

# Roane County United Way Report on the 2012-13 Needs Assessment Study

## Background

As part of the 2012 Roane County United Way (RCUW) strategic planning process, the following mission and vision statements were developed, and these statements guide the actions of the organization:

### Mission

RCUW mobilizes the caring power of our community

- ✚ To create long-lasting change that improves people's lives, and
- ✚ To provide for the basic human needs of those needing assistance.

### Vision

RCUW will be the organization the community turns to when seeking lasting community change. We will be recognized as a catalyst for making a significant and measurable difference in our community. We will mobilize and enable partner agencies to achieve our mission and will be nationally recognized as a leading rural United Way in the area of community outreach.

During the development of the RCUW 2012 Strategic Plan, the following goal was determined: A Roane County needs/gap analysis that identifies service priorities would be completed by August 31, 2012. That date was later extended until January 31, 2013. A needs/gap analysis was desired due to the lack of a recent analysis of Roane County residents' needs. The needs analysis was timely as the 2010 census data for Roane County has just been published.

## Approach

The University of Tennessee, College of Social Work Office of Research and Public Service (UT SWORPS) provided consultation and subject matter expert (SME) assistance with this 2012 needs assessment. UT SWORPS worked collaboratively with the designated RCUW project manager and other administrative staff and volunteers to make decisions about the over-arching questions that guided the needs assessment study.

For over 30 years, UT SWORPS has provided state and local agencies with on-demand access to a variety of resources and programs. The UT SWORPS research staff has expertise with research design, research methodology including both qualitative and quantitative research techniques, program evaluation, test validation, data analysis, information management, database development, and needs assessments. The proposed research methodologies for Roane County needs assessment study were based upon tested strategies and were designed to meet the rigorous standards of the university research community.

The needs assessment study involved compiling data on Roane County available from the U.S Census Bureau 2010 Census and other sources with descriptive information about Roane County residents and their needs, administering a survey of Roane County households, and conducting a series of focus groups with various audiences. The latter two tasks were designed to elicit opinions of community members about service needs and gaps in three areas: education, health, and financial stability.

Over the past 30 to 40 years focus groups, and more recently online surveys, have emerged as widely accepted methods of conducting quantitative and qualitative research. Online surveys provide the opportunity to survey a wide audience. Study participants complete the survey rather quickly and easily. Results can then be compiled to give a synopsis of findings across target audiences and topic areas in a relatively short time period. Focus groups provide an opportunity to elicit qualitative information from experts, those individuals most knowledgeable of the topic under study - service providers and stakeholders from the Roane County community in this case.

While RCUW staff and volunteers gathered the data, administered the survey, and conducted the focus groups, UT SWORPS designed the study, survey questions, and focus group guides; consulted with United Way staff on recruitment of target populations; provided training to staff and volunteers conducting the focus groups; facilitated a focus group with key stakeholders and service providers; and assisted with the preparation of this report and presentation of study findings.

Tasks completed for this needs assessment included:

1. Review existing pertinent data (census, county health rankings, etc.)
2. Deploy a household survey (was available online and as a hardcopy with over 800 responses analyzed)
3. Conduct three focus groups per Education, Financial Stability, and Health topic
4. Conduct fourth focus group to look beyond their expertise, recognize overlaps between topics, and determine final prioritization of needs
5. Present Needs Assessment Results

After all data was gathered, the needs analysis culminated in a focus group session with key stakeholders to discuss findings from the study and to establish priorities for meeting the needs of Roane County residents. Finally, the findings are presented in this report and to the RCUW Board of Directors.

## **Task Description and Result**

### **Task 1 – Review Existing Data**

United Way works on issues around education, income, health, and basic needs. These are considered the building blocks for a good life – a quality education that leads to a stable job, enough income to support a family, and good health. Therefore, the needs analysis focused on these three areas:

1. Education
2. Health

### 3. Financial stability

As stated earlier, the needs assessment involved three primary data gathering tasks: review of available data, a resident survey, and a series of focus groups with community service providers around the three areas stated above.

