WORK GUIDE

UNIT 1

ASSESSING A COMMUNITY'S NEEDS

FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC AND LABRADOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMISSION

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First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (2019) *Work guide - Unit 1: Assessing a community's needs*, Wendake, 24 pages.

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This work guide has been designed for workers who conduct needs assessments in their community. Its purpose is to assist them in developing an action plan which reflects those needs. This guide will allow you to:

- Understand the different steps in a needs assessment;
- Develop the tools necessary for conducting a needs assessment.

1. WHAT IS A NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

The word "need" means there is a gap between an existing situation and a desired situation. A needs assessment is a tool used to identify the short- and medium-term priorities and solutions proposed by the community's members.

Assessing a community's needs allows you to shed light on the health and well-being of a group. It also allows you to discover and understand individual and collective needs and to produce a portrait of the strengths and difficulties encountered by the community. A needs assessment is the first step for planning a project according to a community approach and is a guarantee of success if it is properly carried out.

A needs assessment entails a structured approach that can be easily adapted to different community contexts.

You are the ones who know your communities the best and who are in the best position to determine the method you will use.

The results of a needs assessment can be presented in a written document or they can be included in an action plan that is established.

The information below is intended as a work guide for carrying out a needs assessment; it does not require absolute adherence on every point.

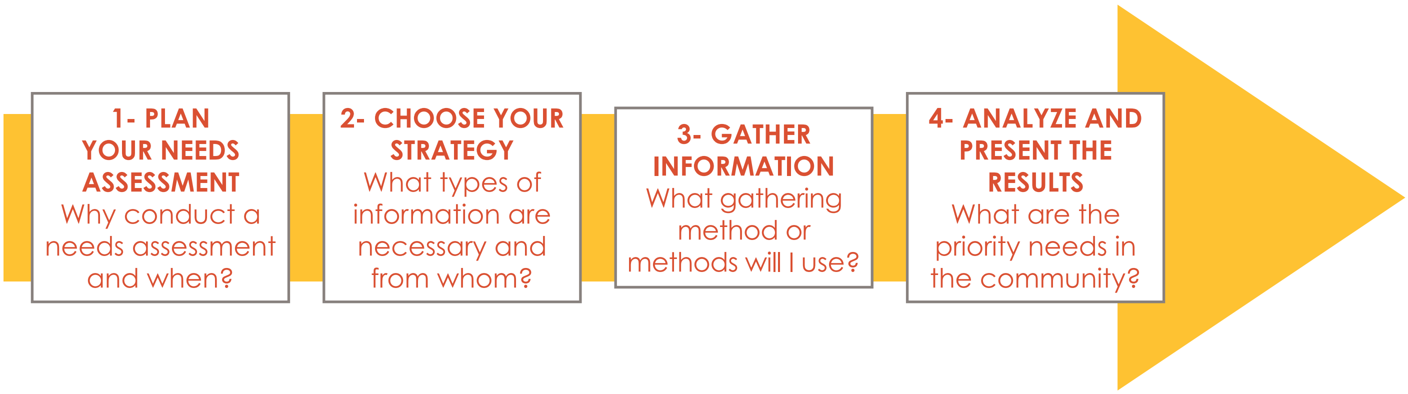
2. WHY ASSESS THE NEEDS OF A COMMUNITY?

The following five reasons demonstrate the importance of assessing a community's needs before planning a project or activity:

1) The information you obtain allows you to adapt the project to the priority needs targeted by the members of the community;
2) A needs assessment allows you to determine the services that will address these needs and to take account of the proposed solutions;
3) A needs assessment allows you to document facts and confirm the existence of needs that are targeted by different community stakeholders;
4) Carrying out a needs assessment increases a program's credibility in the eyes of users and partners, and facilitates the search for resources;
5) A needs assessment means taking account of the opinions of the community's members. The more people get involved in a project, the more they will use and benefit from those services.

3. HOW IS A NEEDS ASSESSMENT CARRIED OUT?

A needs assessment is a process that can be broken down into four steps.



STEP 1: Plan your needs assessment

The first step in your needs assessment is to plan it. First of all, you must ask yourself and answer the following questions:

1. What types of information do we want to collect?

2. Who are the resource people we should target to obtain this information?

3. What are the human, financial and material resources we will need to conduct our needs assessment?

As soon as the type of information to be obtained is specified, it is important that you take the time to plan the activities which will allow you to build awareness among and inform the resource persons you have identified. You must also give thought to the kinds of activities or events that will allow you to consult with these persons and to obtain information from them.

