

“What Serves Us” Survey Research Methodology

Brighter Spark Applied Research and Consulting (BSARC) has been hired by the United Way of Halton & Hamilton (UWHH) to develop a comprehensive tool for collecting community strengths and needs data that will help shape the organization’s investment framework. The tool will address the dual issue of what’s needed and how services are delivered by consisting of three integrated components: an asset inventory that highlights community strengths and needs, an evaluation of users' satisfaction with existing service types, and a ranking and rating system for potential service alternatives to meet identified needs.

The survey tool utilizes the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) to systematically gauge community needs across multiple dimensions of well-being. The SLF provides a holistic approach to understanding how individuals and communities build resilience and achieve prosperity by examining human, social, natural, physical, and financial capital. This framework recognizes existing community assets while identifying areas where additional support could strengthen overall livelihood outcomes. By grounding the assessment in the SLF, the tool would generate data that is both comprehensive in scope and instrumental for funding strategies.

The survey was designed to examine all relevant SLF indicators and create questions that effectively target each area while remaining accessible to diverse community members (questions are targeted to a 1st/2nd grade reading level and can include helpful images). It has also been a major focus to ensure that the project is engaging and culturally meaningful in order to garner participation across demographic groups. Once completed, the tool will require extensive community outreach to achieve a representative sample that accurately reflects the community's needs and priorities. Using census data, we have sampling targets for Halton and Hamilton and for individual sub-populations within both cities.

The project is structured around four objectives:

- 1. Develop comprehensive needs assessment measures structured by the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF).** The survey systematically examines six critical areas where people need support to thrive: Basic needs, Connections, Money, Identity, Skills/Knowledge, and Health. This objective required a thorough literature review to identify and adapt validated measures that capture the most relevant aspects within each SLF asset area while maintaining optimal survey completion rates. The second and third components of the survey were designed to enable participants to evaluate existing services addressing each identified need and rank alternative service approaches according to their preferences.
- 2. Conduct rigorous accessibility testing.** Once basic measures were developed, the team participated in comprehensive pilot testing with diverse community members to confirm both accessibility and engagement across different populations. A community advisory committee comprising representatives from various demographic groups reviewed the survey design and provided feedback on cultural appropriateness and clarity. Following this review, our team conducted cognitive interviews with target respondents to observe their thought processes while answering questions, helping identify potential problems with question wording, comprehension, and response options. The design process incorporates gamification principles

and universal design concepts to integrate diverse question types, formats, and logic pathways that maintain participant engagement while ensuring accessibility across different abilities, languages, and technological comfort levels.

- 3. Collect representative data.** This objective addresses the fundamental challenge of ensuring intentional outreach that captures voices from all demographic groups, extending beyond those who traditionally participate in social services or community feedback processes. Achieving representative participation requires implementing a stratified sampling approach that reflects regional population composition and includes deliberate strategies to reach marginalized communities, particularly those not currently accessing services whose experiences remain absent from traditional assessments. Collaboration with the Social Planning and Research Council provided essential local demographic data to inform sampling strategies. The team also conducted an environmental scan to identify prominent community organizations serving target populations, enabling focused engagement with underrepresented groups. BSARC and UWHH have worked extensively to develop culturally appropriate outreach strategies through partnerships with agencies serving diverse communities.

- 4. Analyze the data and produce actionable recommendations.** This complex, multi-layered analysis will examine community needs at both population and demographic subgroup levels, identifying patterns in service satisfaction and preferences for alternative approaches. The team will employ advanced statistical techniques to identify unique combinations of needs, current service gaps, and community preferences for innovative service delivery models. Particular attention will be paid to intersectional analysis that reveals how different demographic groups experience varying combinations of needs and service barriers. We will produce detailed analytical reports that translate findings into specific recommendations for UWHH's investment framework, including identification of emerging needs and promising service delivery models/approaches preferred by community members.