- **Review data from previous studies:** RCUW staff reviewed previous needs assessment studies of Roane County and similar counties in the East Tennessee geographic region. For example, the last needs assessment “*Nine Counties. One Vision. Focus Group Results and Final Needs Analysis*” was reviewed to provide baseline information for the current needs assessment. These data included quantitative data from the 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census and other sources as well as findings from a telephone survey of Roane County residents and focus groups with community service providers about the key service needs of Roane County. Additionally, benchmarks were reviewed of Tennessee United Ways, specifically the Blount County United Way as this organization recently completed a needs assessment.
- **Collect and review current descriptive data:** The US Census Bureau’s 2010 Census provides an overall community portrait with quantitative data focused in four areas: economics, demographic, social and housing. By comparing these data with the 1990 and 2000 collected in the *Nine Counties. One Vision.* study, RCUW staff was able to detect changes in the population demographics over time that might impact needs in the three areas under study.

RCUW also reviewed data from a variety of other sources, including the *Governor’s Economic Report* and the *County Health Rankings and Roadmaps* that address respectively the financial stability and health areas of this study. The *County Health Rankings and Roadmaps* reports critical health outcomes and health factors of Roane County residents in relation to all Tennessee residents. Rankings of health factors of Roane County against other Tennessee counties are provided within the report. RCUW staff sought out and used additional data sources, particularly for addressing the educational area for the needs assessment study and local economic demographic data from a recent retailing study sponsored by the Roane County Chamber of Commerce.

#### **Task 1 – Results**

Data compiled during step 1 may be found from the Needs Assessment link at <http://www.unitedwayroane.org/>

#### **Task 2: Administer Survey to Residents/Service Providers of Roane County**

UT SWORPS consulted with the RCUW project manager to develop appropriate survey questions in each of the three areas (education, health, and financial stability). As a first step, the RCUW and UT SWORPS project manager reviewed the questions from the 2002 telephone survey conducted as part of the *Nine Counties. One Vision.* needs assessment to determine whether any of those questions could be

replicated or revised to meet the needs of the current study. UT SWORPS project manager advised RCUW staff on how to structure the questions and response choices to provide the most reliable information for the study and validated wording of the survey at a 6th grade level. The UT SWORPS project manager also provided guidance on the possible target populations and best ways to assure an adequate response.

- **Identify target population:** Current adult residents of Roane County were the target population for the needs assessment survey which was conducted based on household. While the RCUW sought responses from the population at large, a concerted effort was also made to recruit survey respondents from groups not-traditionally receptive to completing an online or paper survey. To do so, the RCUW worked with organizations receiving funding through the RCUW and other community organizations to identify and encourage service recipients to complete a needs assessment survey, either online or hard copy.
- **Administer the survey:** Once questions were formulated and the target population was identified, the RCUW staff produced informational materials and distributed them through a variety of means. The distribution methods included: posting a public notice in the local newspaper; posting surveys at community organizations, the public library, shopping sites, churches and other places within the county where people congregate; and sending surveys home with K-12 students asking parents to respond.

RCUW utilized two different methods for administering the survey - an online survey and a paper survey. RCUW used Survey Monkey software to structure and implement the online survey. Informational materials (such as flyers, newspaper articles, and RCUW website) included a link to the survey so that county residents could access the survey at their convenience from the RCUW website. As an alternative, an attractively designed paper survey was available and distributed so that residents could complete a hard copy of the survey and return it to RCUW for data entry and analysis.

The surveys were administered during September 2012. The link to the online survey remained open through the end of September, while the paper survey was distributed during the first few days of September.

Statistically for 22,550 households in Roane County, 378 completed surveys were needed for a 95% confidence interval. Over 825 completed surveys were received therefore meeting the statistical requirement.

