Three-phased Framework for Planning and Conducting a Needs Assessment
Adapted from Witkin & Altschuld, 1995; Simmons, et. al., 2009; Patton, 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Phase One: Pre-Assessment</strong></th>
<th><strong>Phase Two: Assessment</strong></th>
<th><strong>Phase Three: Post-Assessment</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Defining the purpose</td>
<td>• Determine sampling strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gather existing data</td>
<td>• Pilot test data gathering instruments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Characterize the population</td>
<td>• Gather data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Determine data to collect, sources, methods</td>
<td>• Analyze and manage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise 1—Describe the situation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Are there issues or problems that you would like to resolve related to educational programming at your site? If so, what are they?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What question(s) might you ask to help explore the issue or problem?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise 2—Determine the sampling strategy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Who might you target to explore your question?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How will you access them (ex. informal conversations, focus groups, survey, observations, alternative assessment?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise 3—Consider outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What is practical, or feasible for your situation?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What resources would you need to implement this needs assessment?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Needs Assessment Case Study: Schmeeckle Reserve, Stevens Point, WI

## Phase One: Pre-Assessment

**“Situation”:** There is growing requests for educational programming that Schmeeckle Reserve is not able to facilitate. Therefore, the purpose of this needs assessment is to understand the needs of potential stakeholders so that the Reserve may determine feasible solutions.

**Research Question(s):**

1. What environmental education programs are offered in the Stevens Point Area?
2. What perceived gaps exist in current education programs?

**Methods:**

- Conduct a content analysis that synthesizes educational programs, target audiences, and resources within the Stevens Point-area.
- Conduct short semi-structured interviews with education program coordinators at identified sites.

## Phase Two: Assessment

**“Sampling Strategy”:** Growing requests from programming come from three target audiences: **teachers, non-formal educators, and community members.**

**Research Question(s):**

3. What is the knowledge of and interest for environmental education programs amongst potential stakeholders?

**Methods:**

- Administer three surveys that ask questions about each target audience’s interest, barriers, and need for educational programming related to Schmeeckle Reserve.
- Representative sample of teachers (email survey)
- Snowball sample of non-formal educators (email survey)
- Random sample of home owners (mail survey)

## Phase Three: Post-Assessment

**“Consider Outcomes”:** A group process for decision-making model will determine feasible solutions based on the results of the pre-assessment and assessment.

**Research Question(s):**

4. What recommendations from potential stakeholders provide feasible solutions and align with Schmeeckle Reserve’s educational mission?

**Methods:**

- Summarize results and report to Schmeeckle Reserve Administrators (and program planning committee).
- Assess the feasibility of implementing expanded educational efforts.
- Determine program(s) based on the needs of potential stakeholders and knowledge of existing resources.
- Create an implementation plan and determine continued evaluation efforts.

## Resources for Planning and Conducting a Needs Assessment

- **My Environmental Education Evaluation Resource Assistant (MEERA)** [http://meera.snre.umich.edu/](http://meera.snre.umich.edu/)
  Provides resources useful in planning an evaluation and an extremely well organized search option to view sample EE evaluations helpful to whatever stage of planning you are in (front-end, formative, summative).

- **Designing Education Projects: A Comprehensive Approach to Needs Assessment, Project Planning, and Evaluation**, B. Simmons **
  An concise, yet informative guide to that anyone who is developing from scratch or realigning programs will find value in reviewing.

- **Principles for Constructing Web Surveys**, D.A. Dillman, R.D., Tortora, and D. Bowker, 1999**
  Gives a 16-page overview to constructing web surveys including eleven key principles and criteria as “best-practice”.

**These documents are available via Google.**

---

Created by Carly Swatek, Graduate Student, Environmental Education / Interpretation, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, November 2014