Creating a Custom Needs Assessment: Tips from Ontario Communities

These tips were shared by the following presenters during the December 9th 2015 webinar entitled "**Ontario Age-Friendly Communities: Creating a Custom Needs Assessment**".

Presenters:
- **Arlene Groh**, Elder Abuse Restorative Justice Consultant, Chair, City of Waterloo Age Friendly Cities, Mayor's Advisory Committee
- **Dr. John Lewis**, Associate Professor School of Planning, Faculty of Environment University of Waterloo

Tips

- A baseline assessment gives you a good understanding of the issues that are most important – so that a more focused survey can dig deeper into these issues
- Surveys give a cross-section of the community; to get a more in-depth look at the community, consider creating a survey where questions can be used in a survey format , as well as for focus group/interview questions
- Take advantage of the low hanging fruit and look to other surveys that have been developed to create a meaningful questionnaire. Some of these are consolidated in an instrument database: http://sagelink.ca/afc-step2-custom-needs-assessment
- Existing surveys each have their own strength and focus area. Pull from surveys that address the gaps/needs of your own community to ensure relevancy.
- Balance questions about people's opinions of their community with questions about the environment within which people live. (person-environment fit). Remember, unless your survey contains a balance of paired questions about what people want from their community as well as the services, programs and infrastructure that is available to meet those needs, you aren't conducting a true needs assessment.
- Have a balance of questions that address mental and physical health
- The length of your survey should reflect the response rate – a 10 page survey will have a lower response rate.
- Take the time to test the instrument – is it understandable? Is it eliciting information that is meaningful to you?
- This entire process requires time and effort but provides meaningful representation of the needs in your community