

Transportation and Housing Alliance Toolkit

CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

What is THA

The Transportation Housing Alliance was established by the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD), as a way to help meet the housing and transportation needs of people with disabilities. The main product of the THA is its *Toolkit*, which provides information, education and technical assistance to those trying to identify gaps and needs in their communities, regarding people with disabilities.

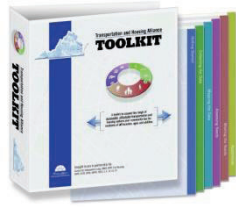
The THA Toolkit provides guidance on

- Transportation
- Housing
- Employment

Conducting a Needs Assessment

A Needs Assessment requires qualitative information, such as listings of existing services and employment opportunities. Needs Assessments also require quantitative data, such as demographic, housing and employment numbers.

Though Needs Assessments are typically done on a regional scale, Disability Services Boards can focus on a locality or neighborhood that has special needs or is critical to the region. This additional analysis, which is more detailed than the typical Needs Assessment, may focus attention and resources for critical areas.



Going Beyond the Standard Needs Assessment

Disability Services Boards and other groups interested in meeting the needs of people with disabilities can use the THA *Toolkit* to complete a Needs Assessment of their community that clearly communicates the needs of people with disabilities, provides updated and accurate information, and opens opportunities for additional funding.

Getting to Know the THA Toolkit

THA developed the *Toolkit* to help provide a better understanding of transportation and housing needs for people with disabilities and others who may otherwise be excluded from the planning process. It is a catalog of tools, with instructions and tips on how to analyze information on your community. In 2007, THA added a section to the *Toolkit* that is focused on providing guidance on assess employment and economic market conditions. With this addition, the *Toolkit* now provides guidance on housing, transportation and employment, which are major items addressed in DSB Needs Assessments.

Disability Services Boards can use the *Toolkit* to assess existing conditions but can also project future needs and identify overlapping issues and opportunities. The *Toolkit* can help provide a clear understanding of a region's housing, transportation and employment needs, regarding people with disabilities. It can also help DSB's focus on a local or neighborhood scale.

With this variety of tools and instructions, the *Toolkit* can help Disability Services Boards develop Needs Assessments that communicate a clear, accurate and comprehensive analysis of a community.

Typical Challenges with Conducting a Needs Assessment

Conducting a Needs Assessment can be a difficult process, in terms of gathering information and effectively communicating identified gaps. Below are some common challenges in this process and ways the THA *Toolkit* can help:

Finding accurate information, with limited time and resources – The THA *Toolkit* will direct you to various websites and resources, where you can find detailed data on your community. The *Toolkit* provides detailed instructions, step by step, on how to extract this information and how to present it in an easily understood format.

Identifying areas of need – Using the references and instructions in the *Toolkit*, you can find detailed information on housing, transportation and employment. The *Toolkit* also provides guidance on how to display these areas together, so you can see where there are gaps or needs.

Visualizing gaps and needs – The *Toolkit* also provides clear instructions on how to map data on your community and provides tips on how to display your information graphically.

Defining Needs Assessments

A Needs Assessment is the first step in a process to mobilize resources, with the mission of filling gaps in services for people with physical, sensory and developmental disabilities. This assessment considers the current services provided in the region and identifies gaps or needs of people with disabilities. It guides DSB activities, helps inform local officials and state agencies of needs within the region, and provides funding opportunities. For example, Needs Assessments are a critical element in selecting proposals for Rehabilitative Services Incentive Fund grants. In Virginia, Disability Services Boards are required to update their Needs Assessments every three years. The Needs Assessment must identify and address at least three of fourteen service areas, including housing, transportation and employment.

Housing:

The cost and location of housing is critical, particularly for people with disabilities. Many people with disabilities have to make difficult choices on where to live, since often affordable or accessible housing is not located near needed services, such as public transit. This makes housing a significant part of any Needs Assessment. The *Toolkit* is a valuable resource that provides multiple strategies and tools for assessing this topic.

U.S. Census Bureau

Under the *Toolkit*'s second tab, "**Collecting the Data**", it directs you on how to retrieve data from the U.S. Census Bureau's website, which keeps an assortment of data. The first section, "*Collecting US Census Data*", will be the basic resource for getting information on your community and directs you on how to extract data on people with disabilities.

GIS mapping

The third tab, "**Mapping the Data**", offers detailed instructions on how to display this data with GIS mapping. Special software is needed to compose these maps. If your Disability Services Board lacks this computer program, then the area's Planning District Commission will be a good resource for helping with this task. One of the local Counties or Cities may also be willing to provide mapping services. While Needs Assessments typically lack maps, this can be a valuable tool. Maps can clearly depict where people with disabilities live and can illustrate other valuable information dealing with education, supplemental income and age. Additional maps can show the vicinity of housing to parks and other services. Focus on section two, "*Mapping Census Data*", section five, "*Mapping Residential Growth*", and section six, "*Disaggregating Block Group Data to Block Data*".

Transportation:

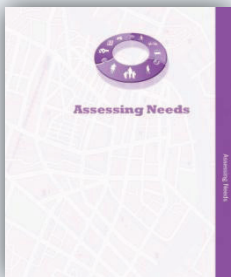
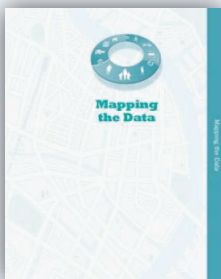
Transportation is the link between one's home and employment, services and amenities. Getting from place to place is a difficult challenge for people with disabilities, making transportation another significant piece of a Needs Assessment. The *Toolkit* provides guidance on identifying gaps in a transportation system, from a standpoint of accessibility.