A template for a work plan to assist you in organizing information, mobilization and consultation activities in the community is given in Annex 1.

MOBILIZATION AND CONSULTATION OF THE POPULATION: A GUARANTEE FOR SUCCESS

Projects implemented according to a community development approach require giving the population the power to change its situation. It is important to mobilize and involve the population in the project's earliest planning steps. People must be able to express their needs and to propose solutions.

Mobilizing and consulting with the members of your community will allow you to establish services that meet their needs, as adapted to the culture and values of your community.

Step 2: Choose your strategy

The second step consists in determining the information required to produce an accurate portrait of the community and its needs.

To produce an overall portrait of a community's needs, you must meet with the potential users of services, the people who will offer those services, and the people who will be partners in the project.

Obtaining information thus means obtaining the opinions of parents, teens, adults, education and health and social services workers, elders, partners and community leaders. The people you meet with must be chosen according to their experience and knowledge about the community.

Examples of information to obtain

- ✓ Socio-demographic information: population, location of the community, history of the community, housing, employment, etc.
- ✓ Available resources: healthcare services and social services offered in and outside of the community, human and financial resources, community organizations, etc.
- ✓ Community dynamics
- ✓ Values of the community
- ✓ Strengths of the community and difficulties it has encountered
- ✓ Joint action and mobilization in the community
- ✓ Needs in terms of care, services, resources and infrastructures
- ✓ Training needs of community workers

STEP 3: Gather information

Different methods can be used to obtain information. The third step of the process is to determine which method or methods to use. To give you some ideas on how to proceed, this section proposes four methods. These methods are referred to as “scientific” and are often used for research or evaluation purposes. For use in conducting a needs assessment at the local level, these methods can be adapted to your needs and available resources.

Finally, using several of these methods will allow you to draw up a more accurate portrait of your community and its needs.

THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

The individual interview consists in a meeting held in person or by telephone, during which the interviewer asks participants questions to determine their experience and opinion regarding a given topic. With the participant’s consent, you may record the interview. For a needs assessment, a semi-guided interview is recommended (some questions may be planned, but the interviewer can adjust the interview grid during the discussion). An interview should not run more than one hour.

The interview takes place in 3 steps:

1) ***The beginning:*** You must use the first few minutes to break the ice. You can begin with general questions; this is when a relationship of trust is established. Remind the participant about the interview’s goals and ask the participant for permission if you wish to record the meeting.

2) ***The interview:*** Use of an interview guide containing the questions or themes you want to cover in the interview will help you remember not to leave anything out. You should favour the use of open questions, which do not require simply yes or no answers. They allow you to learn about the participant’s opinions in greater depth. Your questions should also be simple, short and relevant.

3) ***The ending:*** Summarize the important points made by the participant to ensure that you understood them properly. Remember to thank participants and to indicate the purpose of the information they have provided.

***How many interviews should be held?**
You should establish a **minimum number** of interviews to be held. You can also stop doing interviews when you believe you have all the information that will allow you to understand the needs of your community, i.e., when you believe you will not obtain any new essential information (saturation).

THE FOCUS GROUP

The *focus group* (or discussion group) is an interview technique best used with 6 to 12 participants. But if you hold a focus group with fewer people, you will still be able to obtain valuable information. It is preferable that the participants in the same focus group present the same characteristics, such as age, sex, socio-economic situation and language. This will put participants more at ease to express themselves.

A discussion guide with specific and well-ordered questions should be used. It will allow you to cover all planned topics with the participants. On the other hand, the facilitator should not discourage spontaneity of participants and should let them explore any unplanned but interesting topic.

Facilitation of a *focus group* is the key to the meeting. The facilitator must show a desire to understand, openness, good listening skills and neutrality. It is preferable for the facilitator to guide the participants rather than to adopt an authoritative style with an emphasis on directing the discussion. The facilitator must also give all the participants a chance to talk and must respect the time allowed. A focus group should run for an hour and a half to two hours.

***How many *focus groups* should we run?**
Focus groups should be held as a means for obtaining new information. But you should set a ***minimum number*** of focus groups to run.

