

STEP 2: PERCEPTION & NEEDS

Getting Your Bearings and Meeting Those Around You



The next step on your MARKETING PLAN

Now that your Marketing Plan Team has:

- Completed **Step 1: Values & Vision** and has identified your church's:
 - Values
 - Demographics
 - Vision
 - Key Messaging/Elevator Statement

It's time to take the second step to focus on perception and needs. This step will help your Marketing Team identify:

- Perception: Understand the church's view of itself and the community's view
- Needs: Open your eyes to your congregation and community's needs then determine if your church already has resources/abilities to meet those needs or if new ministries need to be developed.

Step 2: Perception & Needs

Homework

- **Homework 1: Perception**
- **Homework 2: Community Needs**

Action Steps

- **Action Step 1: Congregational Survey** or **Team/Committee/Group Interview**
- **Action Step 2: Newer Member Focus Groups**
- **Action Step 3: Community Survey** or **Community Member Gatherings**

Marketing Plan Deliverables

- Congregational Survey Results or Interview Summaries Report
- Focus Group Summaries Report
- Community Survey Report or Community Member Gatherings Report



HOMEWORK *(each Marketing Team member should complete before beginning Action Step)*



How long will it take?

One to two hours (longer if you choose to do further study).



What will I learn?

In this step, the Marketing Plan Team will have conversations with the congregation and community so you can assess perceptions and needs e.g. conduct surveys, interview teams and individuals and host focus groups.

Reading through this section and reflecting on work conducted so far will:

- Help you understand the importance of perception and how it applies to marketing.
- Help you understand how to assess and meet needs in the congregation and community.
- Keep the vision fresh. As you listen and learn from the congregation and community's perspectives, you will need to continually assess and note how that compares to the vision.
- Prepare you for the types of questions you need to ask to glean the most helpful information from the congregation and community.



HOMEWORK 1: PERCEPTION

What is Perception?

Perception is how people view your church from their own point of view. They form opinions and make assumptions based on their own background and experiences combined with what they see, hear and know about the church.

Internal Perception is how your church looks from the congregation's perspective.

External Perception is how your church looks from the community's perspective (those not associated with the church).

Perception:

Is Reality. Your church may communicate in many ways, but how people respond to those messages or pass them along to others is based on what they believe within their own frame of reference. Their perception is their reality.

May or may not align with leaders' vision or assumptions. As a church leader, you have a vivid picture of the kind of impact you want your church to make. That may or may not match up with the perception of:

- **The Congregation:** They may be on the same page with you and they're just as excited to join you in making that happen, or they may see an entirely different church from the one you have in mind.
- **The Community:** Because they're seeing your church from an outward perspective, the community may think positive and/or negative things about your church that you are completely unaware of.

How does Perception impact your MARKETING PLAN?

It helps you identify your church's strengths so you can develop a strategy that showcases them and matches them to your target audience.

Example:

Through this marketing plan process, a church finds out that they are known in the community as being a place for healing in times of trouble. The planning committee also identifies economic turmoil and job losses in the community. As a response the church may offer financial counseling, job training, and/or support groups. They decide to use creative communication tools to promote these services.

It helps you see the gaps between what your church is and what people think it is so you know where to focus your energy/resources and strategy to narrow those gaps.

The Congregation: You may think you and your church are on the same page, but you can't assume anything! Understanding the connect or disconnect between your vision and the congregation's perception will help you point your **MARKETING PLAN** toward your vision.

- If your congregation's perception aligns with the vision, then energy and strategy goes toward **mobilizing** your congregation to meet your **MARKETING PLAN** goals.
- If a congregation's perception does not match the vision, then energy and strategy goes toward either:
 - **Educating** and **inspiring** your congregation to own the vision and want to be a part of carrying it out.
 - **Modifying** your vision so it makes the most of what the congregation is already excited about. (This only applies in cases where the congregation's perception is a POSITIVE one. If the congregation has a negative perspective, then focus goes toward helping your congregation develop a more positive perspective of the church.)

Example:

A church wants to be known for being a great place for youth. They have an active youth program with multiple opportunities for teens. Youth are connecting with others and growing in their faith.

Through this marketing plan process, they discover that people in the church without teenage children know nothing about the great youth program.

They develop marketing tactics that help the congregation know more about the youth ministry so people can know it is a quality feature of the church to which they can invite their friends with teens.

The Community: Whether intentional or not, your church communicates to the community with your people, your building, your advertising and the groups you partner with. Understanding what your community perceives about your church will help you build a Marketing Plan that reflects the church's vision and values in ways that connect with people and provoke a response.

Example:

A church wants to be known as being a place where people can find purpose and direction for life. Through their discovery, they find that people perceive them to be irrelevant and out of touch with current times and situations. They develop a marketing plan that focuses on making the church more relevant by changing the worship style or getting more involved in community affairs.

Read/Reflect

Read the following story and answer the questions.

A few years ago, I had a vision for my family. I saw an incredible, multi-week vacation serving as the backdrop for the most memorable bonding opportunity my family would ever experience. This would be a once-in-a-lifetime adventure for me, my wife and our three children.

Though the trip was nearly a year away, I could "see" our time together in vivid detail: Destination - Rocky Mountains and the Grand Canyon. Activities - Hiking, rafting, horseback riding throughout God's creation. Transportation - 5,000 miles of cross-country driving as we tow our home behind us – a rented travel trailer. Goal - Our family bonding, creating memories, growing closer to God and each other.

So one night, as the family sat around the dinner table, I sprung my idea on them. It went something like this, "Hey kids (and I had not mentioned this to my wife yet), guess what? This summer, we're going to pack up, rent a camper and travel out West for three weeks! It will be great!"

To my dismay, I was met with stunned resistance. Where I expected delight, I got disgust. "Three weeks?" they protested. "In the car?" My wife, who I most expected to "get it," started balking about campground showers and snakes.

Licking my wounds, I retreated to my home office. In a moment of quiet searching, I realized I had broken the first rule of communication when rolling out any new big thing. I forgot to pave a pathway to help them see where we were going and why we needed to head there. I forgot to cast vision!

Over the next few weeks, I took small steps toward encouraging my family's enthusiasm:

- *To my wife, I'd say things like: "The kids will be in college soon. Not much time left for us to all be together."*
- *Around the dinner table, I'd say, "I want us to experience how great America is together before you guys head out and start your own families. How do you think this trip or one like it could do that? Then I'd ask them what kind of trip they think would help us experience America together.*

Once they started to see how this would work and why we were doing it:

- *I'd ask my son to help pick out a travel trailer online.*
- *I gave maps to my daughter and had her plan out our journey.*
- *I took my other daughter shopping for hiking gear and supplies.*
- *I emailed and text photos to each of them – Grand Canyon, Rocky Mountains and man-made attractions along the way.*

Yes, we did spend 21 days traveling in a camper. Yes, we logged more than 5,000 miles. We smelled mountain air, bonded on the trail and saw God's creation as we never had before. The trip was all I hoped for and more. Once I spent some time casting vision for the experience ahead and helping my family know and buy-into the reason to make the journey, they were totally on board. It was a once-in-a-lifetime adventure that I wouldn't trade for anything.

From this story, how did the author's vision differ from what his family anticipated?

What did the author do to help his family own the vision and see the same thing he was seeing?

Recall a time when you wanted someone to follow you but they didn't understand where you were going. What did you have to do to convince them to come along? Or how did you adapt your journey so they would want to join you?

Review/Respond

Review the Values, Vision and Key Messaging/Elevator Statements from **Step 1: Values & Vision** that you recorded under **Step 1 Deliverables** on the your **MARKETING PLAN** worksheet. Write your thoughts to the questions below.

What kinds of things do you anticipate hearing from your **congregation** that **align** with and confirm the values and vision?

What kinds of things do you anticipate hearing from your **congregation** that **contradict or compete with** your values and vision?

What kinds of things do you anticipate hearing from your **community** that **align** with your values and vision?

What kinds of things do you anticipate hearing from your **community** that **contradict or compete with** your values and vision?



HOMWORK 2: COMMUNITY NEEDS

What are Community Needs?

