STEP 4: IDENTIFY INFORMATION/DATA THAT DESCRIBES THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

There are two kinds of information for developing a profile of the critical health needs of the community--qualitative data or descriptive information and quantitative or numerical data. Both play a role in building a foundation of understanding the strengths and weaknesses as well as the threats and opportunities to improve health.

Partners can provide a rich source of information, based on their experiences and observations in living and working in the community. A simple SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities) analysis is an exercise that can yield this important background. Another tool that can be used focuses on assessing the direct health services, health education and resources, and ancillary community factors that contribute to the health and wellbeing of everyone in the community.

Quantitative data may be considered more objective and can balance the more subjective SWOT and community asset analysis. Although some communities may choose to conduct a survey to gather primary or first-hand data, Iowa has valid and reliable secondary data published by the US Census Bureau, US Department of Agriculture, other federal agencies, the University of Iowa, the Child and Family Policy Center, and the Iowa Department of Education and the Iowa Department of Public Health. There also are such valuable local sources of data as health care providers, law enforcement, schools, chambers of commerce, food systems groups, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, and United Way.

Previous needs assessments conducted by local health, education, and human service agencies or food systems groups may contain information that may be useful. These resources may yield data about the health status of disparate groups in the community not covered elsewhere.

Data gathering should include the following:

- Community Demographics
- Socioeconomic Status
- Access to Health Services
- Health Status of the Population and Disparate Groups
- Conditions Related to the Top Causes of Death
- Infectious Diseases
- Food Systems and Food Security
- Natural Environment
- Social Environment
- Resources/Assets*

* These categories should be included in all assessments. See Assessing & Addressing Community Health Needs, p. 54 www.chausa.org/docs/default-source/general-files/cb_assessingaddressing-pdf.pdf?sfvrsn=4