Some questions to ask yourself in planning an interview or focus group

Check when completed

- Have we determined the objective of the interview or *focus group*? ☐
- Have we chosen the people we will interview or invite to the *focus group(s)*? ☐
- Have we taken the necessary measures to ensure that an interview is no longer than 60 minutes or that a *focus group* is no longer than 2 hours? ☐
- Have we prepared our list of questions? ☐
- Have we arranged to provide a neutral, comfortable space that will ensure respect of participants' confidentiality? ☐
- Do we have the material necessary to record the meeting or to take notes? ☐
- Have we planned how to present the results of our assessment to the participants and to the entire population? ☐

THE SURVEY

Using a questionnaire to conduct a survey allows you to reach people you cannot reach by the means of an interview or *focus groups*. This tool allows you to obtain facts, opinions, beliefs and attitudes.

A questionnaire can be administered by mail, in person, by telephone or by e-mail. These methods have their own advantages and drawbacks. You must choose one which will allow you to obtain the largest amount of quality information, which will save money and time, and which will get the greatest possible number of people to participate.

Because it is impossible to reach all the members of a community, you must try to obtain a sample which represents the entire population as closely as possible. This means the sample you obtain must be made up of a variety of people.

A questionnaire should be produced in 3 steps:

1) ***Prepare a preliminary version:*** Develop clear and simple questions. The explanations at the start of the questionnaire should also be simple and precise. Make sure that the questionnaire is presented in an easy-to-read format.

2) ***Test the questionnaire:*** Distribute the questionnaire to a few people to ensure that the questions are easy to understand and that the vocabulary is appropriate;

3) ***Prepare the final version:*** Prepare the final version according to the comments you received when you tested the questionnaire.

Creating a questionnaire

Make choices:

1- Choose the type of questions

- Closed questions: The choice of answers by respondents is pre-established.
- Open questions: There are no pre-established answers and respondents freely give their opinions.

2- Choose a scale for answers to closed questions

- Two possible answers (e.g., Yes/No, Agree/Disagree)
- Several possible answers: List all possibilities and ask respondents to check off the one or ones they most closely agree with. You can add "other" as a choice allowing respondents to give another answer.

3- Choose the way to formulate your questions (see section *'Gather the necessary information'*)

4- Choose the length of the questionnaire

- A relatively short questionnaire is preferable. If it is long (e.g., 10 pages), divide it into two sections so that it can be completed on two separate occasions.

A questionnaire template is given in Annex 2.

DOCUMENTARY RESEARCH

This method will allow you to obtain information about your community by consulting existing documents. Such documents include reports on meetings, funding requests, reports on public consultations, histories of the community, brochures, information sheets, newspaper articles, audio-visual archives, etc.

In carrying out this research, you can look for documents from the following organizations: health centre, band council, community organizations, youth centre, Native friendship centre, etc.

You can use the information you obtain from these documents for various purposes, including producing a portrait of your community (population, age groups, employment, housing, etc.). This information may also give you indications about the programs that have been run before in the community and about the needs that have been previously expressed by the members of the community.

OTHER METHODS

Alternative methods for obtaining information can be used. For example, a community can form a discussion group on social media (such as Facebook), organize a supper meeting, hold a general meeting or community forum, or even place a suggestion box in a frequently visited place. The important thing is to find which methods are best suited to your community and to combine them in order to get the opinions of as many people as possible.

ADVANTAGES AND DRAWBACKS OF THE PROPOSED METHODS

METHODS	ADVANTAGES	DRAWBACKS
Individual interview	• You can run a highly structured interview with a list of questions and you can also run a more spontaneous interview. • It allows you to discuss a topic in depth. • It allows a relaxed and personal conversational tone.	• It can require more time to do. • Some taboo topics may be difficult to bring up. • The interviewer must have the necessary skills.
Focus group	• It is stimulating for participants to hear others express themselves. • It allows several people to give their opinions in a short time. • It allows you to request additional explanations or examples.	• It is easy to drift from the topic. • The dynamic of the group can influence the level of participation and the answers provided by participants. • The facilitator must have the necessary skills. • A focus group does not allow you to obtain statistics.
Survey	• It is not expensive. • It ensures greater confidentiality. • It allows you to get opinions from people who are difficult to reach. • It allows you to deal with more sensitive topics such as violence or sexuality.	• A low response rate is possible. • There may be delays due to mail service. • Often, only those people the most interested in the topic will complete the survey. • It does not allow you to explore the topic in depth with each participant.

