

## Educator Self-Study Module

**STEP 4.** Collect audience information relevant to the environmental practice and specific behaviors

*1. Introduction: What are social assessment tools and what can they do for natural resource professionals?*

Table I. Recommended Tools and Descriptions

Recommended Tools	Description
<b>Background Research</b>	Reviews existing information about the social, economic, demographic, and historical aspects of a community that has been gathered by other individuals and/or agencies. Information can be found in either written or online form through local or regional institutions such as town halls, libraries, museums, and historical societies. (McDermaid & Barnstable, 2001)
<b>Census Data Research</b>	Involves accessing existing demographic and economic data about a particular block, tract, mail code, county or state collected periodically by governments. This includes basic statistical information about race, gender, age, education, household, marriage, citizenship, length of residency, and employment patterns within the community. (McDermaid & Barnstable, 2001)
<b>Delphi Method</b>	Lacking full scientific knowledge, decision-makers have to rely on their own intuition or on expert opinion. The Delphi Method is a structured process for collecting and distilling knowledge from a group of experts by means of a series of questionnaires interspersed with controlled opinion feedback. The method was developed in order to make discussion among experts possible without permitting social interactive behavior as happens during a normal group discussion and which can hamper opinion forming (Illinois Institute Of Technology). (Andranovich, 1995)
<b>Focus Groups</b>	Focus groups are managed discussions on particular topics (as determined by a moderator) among a small group of people who have some characteristics in common as members of the community of interest or a subgroup within the larger community. Focus groups allow community participants to actively express their opinions on particular issues and in doing so promote community engagement and participation. Focus groups can be useful in building rapport and understanding between

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	<p>researchers and members of the community as well as building consensus within a group or providing insight into conflicting opinions and viewpoints. (Butler, Dephelps, &amp; Hewell, 1995; NOAA Coastal Services Center)</p>
<p><b>Informal Interviews with Key Informants</b></p>	<p>One-on-one dialogues with individual community members who are able to provide detailed insider’s information and opinions about certain topics. While resembling a natural dialogue, the interview is mostly a one-way conversation in which informants do the talking and the researcher listens, taking notes by hand and/or using a recording device (with permission). (NOAA Coastal Services Center)</p>
<p><b>Observations</b></p>	<p>An information-gathering technique based on the researcher’s personal observations and recordings of everyday social activities and behaviors within a particular community. This method sometimes requires the researcher to actively participate in the activity being observed. Participant-observation allows for the gathering of information about a community from more of an “insider’s” perspective. (NOAA Coastal Services Center)</p>
<p><b>Participatory Action Research</b></p>	<p>Participatory Action Research (PAR) involves a “systematic investigation with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied, for the purposes of education and taking action or effecting social change” (Green, 1995). PAR and participatory learning action (PLA) enable community members to make their own analysis and provide a relatively quick method of data collection. PAR includes verbal and visual methods, priority-setting, investigating seasonal variation, and joint walks. PAR can be applied to participatory: project formulation, needs assessment, planning and action, monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment, research, and surveys (Mukherjee, 2003). (Matarasso, 2004)</p>
<p><b>Public meetings -- facilitated</b></p>	<p>Educators facilitate the design and implementation of a <i>forum</i> where equality and popular control can emerge and personal competence can develop. People are provided equal opportunities to determine the agenda, the rules for discourse, to speak and raise questions, and equal access to knowledge and interpretations. Competence refers to the <i>functionality</i> of the system and the exercise of individual liberties. Citizen participation models include citizen advisory committees, citizen panels, citizen juries, citizen initiatives, negotiated rule making,</p>

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	mediation, compensation and benefit sharing and study groups. (Renn, et al, 1995).
<b>Rapid Appraisal</b>	Rapid appraisal entails a timely and intensive approach towards learning about the characteristics of a particular community. It generally involves both outside experts and insider community members as direct collaborators in the research process and emphasizes the collection of qualitative as opposed to quantitative data. Rapid appraisal relies on researcher control (observing, writing, analyzing) but engages community members through a variety of techniques such as social mapping, asset mapping, and visual methods. Examples include Informal Agricultural Survey, Exploratory, Survey, Sondeo, Agro-ecosystem Analysis, and Rapid Agro-ecosystem Zoning (Mukherjee, 2003). (Butler, 1995; NOAA Coastal Services Center)
<b>Surveys</b>	Surveys are lists of questions deemed relevant to a particular research aim that are administered to members of a community of interest via either mail, telephone, the internet, e-mail, or a combination of all four. Surveys administered via the internet and/or e-mail, however, tend to be the least expensive to employ. There are a large number of companies that provide software for developing, administering, and evaluating surveys entirely online. (Andranovich & Howell; Taylor-Powell, Ellen. 2002)

The information included in Table 1 has been drawn in part from 1) personal communication with Lorna M. Butler (Ph.D.), Barbara McDonald (Ph.D., Education Specialist, USDA Forest Service), and Theresa Trainor (M.A., Program Analyst, US EPA Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds) and 2) a variety of publications/websites/online PDF files that are listed in Table 3: Specific assessment tools and references.