

## ***Setting the Stage for Educational Programming in Your County***

The underlying theme to Cooperative Extension's mission is to help people improve their lives. Our vision with the Texas AgriLife Extension Service is to "*Improving Lives, Improving Texas.*" This is done through needs assessment processes targeted at local issues and needs. An important first step in the educational process is to assess these county needs and issues.

There are many ways that needs and issues can be identified. It can be as simple as asking the right people or as complex as sorting through mounds of profile documents. Many researchers have found clever and innovative methods for categorizing these needs assessment tools and while the names may differ, the techniques are similar. For the purposes of this lesson, we will focus on existing data that is always available.

*Existing Data.* Existing data can help gain insights into populations. These data can be used to examine current trends of a given community as well as identifying changes in a community. This demographic data provides a source for Extension educators and advisory members to understand the way of life of local citizens that they are attempting to change through educational programs, and have access into the groupings of their local citizens/clientele. Demographics help people see a visual representation of information about their community, thus making them important in assessing needs. Additionally, demographics often are used to provide a break down of local citizens according to such characteristics as age, sex, marital status, income, educational level, ethnic background, etc. Other than program needs, demographics are also highly useful in detecting clientele groups that are underserved in the county or community and in defining potential audiences.

While there are other sources for demographic data that may be more relevant to your community, county or state, these are five solid sources for obtaining demographic data:

- U.S. Census Data
- Agricultural Statistics
- Local Chamber of Commerce Data
- Local Board of Education
- Local Health Department

Other sources include labor surveys, sales tax reports, bank deposit data, police reports, hospital information and more.

*County History and Culture.* The history of the county and its existing culture also influences decisions, jobs, and education. In this report, please provide a brief historical background of the county.

### **Assignment**

- ***Email to Dr. Boleman by DUE OCTOBER 15<sup>th</sup>*** - Develop a summary 3-5 page document (double spaced) to reveal data regarding your county and program area. Feel free to use any existing data you can find (including U.S. Census Data, Leadership Advisory Board Input, local news outlets, etc.)
  - Do the characteristics of the community shape the history, culture, climate, and values of the community? Explain.
  - Provide any relevant information that has shaped the local Cooperative Extension Program over the last year. For example, has something major happened in the county that has forced you to address a newly emerged issue? (i.e. Drought in county, drinking alcohol in schools, major industry leaving county, etc.)
  - Summarize by narrowing the focus of the county to real issues that you could possibly develop an educational program to address. This is NOT the final issue. It is just a starting point to begin thinking about is the class progresses. You will probably want to list three to five issues you could possibly develop further during the institute.
- You will give a five-minute report to the class and provide them with a one-page summary of your findings when we meet in August.

***If you have questions, please contact Dr. Chris Boleman at [ct-boleman@tamu.edu](mailto:ct-boleman@tamu.edu)***