All these methods will allow you to obtain relevant information and to produce an accurate portrait of your community's needs. Whatever method you use, it is essential that you validate the obtained information with the population. To do so, you must present your results to different key persons and you must be sure that you have fully understood what people have expressed.

GATHER THE NECESSARY INFORMATION

Once you have chosen the methods you will use, you must prepare questions that will allow you to obtain the necessary information. You must therefore develop relevant questions for seeking the desired information and related explanations.

A question considered as being relevant is an "open question," one for which the answer is not simply yes or no (in which case we are dealing with a "closed question"). It is preferable to use open questions because they lead to explanations.

When you set out to design an interview or questionnaire, you already have a number of hypotheses to work with. Relevant questions to which clear and precise answers are given allow you to confirm these hypotheses.

The questions should make it possible to obtain:

1) ***Information:*** Where? Who? What? When? How? How many? Here we are speaking of a simple request for information.

2) ***Explanations:*** Why? How? Getting answers in such a case allows you to understand things better.

You must at all cost avoid questions that include value judgements because they judge a situation or prompt certain answers rather than let participants freely give their opinions.

Examples of questions	Types of questions				
	Open	Closed	Information	Explanatory	Value judgement
Who manages the psychosocial services in the community?	x		x		
What activities are necessary to assist families and children?	x		x		
Why is the situation in the community so bad?	x			x	x
When did the community hold its most recent annual meeting?	x		x		
Do parents need support?		x	x		
How can the increase in child negligence be explained?	x			x	
What does the choice of child and family assistance programs depend on?	x		x		
Is it fair that we don't have enough housing?	x			x	x
How much time does it currently take to obtain psychosocial services?	x		x		
Why do you think it is necessary to develop culturally-adapted activities?	x			x	

Further to being relevant, the questions asked in interviews, focus groups or questionnaires should be written with the respondents in mind. The way in which they are formulated is crucial for results.

The following table presents the most common mistakes and the way in which they can be reformulated to make them simple, clear and relevant.

The characteristics of a good question are:

1) A good question is "open" and directs participants' attention towards your topic;

2) A good question does not make any judgement and does not suggest a direction for the answer;

3) A good question is short (few words).

TYPES OF MISTAKES	EXAMPLES OF MISTAKES	IT IS BETTER TO SAY...
Question too long	Regarding the state of health of the members of your community, what, according to you, are the most serious health problems that affect some members of your community?	What are the health problems of the members of your community?
Question too short	What are the characteristics of your community?	What characteristics of your community should social services planning take into account?
Ambiguous or unclear question	What actions would assist in reducing action by the YPB in your community to reduce the number of children it takes charge of?	What services could be offered in your community to reduce the number of children taken charge of by the YPB?
Two questions in one	What are the gaps in the social services offered in your community and what services should be offered to improve the well-being of the members of your community?	1- What are the gaps in the social services offered in your community? 2- What services should be offered to improve the well-being of the members of your community?
Use of terms that are too technical or poorly defined	What are the relations of joint action in the community?	What activities are held to allow community members to be consulted and to share their knowledge?
Question too suggestive	Do you agree that there are not enough services offered in your community?	What do you think about the number of services offered in your community?

CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONSENT OF PARTICIPANTS

It is essential to assure participants that their answers will remain confidential. You must therefore arrange to keep the questionnaires or interview summaries in a secure place. It is also important never to disclose the identity of participants.

Furthermore, it is up to you to decide whether or not written consent is necessary from people who are asked to give their opinions regarding the needs in your community.

A consent form should be written in simple terms and in the everyday languages of participants. It must give information on how the requested participation will take place, on the advantages and drawbacks related to participation, and on how confidentiality of information will be protected. Participants must also be informed that they can refuse to take part or to withdraw from the process at any time, without any negative consequences for them.

If you have participants of minority age, it is important to obtain the consent of their parents. Note also that people have the right to give their consent orally rather than sign the consent form.

A template for a consent form is given in Annex 3.

STEP 4: Analyze and present the results

SELECT YOUR PRIORITIES

You will find after the data collection stage that you have a vast amount of information to prioritize. You must prioritize because it is unrealistic to believe that all the needs expressed by the community's members can be met by a single action plan.