- **Conduct analysis of survey responses:** The data from the paper survey was entered into the Survey Monkey database and analyzed along with the online responses. RCUW staff calculated simple frequencies of responses, thereby enabling a description of respondents and their responses to survey questions. Additional analysis was completed in order to provide more meaningful information about respondents for the study. For example, responses were analyzed by income level and other respondent characteristics to detect differences in response patterns.

## Task 2 – Results

Attachment 1 is a copy of the household survey instrument used and Attachment 2 is a copy of the survey results. The data collected from both task 1 and task 2 were provided to the representatives within each focus group prior to the meeting and the focus group participants requested to highlight and note their first impressions and observations.

## Task 3: Conduct Three Focus Groups per Topic of: Education; Health; and Financial Stability

While quantitative data from available sources and from the online survey of residents were critical to the needs analysis, the collection of qualitative data through hearing from experts in the three areas of study was also essential. Qualitative data was obtained from the Roane County stakeholders (subject matter experts) in a “focus group” setting to identify and prioritize needs. The stakeholders integral to this effort were those organizations currently fulfilling needs of Roane County citizens (both United Way funded agencies and non-United Way organizations). Both sets were invited to participate in the focus group meetings, providing valuable input to this effort.

The approach outlined in Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research (Krueger & Casey, 2000) served as the guide for implementing the focus group part of the study. The steps for conducting the research are described in the paragraphs that follow.

- **Develop focus group guides:** UT SWORPS worked collaboratively with the RCUW project manager to identify the questions that guided the focus group discussions for various community target populations. The focus group questions were designed to facilitate discussion about service priorities in three major areas: education, health, and financial stability.

UT SWORPS then devised structured guides for directing the focus group discussions. Typically, a focus group begins with an introductory question to ease participants into discussion followed by sequentially arranged questions that become more focused on the goals of the research as the discussion progresses. Once the focus group guides were constructed, administrators from the RCUW reviewed the focus group guides and provided their suggestions for improvement and revision.

- **Assist in identifying target audiences and participants:** The UT SWORPS project manager worked with RCUW staff and volunteers to identify knowledgeable community members across a variety of audiences. One focus group was held with each audience to elicit opinions about the needs and service gaps of the community related to education, health and financial stability.
- **Plan and schedule focus groups:** The UT SWORPS project manager worked with the RCUW project manager to determine the best plan for implementing focus groups with the various audiences and made recommendations to assist in recruiting participants and making arrangements for the groups. The RCUW staff and volunteers scheduled the various focus

groups and issued invitations to focus group participants in sufficient numbers to recruit 8-10 participants for each group. Calls and emails reminders were delivered before each scheduled focus group to increase the likelihood of participation.

➤ ***Train focus group moderators and assistants and provide technical assistance:*** Prior to initiating the focus groups, the UT SWORPS project manager held a one-day training session with focus group moderators and assistants identified by the RCUW staff. The training sessions provided tips on conducting the focus groups, reviewed the focus group guide, and provided an opportunity for moderators and assistants to practice their skills. The UT SWORPS project manager also observed the first focus group in order to provide assistance in implementing the study.

➤ ***Conduct focus groups and debrief:*** Three focus groups were held on the following schedule:

Education:	October 30, 2012	10 attendees
Financial Stability:	October 25, 2012	9 attendees
Health:	November 13, 2012	12 attendees

As a first step toward qualitative analysis, the moderator and assistant moderator met immediately following each session to discuss prominent themes and issues discussed during the group. The training session provided guidelines for the moderator and assistant in conducting these initial debriefing sessions. Essentially, the assistant moderator went question by question and prepared a summary document highlighting the important issues as well as any unexpected discoveries during the discussion.

### **Task 3 – Results**

Once all groups were completed, the UT SWORPS project manager and RCUW project manager discussed emerging patterns among and across the various audiences and topic areas and plan for the next step. The following table incorporates the results from the first three focus groups of which each concentrated on a singular topic of education, financial stability, or health.