Community needs are areas where individuals, groups or the entire community are lacking. They may be physical, spiritual, mental or social.

Needs:

- Open up opportunities for your congregation to connect people to the hope and joy of Christ.
- May address basic human needs (food, shelter, clothing) or developmental needs (art, music, life-enhancing opportunities).
- Should be met by your church for the sake of the beneficiary. The church's motive should always be to serve others as Jesus would serve, not to serve them so they'll come to a worship service. If done correctly, church growth will happen. It may grow from more people coming to the church. It may grow from the individuals in the church growing spiritually because they are involved in meeting these needs.

How do Community Needs impact your MARKETING PLAN?

Knowing and understanding community needs helps us meet people where they are as opposed to creating offerings and messages that we *think* they would connect with.

Example:

A church in an area with a high number of retired people may assume they should provide medical services or social events for senior adults. A thorough community needs assessment reveals that the primary need is for these senior adults is to feel useful. So their marketing plan features ways to connect people with volunteer opportunities that allow them to serve others locally and around the world.

Knowing and understanding community needs gives the church the opportunity to become an integral part of the community.

Example:

A church located in a hurricane-prone area has a beautiful building with a long history. Through discussions with community leaders, they learn there is a need for emergency shelter facilities. The church offers their building to be that shelter and hosts hurricane preparation clinics, conducted by the local emergency services.

Read/Reflect

Read the following and answer the questions.

From these examples, how did the church connect their values/vision to the communities' needs?

What did the church have to change in order to meet those needs? (What did they *start* doing and what did they *stop* doing.)

What about the church stayed the same?

Do these stories prompt any new thoughts about our church?

Review/Respond

Review the **Community Demographic and Behaviors Reports** you received with your **MARKETING PLAN** Workbook and write your thoughts to the questions below.

How would you describe your community? (Circle all that apply.)

- Inner-city
- Suburb
- Revitalized neighborhood
- Urban fringe
- Rural
- Heavily religious – Christian
- Heavily religious - Other
- Un-churched
- Transitional (many people moving in)
- Transitional (many people moving out)
- Young families
- Single adults
- Aging/retirement age
- Many preschoolers
- Many elementary age
- Many middle and high school students
- High to middle income housing
- Multi-family housing
- Low-income housing
- Mobil homes
- Condominiums
- Governmentally impacted area
- Industrially impacted area
- Militarily impacted area
- Resort area

Other descriptions: _____



What demographic descriptions represent the highest percentage of people in your community?

Race: _____

Age: _____

Marital status/family situation: _____

Income range: _____

Education: _____

How would you describe the people in your community: Who are they? What makes them unique from people in other communities? What is important to them? What are their struggles? Where do they spend their time? What do they respond well to? What turns them off? What would pique their interest about church?

What are needs you might assume people in your community would have? Consider:

- Relational needs: friendship, life purpose/direction, a way to use their time and talents.
- Physical needs: food, clothing, shelter, medical care, pregnancy care; perhaps people or groups have a need for meeting or facilities space (gym, library, kids areas), after school care.
- Socioeconomic needs: abuse protection or healing, freedom from addiction, financial advice, marital or parental counseling.
- Circumstantial: widowed, divorced, job training, language training, unique job situation (travel a lot, dangerous, etc.).

NOTE (on the questions that follow): Having an activity doesn't necessarily mean you are meeting a need. When answering the following, carefully consider how your church is meeting real needs that go beyond general participation.



What are needs that your church is currently meeting?



What are ways that your church is meeting needs within the congregation that could benefit the community as well (if more people knew it was available)? What new things could the church begin to do to meet community needs?

Observe/Pray

Before or during the **Action Steps**, spend time around your community and observe things from your **MARKETING PLAN** perspective. Pray for God to open your eyes to see your community from a fresh perspective and to help you see how your church can connect with these people.

- Walk your dog around the neighborhood.
- Take your kids to the park.
- Shop and/or eat at a restaurant.
- Have coffee at a coffee shop.
- Attend community events.
- Attend another church's services.