You can select priority needs on the basis of:

1) The number of times each need is indicated;
2) The impact of each of the expressed needs on the population and on the functioning of the community;
3) The existence and availability of resources to effectively meet each need;
4) The level of urgency expressed for each need.

The idea here is that you must define the criteria that will be used to determine which of the expressed needs will necessitate the implementation of new resources.

VALIDATE THE INFORMATION THAT HAS BEEN OBTAINED

After you have made a list of your community's needs by order of priority, it is important to validate the list. To do so, you may want to meet with a number of new participants to obtain their opinions as a way of confirming the results of your initial analysis.

You can also organize a community meeting to present your results. It is important that people have the opportunity to express their opinions about the list of needs that are to be prioritized, because your action plan will be based directly on what you have prioritized.

PRESENT THE RESULTS OF YOUR NEEDS ASSESSMENT

You can present the results of your needs assessment in a written document. This document must:

- ✓ Describe the process which allowed you to assess needs and present the information gathering tools that you used;
- ✓ Describe the community and its resources;
- ✓ Summarize the information that you obtained;
- ✓ Provide a portrait of the existing services in your community and the desired ones;
- ✓ Indicate the needs which are the greatest priorities and explain why.

Finally, any additional information you give about the process you used and about your data-gathering tools may provide ideas for other workers who produce their own action plans in the future. You can also use your document for self-evaluation purposes concerning the new services you develop.

4. CONCLUSION

The results obtained by your needs assessment can be presented and used to create an action plan. The information you have gathered will allow you to identify objectives and the target clientele to which new services must be provided. You can also integrate several sections of your written report on the needs assessment directly into your action plan.

In closing, remember that your document is a work guide and that it is up to you to decide on the most appropriate method for assessing the needs in your community, taking account of the time and resources available to you.

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ANNEX 1

WORK PLAN FOR INFORMATION AND CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

Work Plan [Name of community] [Year]						
General Objective: AWARENESS						
Specific objectives	**WHO[1] (resource persons)**	**WHAT (topics and themes addressed)**	**HOW (ways/ methods)**	**RESOURCES NEEDED TO CARRY OUT THE ACTIVITIES (material, human and financial)**	**WHEN (calendar)**	**PERSON IN CHARGE (responsible for)**
Involve the band council and directors	Consultant FNQLHSSC Advisor					
Involve stakeholders	Consultant FNQLHSSC Advisor					
Involve members of the population	Consultant FNQLHSSC Advisor					

1 Examples of key persons to mobilize are given in the next three tables. Depending on the objectives of your project and the available resources, you can call on other persons to take part in the planning process.

General Objective: MOBILIZATION						
Specific objectives	**WHO (resource persons)**	**WHAT (topics and themes addressed)**	**HOW (ways/ methods)**	**RESOURCES NEEDED TO CARRY OUT THE ACTIVITIES (material, human and financial)**	**WHEN (calendar)**	**PERSON IN CHARGE (responsible for)**
Mobilize the population	Youths aged 12 to 18					
	Parents (men and women)					
	Women					
	Men					
	Elders					
Mobilize internal partners and stakeholders	Community stakeholders					
Mobilize external partners (services outside the community)	Community and youth centre workers					
Mobilize local political leaders	Band council Health/social services					

General objective: COLLABORATION						
Specific objectives	**WHO (resource persons)**	**WHAT (topics and themes addressed)**	**HOW (ways/ methods)**	**RESOURCES NEEDED TO CARRY OUT THE ACTIVITIES (material, human and financial)**	**WHEN (calendar)**	**PERSON IN CHARGE (responsible for)**
Collaboration among the community's directors and leadership (i.e., band council or tribal council)	Band chief or manager Social services director Health director Education director Early childhood centre (ECC) manager Police representative Youth centre representative					
Collaboration among the directors of the different sectors in the community (i.e., social services, health, police, education, etc.)	Band chief or manager Social services director Health director Education director Early childhood centre (ECC) manager Police representative Youth centre representative					
Collaboration among workers in various sectors (in and outside the community)	Workers involved in child-youth-family matters					

General objectives: WRITE THE PORTRAIT OF THE COMMUNITY AND THE ACTION PLAN		
Specific objectives	**Steps taken**	**CALENDAR**
Information gathering **Summary: analyze the results**		
Revalidate with all stakeholders mobilized in the community		

ANNEX 2

QUESTIONNAIRE TEMPLATE

A questionnaire should begin with a short text explaining its objective. You should also provide instructions for answering the questions. Finally, it is important to ensure participants that their answers will remain confidential.

