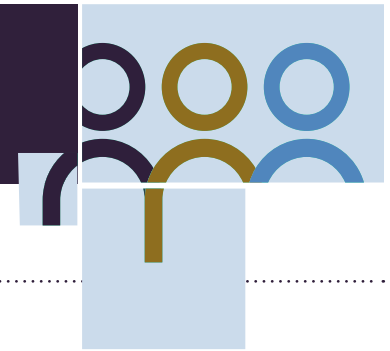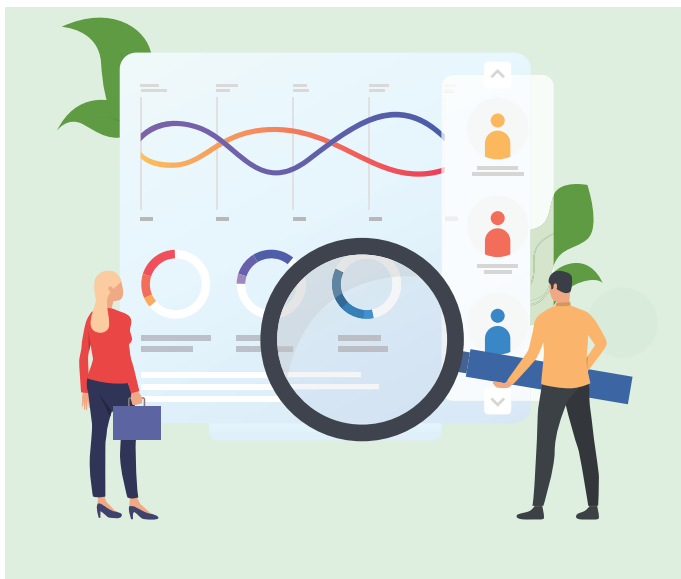# NEEDS ASSESSMENT
STEP 1 of the Strategic Prevention Framework SPF*

What is a Needs Assessment?

A systematic process of gathering information about the current conditions of a targeted area that underlie the "need" for an intervention.

Identifying the Need and the Potential for Addressing It

Conducting a needs assessment involves gathering and using data to identify:

- a priority problem
- factors influencing this problem, and
- resources and readiness to address it.

(Selecting Best-Fit Programs and Practices: Guidance for Substance Misuse Prevention Practitioners/SAMHSA, pp.3-4)[1]

What happens if you don't conduct a needs assessment?

- Without a needs assessment, your efforts basically amount to a best guess.
- You might end up wasting a colossal amount of money and time and end up losing credibility with key partners and funders.

Every community struggles with multiple substance use-related problems, but no community can address them all—at least not all at once. Setting clear priorities requires understanding which problems are most important for a community to address first and which problems a community is most capable of changing. By engaging in a thorough assessment of local prevention needs and capacity, and in a collaborative prioritization process, planners can identify their community's *priority problem*. **This begins to focus their prevention initiative.**

Building a Needs Assessment Committee

It is often helpful to gather a group or committee to help with the needs assessment and offer different perspectives to interpret the data. Your committee may include representatives from collaborative organizations, coalition members, and members of the community, including youth. It's also important to consider an individual with lived experience on your committee.
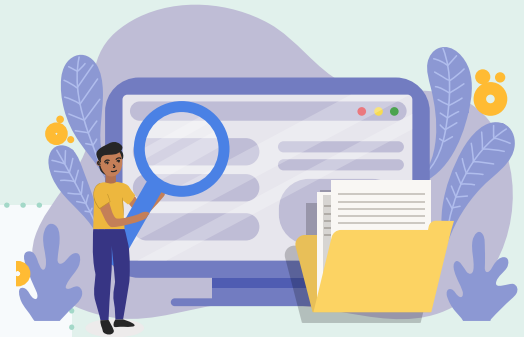
*The Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is a community-based approach to prevention. (www.samhsa.gov) The SPF consists of 5 steps: 1) Needs Assessment, 2) Capacity Building, 3) Planning, 4) Implementation, and 5) Evaluation. Through all the steps, there is an expectation of Cultural Competence and Sustainability.

Questions to Guide the Needs Assessment Process

QUESTION #1: What are current issues?

To answer this question, **data on both consumption and consequences of substance use/misuse are needed.**

Step #1
FIND
the Data

Data that define the COMMUNITY:

Who is the community?

What are their characteristics/needs?

What is their environment like?