As you do, write your observations and thoughts below:

What additional questions does this raise that you might want to include in conversations with people during your **Action Steps**?

Write out your prayer for your community:





ACTION STEP OVERVIEW



Who?

Each Marketing Plan Team member will be assigned to complete one or more of these **Action Steps**:

- **Action Step 1:** Congregational Survey or Team/Committee/Group Interview
- **Action Step 2:** Newer Member Focus Groups
- **Action Step 3:** Community Survey or Community Member Gatherings



How long will it take?

Each **Action Step** takes about two weeks to administer. Ideally, **Action Steps** will be divided up among members of the Marketing Plan Team. If so, all of the Action Steps can take place simultaneously.



What will I accomplish?

Your team will develop the following reports, which you will review as you begin **Step 3: Strategy**.

- **Internal Perceptions:** A list of four to five key things people inside your church think about your church.
- **External Perceptions:** A list of four to five key things people outside your church think about your church.
- **Community Profile/Needs:** A profile of what your community looks like and three key needs.



ACTION STEP 1: CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

Overview

Hear what your congregation has to say about your church. Include teen members in this process. How do they feel about it? Why do they call it their church? What do they tell their friends about it? What do they see as its strengths and weaknesses? You may think you know what your congregation thinks but being intentional to ask will provide you with solid information on which to build Your Marketing Plan.

Process

1. Prepare Survey

Determine how the survey will be administered. Consider the following options:

- **After Worship Services:** Set aside time (10 to 15 minutes) after a weekend worship service to invite people to take the survey. This approach ensures you are capturing the most information while also communicating to your congregation how important this is. Your sample size should be at least 25% of the congregation.
- **Sunday School Classes:** Adults and children of appropriate age.
- **Youth Group**
- **Small Groups**
- **Ministry Team/Committee Gatherings**
- **Email or Regular Mail:** This will help you collect information from people who did not attend that weekend or those who left without participating. (Important to note that you only want one survey per person so people won't fill it out again.)
- **Web site:** Have the survey available on your church Web site. Invite people (via regular communication and a special email) to go and take the survey.

Determine what questions to include in the survey.

We HIGHLY recommend you use the "Local Church Member Survey" available from the UMCOM office. It features a wide spectrum of questions that glean specific thoughts and feelings about the church. Questions can be adapted to suit your needs and time allotted.

When adapting questions, these are ones you will definitely want to include:

- Situation (demographic, length of time with the church, attendance frequency, etc.)
- Satisfaction level with church overall and with specific ministries.
- Probability that they would recommend the church overall or a specific ministry to a friend (and, to be more specific, what type of friend (age, gender, family situation).
- Their needs and their opinion as to how the church is meeting them.
- Their perception of the community's needs and how the church is meeting them.
- Their opinion about the church's strengths.
- Their opinion about the church's weaknesses.

2. Administer Survey

Make sure whoever is presenting the survey is well prepared with talking points about why the survey is being conducted and what will be done with the information. This should be clear and simple.



Step 2: Deliverable

Upon collecting the surveys, the Marketing Plan Coordinator (or designee) will prepare a report with results from the survey. He/she will include the comprehensive data as well as a summary of information collected and narrative about what it might imply. Along with this report, the Marketing Plan Coordinator will prepare a list of all ministries and offerings in the church. This will be reviewed during **Step 3: Strategy Homework** and team members will be encouraged to compare this list to the survey results to see which activities are mentioned and which ones are not.

Once the report is prepared, the Marketing Plan Coordinator will distribute copies for **Step 3: Strategy**.



ACTION STEP 1: TEAM/COMMITTEE/GROUP INTERVIEWS

Overview

Hear what individuals who are connected with your church (through serving or small groups) have to say about your church.

This will go beyond the statistical and factual data collected in the surveys. It will help members collect more anecdotal information, so they can get to the heart and emotion behind the perspectives.

Conducting the interviews within settings that already exist in your church helps participants frame their answers from a more specific/involved perspective and makes the most of time since a separate meeting doesn't have to be planned.

Process

1. Prepare for the Interviews

Determine what groups will be visited and by whom.

Marketing Team Member(s) will want to meet with as many "smaller group" gatherings in the church as possible. Consider the following options:

- Sunday School classes, including children
- Ministry Teams/Committees
- Small Groups
- Youth Group

Once you determine how many groups will be visited, divide up the groups among the Marketing Team Members who have been assigned to this Action Step. Remind them to conduct their Homework prior to interviewing their group.

Communicate with the group's member(s) and prepare the group.

Contact the group's member(s) and explain to them about the interview. Ask if they can set aside 20 to 30 minutes in their upcoming meeting for you to interview their team or group.

Consider giving the member the questions in advance so he/she can prepare his/her group for the interview.

2. Administer the Interviews

The Marketing Team Member will give a very brief overview as to why the interview is being conducted and what will be done with the information. This should be clear and simple.

The interviewer will then ask questions and invite everyone to respond. The interviewer will need to take notes or bring someone along to help him/her capture the information.

Things to keep in mind:

- Encourage the groups to be candid, providing positive and negative feedback.
- The interviewer must not be defensive and be open to opinions of others
- Ensure confidentiality. You want them to be as candid as possible so ensure their feedback will be submitted anonymously.
- Encourage everyone to be a part of the conversation – be careful not to let one or two people dominate the conversation
- For groups with children, you'll want to adapt questions and build in interactive components, such as drawing pictures or molding with clay.
- Goal is to make church better, more attractive.

Questions to ask:

- Why did you start coming to this church?
- Why did you stay?
- Why and how did you get connected with this group?
- What is your favorite part of this church?
- When describing this church to your friends, what do you say?
- Do you invite friends to this church's activities? Why? Why not?
- What is your favorite thing about this church?
- What would you most want to change about this church?

Upon completing the interview, be sure to thank the group for setting aside time for this interview and for helping the church make a greater impact.

3. Summarize the Interviews/Make Observations

As each Marketing Team Member completes an interview, he/she will prepare a summary of his/her findings. The summary should include common themes under each of the questions listed above.



Step 2: Deliverable

The Marketing Plan Coordinator (or his/her designee) will prepare a report with the collective interview summaries. He/she will include the comprehensive data as well as a summary of findings under each of the questions.

Once the report is prepared, the Marketing Plan Coordinator will distribute copies to prepare for in **Step 3: Strategy**.



CAPTURE!

During this **Action Step**, Marketing Team Members might hear exciting stories about how lives have been impacted by your church.

Don't miss out on this opportunity to capture these stories!

- Make a note of the story and the type of impact the story communicates: "My kids learned about Jesus here!" "God used this church to heal my marriage!" "I found my purpose through this small group!"
- As you begin to develop tactics for marketing your message, refer back to these stories and draw on them to communicate your message with exponential impact (Using live, video, or written testimonies or other creative ways to showcase these testimonies. Plan to share these stories during worship services or on your Web site).



ACTION STEP 2: NEWER MEMBER FOCUS GROUPS

Overview

Gain a fresh perspective about what is attracting people to your church in your current reality.

People who are newer to the church (have started coming within the last two years) have a clearer vantage point because their experiences are still fresh. Spending time with them will help you learn what "main things" the church communicates through its messages and decisions because they haven't gotten distracted by the details. It will also help you understand what is *currently* drawing people to the church.

Since the Marketing Plan Team will likely be made up of members who have been part of the church for many years, this step is important to hear the thoughts and perceptions of newer members.

Process

1. Prepare for the Focus Groups

Determine who will be invited and how many focus groups.

The Marketing Plan Coordinator will provide this group of Marketing Team Members with contact information (and length of attendance) for all newer members (those who have connected within the past two years). Members will want to meet with as many newer members as possible.

Focus groups should be made up of at least six, but no more than 10 people. Determine how many focus groups you would like to conduct, based on how many newer members are on the list. (Keep in mind that only a percentage of people on the list will be interested and available to participate.)

Once you determine how many focus groups you want to conduct, set a time and date for each group based on your church's existing schedule. (Consider having one group meet at a lunch after worship services to retain the largest number of people; also consider providing child care).

Invite the participants.