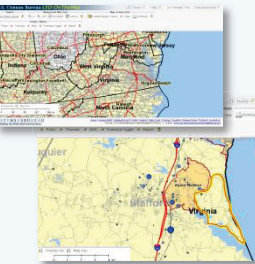
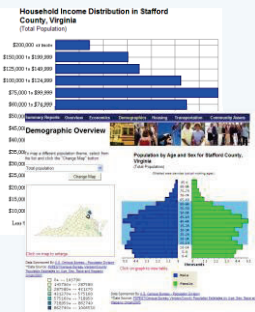
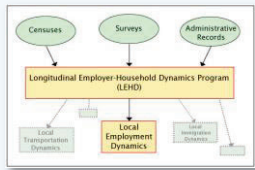
Collecting Transportation Information

Information on transit and other services will require separate research, but the *Toolkit* does offer directions on conducting fieldwork, using the "*THA Checklist*" found in the "**Assessing Needs**" section. For this review, focus on the regional transportation questions. If a DSB is focusing on a smaller study area, these questions will help identify the location and quality of facilities such as bus stops, sidewalks and other transportation related items. Questions in the Audit forms found under the "**Collecting the Data**" section, "*Audit Forms*" may be a good start for determining how people with disabilities get around. Unless there is a detailed assessment of a neighborhood, these questions will only serve as talking points for general guidance.

GIS mapping

With GIS mapping, DSBs can show where there are transit services and depict their proximity and access to people with disabilities. The *Toolkit* shows how to input this information into GIS, to be illustrated in maps. This is an effective way of identifying gaps in transportation services. They can clearly depict the proximity of people with disabilities to transportation and access to important places, such as employment. Under the third tab, "**Mapping the Data**", focus on the third section, "*Geocoding Places*". This will instruct you on how to depict important places on your maps, such as housing or senior services, parks and financial services. Also focus on the seventh section, "*Proportion of Persons served by Transit*". After collecting information on your transit services, this will instruct you on how to map this information. By overlapping the transportation information with housing, employment and other important places, there will be a clear understanding of existing gaps or challenges in accessibility.





Employment:

The location and availability of employment plays an important role in anyone’s decision of where and how to live. For people with disabilities, these decisions can be difficult, since affordable and accessible housing may not be near a community’s employment centers. Considering the challenges people with disabilities face, it can be difficult commuting to those job opportunities or finding one that accommodates certain needs. With a new section on market conditions and employment, the *Toolkit* offers detailed and comprehensive resources to assess an area’s job market. All of the employment references are under the second tab, **“Collecting the Data”**, in the last section, labeled **“Economic Market Conditions”**.

HotReports

The *Toolkit* gives detailed instruction on using the [HotReports](#) website. While this tool does not specifically address people with disabilities, it can provide a general overview of a community’s market conditions. It identifies types of employment in the area and provides demographic information on education, income, and age. HotReports is easy to use and gives a clear understanding of market conditions by using charts, maps and tables. It also identifies other community assets and offers information on how people commute to work. This information serves as a general overview of employment, which can be useful in a Needs Assessment. Information on [HotReports](#) can be found on Page 3 of the **“Collecting the Data”/“Economic Market Conditions”** section.

OnTheMap

[OnTheMap](#) found on Page 17 of the **“Collecting the Data”/“Economic Market Conditions”** section is another resource, which provides maps on employment centers and concentrations of housing. Again, this section does not specifically address people with disabilities, but the maps can be useful in showing proximity of housing to jobs. The U.S. Census maintains [OnTheMap](#), providing information on a community’s labor statistics. While [OnTheMap](#) offers mapping, a DSB can find further options under the **“Mapping the Data”** tab. Section four, **“Geocoding Employment Centers”**, discusses how to depict employment opportunities on your maps using GIS. With the GIS maps, a DSB can overlay the employment centers with other maps, such as ‘Disabilities by Block Group’.

Workforce Indicators

The *Toolkit* also offers references to [workforce indicators](#), which provide further detail on an area’s employment opportunities, such as turnover rates, new hires, etc. This information is included under the **“Collecting the Data”/“Economic Market Conditions”** section. With the other employment information found in this section, this can contribute to a general overview of employment in a DSB’s jurisdiction.

Extras: Study Areas

Needs Assessments are typically done on a regional scale. If a DSB identifies a critical area in the region that has a higher population of people with disabilities, then it may want to focus on that neighborhood. While the following tools can be useful for assessments on a regional scale, they are tailored for a neighborhood approach. By spotlighting a unique neighborhood, the Needs Assessment can give greater guidance for those areas with special needs.

Assessing Needs Checklist

The *Toolkit*’s fourth tab, **“Assessing Needs”**, can be useful for DSBs with collecting qualitative data. By using an assigned rating system, these questions cover five categories: land use, vehicle, transit, pedestrian and housing, on both a regional and neighborhood scale. A DSB can use the software that is included with the *Toolkit*, which will help with ranking the needs in these areas. Aside from using the ranking system, the questions may also serve as guidance or offer things to consider when identifying gaps in the community.

Audit Form

Under the second tab **“Collecting the Data”**, the *Toolkit* presents useful questions for a neighborhood assessment. The section labeled **“Audit Form”** asks several detailed questions that help identify priorities in a smaller study area. For most Needs Assessments, these questions will serve as talking points or a foundation for what data to collect.