homeowners

Jobs and Job Training. The Partnership is justified in the continuance of its partnerships with the Decatur Youth Services and The Link of Cullman County to provide meaningful job training and build a resume of work experience. It is recommended that The Partnership
• increases its sponsorship of Decatur Youth Services (DYS) program participants
• seeks similar partnerships across the three core county service area for youth and formerly incarcerated individuals.
Utility Costs. Community Action Agencies focused on reducing and eliminating the causes and consequences of poverty may also offer emergency services to address an immediate need. There is data within the CNRA that supports the provision of assistance with utilities. Recipients of assistance are provided with a comprehensive evaluation of household needs, allowing for the creation of a path to long-term economic security. It is recommended that

- utility assistance include education on understanding
  - itemized costs on utility bill
  - peak months of use
  - feasibility of a prorated utility cost, if offered, as an appropriate option to making utility costs more budget-friendly
- create collaborative effort with local utility companies to provide classes for educating homeowners about energy efficiency

Community Recommendations
Based on the findings of the 2017 CNRA, the following are recommendations to guide the community in decisions relating to services and the prioritization of resources to address the top key needs of families and the community.

Childcare. It is recommended that the community
- explores opportunities to expand safe, affordable childcare options for low-income families
- comes together to advocate for the expansion childcare hours of operation to meet the need for childcare that is more conducive to parental work schedules.

Food/Hunger Prevention. It is recommended that the community
- works together to create additional food pantries and food assistance options
- advocates for expanded assistance to low income families
• coordinates whenever possible the open communication of food assistance providers to ensure that families may secure the most appropriate assistance possible.

### Healthcare and Prescriptions
It is recommended that communities
- explore the creation of a community-level initiative designed to educate employers
- bring healthcare providers together to discuss affordability and solutions
- advocate for community and business partnerships to create a health program for those who fall in the age bracket of the healthcare coverage gap.

### Housing and Home Repair
It is recommended that the community
- works together to explore opportunities to revitalize neighborhoods in decline and increase safe, affordable community housing stock for rental and homeownership
- comes together with city leaders and housing authorities to identify “slum lord” housing and help launch an initiative to force compliance.

### Jobs and Job Training
The it recommended that the community
- comes together to consider the current resources and explore opportunities to bolster training programs
- addresses barriers that prevent job attainment/retention
- develops an initiative that will assist more individuals in the community who are seeking job skills and jobs.

### Utility Costs
It is recommended that the community
- explores opportunities to create partnerships to educate individuals and families on understanding utility bill options (proration of costs vs actual monthly costs), the most effective home energy saving measures
- provides more assistance opportunities.
For More Information

Community Action Partnership of North Alabama

is pleased to present this abbreviated version of the 2017 Community Needs and Resources Assessment for preview by interested agencies.

If you would like an electronic copy of the full version of the 2017 CNRA, please contact the

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Laurie Lincoln-Swaim at
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and make a formal request in writing.