Marketing Team Member(s) make phone calls AND send/email invitations to each person on the list. When inviting people to participate, give a brief overview as to why the focus group is being conducted and what will be done with the information. This should be clear and simple.

Keep a list of who will participate in the focus groups.

2. Administer the Focus Groups

At the focus group gatherings, the facilitator will give a very brief overview as to why the interview is being conducted and what will be done with the information. This should be clear and simple.

The member will begin by asking questions and invite everyone to respond. The questions listed below are a general guide to help you spark conversation and glean valuable information. As participants respond to the questions, ask for elaboration or use their points to direct the group to other lines of thought. Follow their lead.

Questions to consider:

- Why did you start coming to this church?
- Why did you stay?
- Are you involved in a ministry team/committee and/or small group? If so, why and how did you get connected with this group?
- What is your favorite part of this church?
- When describing this church to your friends, what do you say?
- Do you invite friends to this church's activities? Why? Why not?
- What is your favorite thing about this church?
- What would you most want to change about this church?

The interviewer will need to take notes or bring someone along to help him/her capture the information.

Upon completing the focus groups, be sure to thank the group for setting aside time for this and for helping the church make a greater impact.

Things to keep in mind:

- Encourage the groups to be candid, providing positive and negative feedback.
- Ensure confidentiality. You want them to be as candid as possible so ensure their feedback will be submitted anonymously.
- For groups with children, you'll want to adapt questions and build in interactive components, such as drawing pictures or molding with clay.

3. Summarize the Focus Group information

As each Marketing Team Member completes a focus group, he/she will prepare a summary of his/her findings. The summary should include common themes under each of the questions listed above.



Step 2: Deliverable

The Marketing Plan Coordinator (or his/her designee) will prepare a report with the collective focus group summaries. He/she will include the comprehensive data as well as a summary of findings under each of the questions.

Once the report is prepared, the Marketing Plan Coordinator will distribute copies to the Marketing Team Members who will participate in **Step 3: Strategy**.



CAPTURE!

During this **Action Step**, Marketing Team Members might hear exciting stories about how lives have been impacted by your church.

Don't miss out on this opportunity to capture these stories!

- Make a note of the story and the type of impact the story communicates (my kids learned about Jesus here, this church healed my marriage, I found my purpose through this small group).
- As you begin to develop tactics for marketing your message, refer back to these stories and draw on them to communicate your message with exponential impact. (Using live, video, or written testimonies or other creative ways to showcase these testimonies. Plan to share these stories during worship services or on your Web site).



ACTION STEP 3: COMMUNITY SURVEY

Overview

Hear what your community has to say about your church and how you can meet their needs.

This survey will not be scientific or highly statistical. It is more geared toward having conversations with people in the community. Those conversations will center around:

- **Perception:** What do they know about your church? How do they feel about its people? What do they see are its strengths and weaknesses? Would it be missed if it left the community?
- **Needs:** What do they believe are individual and community-wide needs that the church could meet?

Process

1. Prepare Survey

Determine how the survey will be administered. Consider the following options:

- **Public Location:** Set up a table at a public gathering (special event or outside a grocery store). Ask people to complete a short survey in exchange for a prize or gift certificate.
 - Helpful tip: In most communities where there is a Chick-Fil-A, they are willing to donate coupons for free sandwiches to be used for this.
- **Email or Regular Mail or Circulate Door hangers throughout an area:** Send out a simple survey to a random sampling of people in the community. Use email addresses or mailing addresses you already have access to or purchase mailing lists.
- **Informal Conversations:** As Marketing Team Members visit places in the community (grocery store, doctor's office, school, work), be intentional about asking a few questions to the people around you. "Hey, my friend is looking for a church and mentioned XYZ church. Do you know anything about it?"

Determine what questions to include in the survey.

Each Marketing Team Member administering this **Action Step** will want to work through the **Homework** prior to preparing the survey. This will help them determine what questions would be best to ask of the community.

