

Conducting and Writing a Needs Assessment

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CONDUCTING AND WRITING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) expects the institutions that are considering offering a PT/PTA program to conduct a needs assessment that carefully considers the need for a new program in light of resources as well as local and regional employment needs.

A needs assessment should examine the program's ability to deliver effective PT/PTA education based on (1) program resources, (2) the need for the program at the local and regional levels, and (3) the institutional structure that assures a commitment to its responsibilities as defined in CAPTE's Standards and Required Elements for Accreditation.

The results of the needs assessment must provide evidence that the local and regional resources can support the program. This evidence must include current workforce needs as well as 2 years out and 5 years out.

A needs assessment is written to help an institution/program determine if it should offer the program. The needs assessment must indicate how the process was conducted, provide a summary of the outcomes/results, a description of how these were analyzed and how the analysis supports the need for a new program.

WHEN SHOULD IT BE CONDUCTED?

Ideally a needs assessment should be conducted at least one year before a program submits the Application for Candidacy (AFC). The needs assessment should be used to verify that there is a local and/or regional need for the program. Waiting to determine need for the program until well into program planning is too late. The final needs assessment will be submitted with the Notification of Intent to Seek Accreditation and the Application for Candidacy.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS?

A variety of participants from within the institution, program and externally should be included in the needs assessment process. The following categories may be effective participants:

- Representatives from institution administration and support service offices (e.g., registrar, admissions, library, instructional technology, financial aid, and student services)
- Finance office representatives
- Faculty and staff
- Representatives from the office of institutional research
- Practicing PTs/PTAs from the area
- Officers of area health systems
- Representatives of local and national health care organizations and hospital systems
- Consumers of health care

WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE WRITTEN REPORT?

The required written components of the needs assessment include:

- Local (less than state) data that includes, but not limited to, current vacancies and proposed vacancies 2 and 5 years out
- Regional (could be more than state) data that includes, but not limited to, current vacancies and proposed vacancies 2 and 5 years out

- National data on current workforce needs and proposed needs 2 and 5 years out
- Survey and analysis of local, regional and national health care organizations and systems
- Data of current graduate numbers from local and regional existing and developing programs
- Demographics of local and regional areas that impact PT practice
- Foreseeable and possible challenges to starting and sustaining the program, as well as strategies to address these challenges

DOCUMENT FORMAT

There is no specific format for the organization of a needs assessment report. Typically, the report includes a table of contents addressing the areas of the study and appendices supporting the body of the report.

A classic needs assessment document often includes the following components:

- A. *Title Page*: List the name and location of the program, planned start date, date of report submission, primary author.
- B. *Table of Contents*: Include the page location of all major headings and subheadings.
- C. *Introduction*: Include the following:
 - Period of time devoted to the process
 - How the process was conducted
 - Who was involved in the study process
- D. *Participants*: Include a list of individuals and/or groups that participated in the study process.
- E. *Body of the Needs Assessment*: Address the topical areas of the study. This is often done by using the subheadings as identified in the bulleted list included in this document under "WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED." The report should include a separate, thorough and detailed narrative for each topic.
- H. *Summary*: End with a summary of outcomes/results that demonstrates a need for the program.

HOW LONG SHOULD THE DOCUMENT BE?

A needs assessment is not a lengthy discourse on the profession, nor is it an outline summary of titles without substantive content. If written concisely, the document without its appendices can often be completed in fewer than 20 pages.