

Introduction to contextual evidence

Contextual evidence refers to information about whether or not a strategy “fits” with the context in which it is to be implemented. In other words, contextual evidence provides prevention practitioners with information on whether a strategy is:

- Feasible to implement
- Useful
- Likely to be accepted by a particular community

Contextual evidence provides guidance grounded in information from a variety of local data sources, such as findings from community needs/assets assessments, and census, school, economic, or police data. Whether found in established local databases or newly collected, this information offers a “snapshot” of measurable community characteristics that may affect a particular decision.



“When a group is considering taking on a new, evidence-based or evidence-informed strategy, we always have to take a close look at the staff and resources they have on hand. We also recommend they collect information on their community’s needs and assets that could affect the success of any new strategy.”

– Valerie Spiva Collins, MS Ed, DHSc, Training & Technical Assistance Supervisor, FRIENDS National Resource Center

What questions can contextual evidence help to answer?

- Does the community have the resources and/or capacity to implement the prevention strategy effectively?
- Do the strengths documented in the research evidence match well with the needs of the community?
- What are the characteristics of the population to be served by the prevention strategy?
- Who are the people and organizations that will implement the prevention strategy?
- What are the characteristics of the setting for the proposed program, policy or practice that could affect its implementation?

How is contextual evidence collected and measured?

Context is a broad term. The first step in the collection process is to identify contextual information that is relevant for Evidence Based Decision-Making. **Contextual evidence must relate to factors that are likely to influence the implementation of the program, practice, or policy that is being considered.**

The contextual factors considered to be evidence will vary based on the circumstances and prevention goals of a particular community. Information on contextual factors is considered to be contextual *evidence* when it is systematically collected, replicable, observable, credible and verifiable.

The next step is to identify sources of that information on relevant context that have been or can be systematically gathered and assessed. Existing sources of data can include census data, school records, hospital data, and law enforcement data. New data that can describe the contextual realities of the community or setting can be gathered in several ways including surveys, community assessments, focus groups, and interviews.



What community characteristics may be relevant contextual evidence for a decision-making process?

There are many characteristics about a community that could affect how a prevention strategy is selected and implemented. Some of these characteristics include:

SETTING-RELATED CONTEXT:

- Community History
- Institutional/Organizational Culture
- Location
- Social Determinants of Health
- Community Values



POPULATION-RELATED CONTEXT:

- Education
- Income
- Gender
- Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Identity
- Religious Affiliation
- Sexual Orientation

APPLYING KEY LEARNING PRINCIPLES

A Community's Approach to Gathering Contextual Evidence

As part of a larger Task Force, an interagency workgroup was convened to use evidence to make a decision about implementing a new prevention strategy in their community. This workgroup has chosen a strategy, but there are several models under consideration.

The workgroup used a systematic process to collect information that was replicable, observable, credible, verifiable, and relevant to the decision at hand. They conducted a community needs assessment and asset inventory. The assessment revealed some significant concerns in the community. In addition, many community agencies reported both a rise in demand for services that address these concerns and a decrease in funding.

Additional information on the local context was collected from secondary data sources on factors related to violence (e.g., census data, school administrative data, local police data).

What methods are used in gathering contextual evidence?

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- Needs/Assets Assessment
 - Capacity Assessment
 - Stakeholder Analysis
 - Economic Analysis
 - Archival Data Analysis

What's Next?

For more information, please refer to the What's Next report received upon completion of the Lesson Modules. This document contains additional resources relating to contextual evidence and its successful application.