Data that define the PROBLEM:

What are the current issues facing the community? (e.g. vaping among teenagers, suicide among teens and young adults, underage drinking)

What data are available to better understand this problem and its consequences? (e.g. data on use of substances, school suspensions, hospitalizations/ Emergency Department visits, DUIs, etc.)

Step #2
REVIEW
the Data

Once you've collected your data, **it's time to review the data to identify the issues in your communities**. As you review these data, ask your workgroup or committee to consider the following questions:

- *Does the consumption of one substance appear to be more of a problem than others?*

- *Does one consequence* (e.g. impaired driving, overdoses, suspensions) **appear to be more of a problem than others?**

- *Is there a pattern of consumption or misuse among certain grades, age groups, or areas of the community that is of particular concern?*

- *How does your community compare with the state?*

> Just as a community cannot tackle all problems at once, a community cannot address a substance use-related problem directly; it must work through the underlying factors that influence this problem. For this reason, planners also need to identify the priority risk and protective factors they intend to address in order to influence their priority problem.
>
> (*Selecting Best Fit Programs and Practices Guidance for Substance Misuse Prevention Practitioners./ SAMHSA*)[1]

Possible Data Sources:

KIP Survey: Youth Substance Use & Mental Health Data — www.kipsurvey.com

Demographics and General Health Outcomes: County Health Rankings — www.countyhealthrankings.org

KY Injury Prevention and Research Center: Drug Overdose Database — http://www.mc.uky.edu/kiprc/pubs/overdose/index.html

Demographics, Environmental Risk Factors, Consequences of Substance Use:

KY Data Warehouse for Substance Abuse Prevention — http://sig.reachoflouisville.com
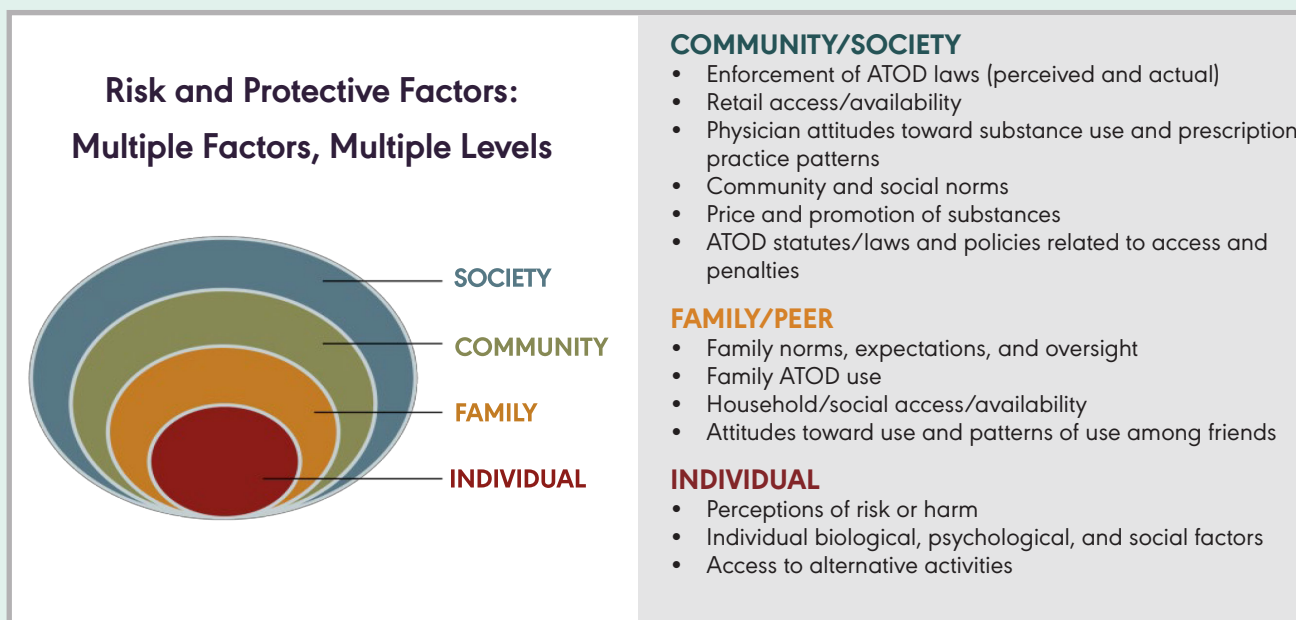
Questions to Guide the Needs Assessment Process

QUESTION #2: Why? Why here?

For the answers to these questions, **data on the factors that exacerbate or mitigate the problem (the risk and protective factors) are needed**. These factors are often called intervening variables and contributing factors.

