

Preface

At initial glance it may seem that this book does not quite fit with the first one in the KIT, which is an overview of the needs assessment process, and the other three that parallel the phases of assessment. Numerous useful tables are embedded in them, as are ways to analyze and portray the data and information that have been collected. This book may appear to be redundant and a bit of overkill.

There is some overlap, not an undue amount. Our firmly held impression is that the two main topics of this text tend to be glossed over when needs assessments are conducted, prioritization in particular. The senior author never ceases to be amazed when he queries supposedly knowledgeable needs assessors about ways in which needs-based priorities are determined. Usually when this question is brought up in group settings, followed by others involving how one need was selected over another and upon what criteria such decisions were made, a pregnant pause (silence) is noticeable. It seems that the outcomes were sort of decided by an invisible mechanism without well-defined rules or even semiapparent structures to guide choices. For relatively small needs this isn't a problem, but in large organizations with competing needs, the absence of criteria and decision rules can have a serious effect on priorities.

Indeed, one example in Book 1 is about an organization that funded work in an area that did not prove to be in accord with the needs of its clientele. A structured prioritization strategy would have prevented this wasteful expenditure of funds. All of the above observations underscore the perception that a separate book devoted to analysis and prioritization is a valuable addition to the four others in the KIT.

It is our sincere hope that this volume provides a good overview of how to analyze two distinct types of data, pull them together in a meaningful way, and derive priorities from the collation of the information that has been generated by the needs assessment. What should result is a stronger foundation for needs-related decisions and one that will stand the scrutiny of involved and questioning audiences. If that foundation is not there and the priorities are challenged, they are difficult to defend. Having a basis for coming to final decisions is a step forward.

By the same token, it is recognized that data obtained from multiple groups and methods may not fall easily or simply into alignment and even may be contradictory. Therefore, ultimate priorities often result from negotiations with key stakeholders and groups. The text offers guidance rather than absolute solutions to help needs assessment committees (NACs) and their facilitators work through the complexities of analysis and subsequent prioritization.

❖ A FEW NOTES ABOUT CONTENT

The content in the text is an overview of analytic and prioritization procedures and not a comprehensive treatment of all strategies in this regard. If the local circumstances require specialized indices and other aspects of the two processes, seek out sources in the literature.

As indicated in its title this is Book 4 in the Needs Assessment KIT. The other books are:

Book 1: *Needs Assessment: An Overview*

Book 2: *Needs Assessment Phase I: Getting Started*

Book 3: *Needs Assessment Phase II: Collecting Data*

Book 5: *Needs Assessment Phase III: Taking Action for Change*