

How doing a needs analysis?

There is no one standardised method for carrying out a needs analysis. The process is a lot like trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle. Each puzzle piece is unique and shows a different angle of your organisation and the environment around you, yet each piece is essential to providing a complete picture.

To understand their current situation in terms of inclusion, an NA needs to focus on the following puzzle pieces:

- **Your mission** - On a global level, what is it that you are working towards? The mission of the Youth in Action programme and the specific aims related to inclusion are already defined for National Agencies but what, specifically, does your NA want to work towards in inclusion and what do you concretely hope to achieve?
- **Your past performance** - In terms of inclusion, what has your NA concretely achieved to date? To what extent have you successfully been inclusive? To what extent have you successfully contributed to inclusion? Can you spot any significant trends? What has been the role of key players within the NA? What types of challenges or difficulties have you faced in the past? Did your NA have an earlier version of an inclusion strategy? Were those objectives achieved? Why or why not?
- **Your internal systems and processes** - Are your systems as effective as they could be? This is a crucial area because much of the work with young people with fewer opportunities is dependent on efficient systems. An NA has many areas to consider: processes related to promotion and recruitment, processes related to selection, processes related to the distribution of finances, processes related to evaluation and follow-up, etc.
- **Your key external stakeholders** - In the field of inclusion the range of external stakeholders is very broad but nevertheless NAs need to have some information about the circumstances, needs and expectations of each specific group. Understand their circumstances and expectations. What is their motivation for taking part in Youth in Action? What are their biggest needs at this time? What are they looking for from you? To what extent have you successfully fulfilled those expectations?
- **Your competitors** - yes, even National Agencies have competitors and yes, they even exist in the field of inclusion. What are other organisations or institutions working on inclusion doing? Do they offer activities or services similar to those in Youth in Action? What is their strategy? What are they trying to achieve? Who are their focus groups? How might their inclusion work affect yours?
- **Socio-economic trends and changes** - social, economical and political changes usually affect the most vulnerable groups in society first. Any major shifts or trends in this area will likely have a big impact on an NA's inclusion work. What is going on locally, regionally and/or nationally? How this might impact the young people and project promoters you work with?

Reviewing your "mission" for inclusion on national level will remind you of the direction you have taken in the past. Reviewing your past performance and your internal systems will highlight your strengths and weaknesses. Reviewing the needs of your key stakeholders, the activities of your competitors and current socio-economic trends will indicate where you can find new opportunities as well as potential threats to your inclusion work.

By collecting the information in each of these separate areas you are painting a picture of what is going on in and around your NA right this moment. This tells you exactly where you are in terms of

inclusion and what your starting point is ("here today"). Not all the information you collect will be positive but remember that to really know your situation, you have to be objective. You are looking for the cold hard truth.

Methods / techniques to use in a needs analysis

The individual puzzle pieces which make up your needs analysis can be obtained by using a **variety of techniques**. It is important for NAs to use different methods because you are searching for different types of feedback from different sources. In a needs analysis, one size definitely does **not** fit all!

Some possible methods include:

- **Questionnaires** - an inexpensive way to gather data from a potentially large number of respondents (they also allow for a statistical analysis of the results)
- **Surveys** - good tools for measuring levels of satisfaction, either internally or among your clients.
- **Statistics** - a treasure trove of information. How many participants? How many projects? How many new clients? How many staff hours? Etc.
- **Interviews** - allow you to gather more in-depth information from a specific group of candidates
- **Small group discussions** - a semi-formal way to explore issues within a mixed group (mixed functions, mixed profiles, etc.)
- **Focus groups** - a small group of candidates selected to represent a much larger group, usually sharing some specific characteristics of a defined profile.
- **Task and/or systems analysis** - a way to examine systems and activities which are carried out consistently and repeatedly (e.g. the process involved in selecting project applications)

These are just some examples. Each of these methods has its own strengths and weaknesses. Not every method is suited to every situation so it is useful to combine different techniques whenever possible. Mixing methods ensures that the resulting feedback is as comprehensive and meaningful as possible. It will also reduce the possibility of missing key issues.

Summarising the outcomes

As the needs analysis progresses, it is likely that the NA will collect a large amount of information. The NA needs to make sense out of all the different outcomes by pulling out the elements which are the most valuable or which will have the most impact on future inclusion activities.

A useful tool for this process is a **SWOT summary**. SWOT stands for **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats**. A SWOT summary is ideal in the final phase of a needs analysis because it presents a concise overview of the most important positive and negative points to come out of your research.