Risk and Protective Factors: Multiple Factors, Multiple Levels

Regardless of the type of substance or the particular population of concern, consideration of **risk and protective factors should be part of the needs assessment process**. Risk factors are associated with an *increased* likelihood that a person will experience a problem. Protective factors are associated with a *decreased* likelihood that a person will experience a problem. Both types of factors operate at different levels of a person's experience: Community, Peer, Family and Individual (see diagram below).
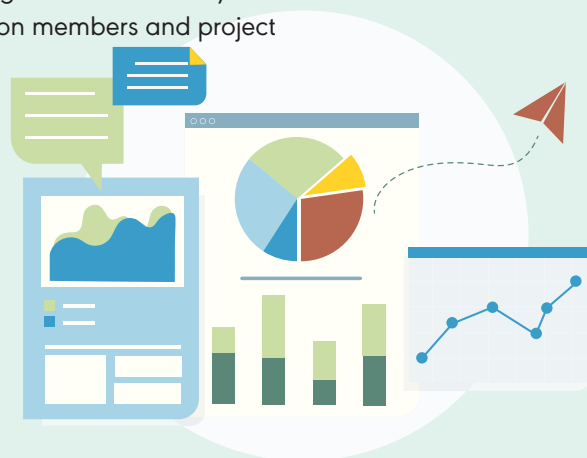

Risk and Protective Factors:
Multiple Factors, Multiple Levels

- SOCIETY
- COMMUNITY
- FAMILY
- INDIVIDUAL

COMMUNITY/SOCIETY
- Enforcement of ATOD laws (perceived and actual)
- Retail access/availability
- Physician attitudes toward substance use and prescription practice patterns
- Community and social norms
- Price and promotion of substances
- ATOD statutes/laws and policies related to access and penalties

FAMILY/PEER
- Family norms, expectations, and oversight
- Family ATOD use
- Household/social access/availability
- Attitudes toward use and patterns of use among friends

INDIVIDUAL
- Perceptions of risk or harm
- Individual biological, psychological, and social factors
- Access to alternative activities

(A Guide to SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework/SAMHSA, p.17. Modified to be consistent with SAPST.) [2]

QUESTION #3: What's Next?

After determining the priority, based on consumption and consequences, and looking at the intervening variables and contributing factors (risk and protective factors at all levels), then the task is to develop a plan that encompasses relevant strategies and programs that are likely to yield a change in the desired direction. Throughout this process, coalition members and project leadership need to consider two more issues:
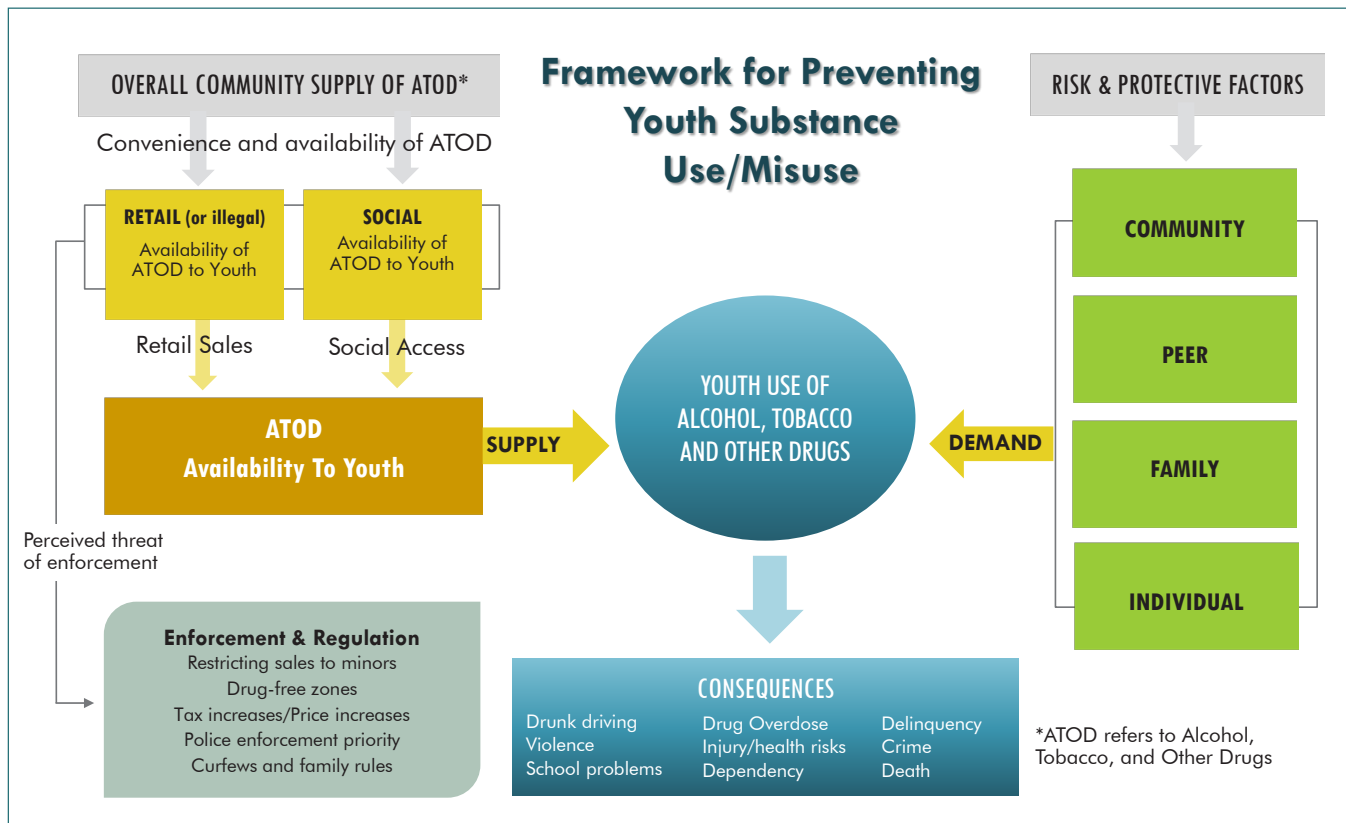
RESOURCES and READINESS

