Assessing the Situation

Why does your club do what it does? It’s a simple enough question—and one that most Kiwanis members should be asking more frequently.

By Courtney Meyer
Your club clocks hours upon hours working on multiple projects a year. You help countless families and get great feedback on your projects. But is your club really doing what’s best to support your community?

Answering this may be more complicated than you think. Communities change constantly. But there is a way for you to ensure you’re doing what’s best for everyone—by conducting a community survey.

That’s exactly what the Kiwanis Club of Deltona-Southwest Volusia in Florida did. And once members started asking questions this past year, they were astounded with the results. By simply talking to a teacher, librarian, real estate agent, pastor, police officer, school counselor, small business owner and health care worker, as well as the city manager, the club found there were two top needs: food and community unity.

The club serves five cities, which members estimate have a combined population of 120,000 people. Unfortunately for residents, the economic conditions have caused the number of families living in poverty to double over the past seven years.

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What to do? Where to begin? They began inviting the public to learn about the depth of the issue, hearing from social workers, teachers, a county human service representative and food pantries. What they learned: One in seven homes in their community of 100,000 were currently in (or had previously been in) foreclosure. The high school had the highest number of homeless students in the county. And no public- or United Way-supported food pantries were filling the gap that was left after churches and nonprofits could not help.

Members donated cans of food every week. They reached out to area restaurants, asking to host monthly Dining to Donate evenings to raise additional funds for the Southwest Volusia Fund. They reached out to the Rotary club and Moose Lodge to join them. They assisted at food-distribution events and a Christmas outreach. They made donations to the food bank and the public schools’ food pantry.

“Although we realized that our community is suffering through this recession more than many, we were shocked to find so many in need of food,” says Carolyn Martin, the club’s community outreach committee chairwoman. The community survey opened our eyes to the poverty around us.”

The club has added new members too. The surveying process was also an opportunity to assess current projects to make room for the new. The club discontinued its pancake breakfasts due to declining revenue.

“It helped us develop an action plan incorporating informational local community speakers, connecting area clubs and restaurants into a fundraising focus on food and opened more areas where our members could provide hands-on help to local needy families,” Martin says.

Most importantly, though, the process increased the community’s awareness of Kiwanis—and helped to engage not just the club, but the entire community in fighting hunger together.”
COMMUNITY SURVEY

HOW TO DETERMINE WHAT YOUR COMMUNITY NEEDS

STEP 1: Create contact lists
Brainstorm to identify community members who could provide the most useful information.

STEP 2: Identify team members
Put together small teams to conduct interviews. Look for members who are eager to learn and are comfortable interviewing people.

STEP 3: Schedule and conduct interviews
Ask about the community’s needs. What makes the community great? Where could it use improvement? How can Kiwanis help?

STEP 4: Debrief and reflect
How can your club make itself even stronger and more relevant? Compile the input from the interviews and discuss ideas for potential new service projects or fundraisers, partnerships or sponsorships and even potential new members at the next board and/or membership committee meeting.

For even more details, download the Achieving Club Excellence tool “Rediscovering Your Community” at www.kiwanis.org/ACEtools.