On the survey, you will list your church, along with several other churches in your community (so you don't influence the survey based on their knowing who's conducting it). Questions to consider including:

- Situation (demographic, do they live in the area, do they attend a place of worship, etc.)
- Which of these churches are you familiar with?
- What are the one or two things you know about these churches?
- If you don't currently attend a church, which would you be willing to attend based on what you know about each? Why?
- What are your three greatest needs?
- What do you believe are the three greatest needs in the community?
- What group or organization is doing the best job of serving needs in the community?
- What is the best way a church could meet a need in the community?

2. Administer Survey

Make sure whoever is presenting the survey is well prepared with talking points about why the survey is being conducted and what will be done with the information. This should be clear and simple. You don't need to identify the church, only that you are working with a group that wants to learn how it can best serve the community.



Step 2: Deliverable

Upon collecting the surveys, the Marketing Plan Coordinator (or designee) will prepare a report with results from the survey. He/she will include the comprehensive data as well as a summary of information collected and narrative about what it might imply.

Once the report is prepared, the Marketing Plan Coordinator will distribute copies for **Step 3: Strategy**.



ACTION STEP 3: COMMUNITY MEMBER GATHERINGS

Overview

Tap into community knowledge and leadership to hear what your community thinks about your church and how you can meet their needs.

This step will feature a series of meetings with influential individuals and groups to assess:

- **Perception:** What do they know about your church? How do they feel about its people? What do they see are its strengths and weaknesses? Would it be missed if it left the community?
- **Needs:** What do they believe are individual and community-wide needs that the church could meet?

Process

Information for this step can be gleaned by bringing community members together for gatherings at your church.

1. Prepare for the Gathering

Determine who will be invited and by whom.

Marketing Team Member(s) will want to include a complementary gathering of people and perspectives. Plan to invite key leaders within each group.

Consider the following options:

- Chamber of commerce.
- Other churches.
- Business leaders (large corporations and small businesses).
- Government leaders.
- Education leaders.
- Nonprofit and social service agencies.
- Arts programs.
- Medical clinics.
- Social organizations.

Plan the gathering/invite the guests

Once you determine how many people will be invited, decide on the nature of the gathering. Will it be a breakfast, lunch, dinner or coffee? Where will it be held? Who from the church will be involved? What information needs to be prepared in advance?

Contact the guests.

Send invitations and follow up with phone calls. Contact the guest and explain to him/her that your church wants to learn more about the community and how you can meet needs. Ask if they can attend.

2. Host the Gathering

Within the context of the gathering (food and mingling or just sit down and start with the agenda), the Marketing Team Member will give a very brief overview as to what the gathering is all about and what will be done with the information. This should be clear and simple.

The facilitator will then ask questions and facilitate the conversation. He/she will need to take notes or bring someone along to help him/her capture the information.

Questions to ask:

- What are the key strengths of our community?
- What are the three biggest challenges our community is facing right now?
- What are community needs that you would like to meet, but for whatever reason you are not able to do so. Is anyone else meeting that need? If so, who?
- What do you know about ABC church?
- What are ways our church can meet our community's needs? (You may want to present this within the context of the Vision/Values so the contact will know what types of needs you might be more focused on.)
- What are ways our church can *partner* with you to meet needs?

Upon completing the gathering, be sure to thank the contact for setting aside time to attend and for helping the church make a greater impact.

3. Summarize Comments from the Gathering/Make Observations

As each Marketing Team Member completes an interview, he/she will prepare a summary of his/her findings. The summary should include common themes under each of the questions listed above.



Step 2: Deliverable

The Marketing Plan Coordinator (or his/her designee) will prepare a report with the summary. Once the report is prepared, the Marketing Plan Coordinator will distribute copies to prepare for in **Step 3: Strategy**.

Additional Reading & Resources

- [To Thine Own Self Be True: Assessing Your Congregation](#)
- [Moving Beyond Anecdotes: Developing Local Church Member Assessments](#)
- [The Green Grass Across the Fence: Assessing Your Community's Needs](#)
- [Church Vitality Indicator \(CVI\)](#)
- Vital Signs Assessment: [Contact General Board of Discipleship](#)
- Community Demographic reports: [Contact United Methodist Communications](#)
- Community Psychographic reports: [Contact United Methodist Communications](#)