- **Do we have the resources to do what we want/need to do?**

- **Is our community ready to do this?**
  Do we have support of community leaders?
  Do we have the will to address resistance?

Tying It All Together

Framework for Preventing Youth Substance Use/Misuse

The graphic below shows how all the pieces fit together to contribute to youth use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs and their related negative consequences. By targeting the intervening variables with strategies that match the resources and readiness of the community, it is possible to reduce the supply and demand of substances, which in turn will prevent youth use and its related consequences. *While the graphic relates to youth, DBHDID and the Regional Prevention Centers address prevention across the lifespan.*

Framework for Preventing Youth Substance Use/Misuse

OVERALL COMMUNITY SUPPLY OF ATOD*

Convenience and availability of ATOD

RETAIL (or illegal) Availability of ATOD to Youth

SOCIAL Availability of ATOD to Youth

Retail Sales — Social Access

ATOD Availability To Youth → SUPPLY → YOUTH USE OF ALCOHOL, TOBACCO AND OTHER DRUGS ← DEMAND ←

Perceived threat of enforcement

Enforcement & Regulation
Restricting sales to minors
Drug-free zones
Tax increases/Price increases
Police enforcement priority
Curfews and family rules

RISK & PROTECTIVE FACTORS

COMMUNITY
PEER
FAMILY
INDIVIDUAL

CONSEQUENCES
Drunk driving
Violence
School problems
Drug Overdose
Injury/health risks
Dependency
Delinquency
Crime
Death

*ATOD refers to Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs

For additional information and an excellent collection of worksheets, templates, and other resources related to conducting an assessment and prioritizing the work of a coalition, the following document is available through the Kentucky Prevention and Promotion Branch or the Regional Prevention Center.

Kentucky Regional Prevention Centers (RPC) Work Plan Toolkit
Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities
Lead author: Dr. Patti Clark

Email Addresses for Kentucky Regional Prevention Centers
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Seven Counties (pgregory@sevencounties.org); Northkey (Autumn.smith@northkey.org); Comprehend (sarrasmith@comprehendinc.org); Pathways (Amy.Jeffers@pathways-ky.org); Mountain (Mashawna.Jacobs@mtcomp.org); Kentucky River (jamie.smith@krccnet.com); Cumberland River (jill.owens@crccc.org); Adanta (sestes1@adanta.org); New Vista (shawn.freeman@newvista.org)

References:

1   Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *Selecting Best-fit Programs and Practices: Guidance for Substance Misuse Prevention Practitioners.* https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/ebp_prevention_guidance_document_241.pdf

2   Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *A Guide to SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework. (2019).* https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/20190620-samhsa-strategic-prevention-framework-guide.pdf

TEAM KENTUCKY