Section 1 – Socio-demographic information

The first section of the questionnaire should contain questions allowing you to produce a portrait of the people who have agreed to complete the questionnaire. Here are some sample questions:

1. Are you non-Aboriginal or Aboriginal?
   - ☐ Non-Aboriginal
   - ☐ Aboriginal
2. Are you male or female?
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Female
3. Do you live in the community or away from the community?
   - ☐ In the community
   - ☐ Away from the community
4. What is your age group?
   - ☐ Under 18
   - ☐ 18 - 35
   - ☐ 35 - 55
   - ☐ 55 and older
5. Do you have children? If yes, how many?
   - ☐ No children
   - ☐ 1 child
   - ☐ 2 children
   - ☐ 3 or more children

Section 2 – Perception of needs regarding psychosocial services

The second part of the questionnaire should contain questions related directly to the community needs assessment. You must choose the topics you wish to address, while limiting the number of questions. Use a vocabulary you believe is appropriate for the people to whom you administer the questionnaire. Here are some sample questions:

6. What do you feel are the main social problems experienced in our community?
   1) ______________________________
   2) ______________________________
   3) ______________________________
7. What characteristics of your community should planning of social services take into account?

____

____

____

8. What services could be offered in your community to reduce the number of children taken charge of by the Director of Youth Protection?

____

____

9. What activities are necessary to assist the families and children in your community?

____

10. In your opinion, what assistance should be offered to parents?

____

____

11. How would you explain the instances of child neglect in the community?

____

12. How much time does it currently take to access social services in your community?

- ☐ Less than 1 week
- ☐ Between 1 and 2 weeks
- ☐ Between 2 weeks and 1 month
- ☐ More than 1 month

13. Why do you feel it is necessary to create culturally-adapted activities and services?

____

____

____

Section 3 - Acknowledgements

At the end of your questionnaire, it is important to remind participants of the assistance they have given you in agreeing to take part in the needs assessment of your community. If you plan to inform participants about the results of your assessment, indicate how this will be done.

ANNEX 3

CONSENT FORM TEMPLATE[2]

Introduction
Before agreeing to participate in this research, please read the following information. This document explains the objectives we wish to achieve through your participation, how you will be asked to participate and the advantages and disadvantages of your participation. Do not hesitate to ask any questions you might have before signing.

Objectives
We are requesting your participation in a needs assessment of our community. This will involve obtaining the opinions of several community members for purposes of developing new front-line services that meet the needs of the population.

How I will be asked to participate
In agreeing to take part in this needs assessment of your community; I will take part in ***(an interview, focus group, questionnaire, etc)***. My participation will take approximately ***X minutes***.

Advantages and disadvantages related to my participation
Participating in ***(this interview, focus group, questionnaire, etc.)*** will give me the opportunity to express my opinions about the needs in our community. This needs assessment will contribute to the development of new front-line services that meet the needs of our community. The only disadvantage related to my participation is the time required for my participation.

Right to withdraw
I am free to participate in ***(this interview, focus group, questionnaire, etc.)***. I may end my participation in it at any time, without any negative consequences and without having to explain why I am ending my participation. I may end my participation simply by no longer answering questions ***(or in the case of a focus group, by informing the facilitator)***. All personal information obtained regarding me will then be destroyed.

Confidentiality
All information obtained regarding me will be handled and stored confidentially for ***(number of weeks, months or years)***. After this time, all information obtained regarding me will be destroyed in an appropriate manner. The names of participants will not appear in any report and will not be made public at any time.

Acknowledgements

If you have any questions regarding this project, please contact (name of resource person) by telephone at: ________________________.

I, ***(nom du participant)***, freely give my consent to participate in the needs assessment of my community.

I have signed this form in two copies and have kept one copy.

____ ____________________

Signature of participant Date

____ ____________________

Signature of person responsible Date

For participants of minority age (0 to 17):

I, the parent of ***(nom de l'enfant)***, freely give my consent allowing my child to participate in the needs assessment of my community.

____ ____________________

Signature of parent Date

[2] You will have to modify all of the text bold in orange according to the data gathering method you have chosen.

FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC AND LABRADOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMISSION