

Conduct Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is a systematic process for identifying the nature and extent of learning needs within your target audience, along with the resources available to address them. These needs form the basis for your activity's objectives, content, and format. Learning needs are generally either perceived (self-recognized by the learner) or unperceived (gaps the learner isn't aware of), and a well-rounded needs assessment draws on sources from both categories.

Perceived Needs

Self-recognized – I know what I want and need to know:

- Survey
- Interview
- Focus Group Interview
- Key Informant
- Representative Planning Committee
- Meetings with Colleagues
- Evaluation of Previous CPD Activity

Unperceived Needs

Unknown to the learner – I don't know what I don't know:

- Knowledge test
- Chart Audit
- Critical Incident Reports
- Duplicate Prescription/Health Care Diary
- Expert Advisory Group
- Patient Feedback
- Direct Observation of Practice Performance

See also DEI Considerations [<link>](#) for inclusive assessment methods.

Define your target audience, their work environment or practice activities, and a valid professional practice gap identified through these methods. Consider not just clinical performance but the broader context shaping it — such as practice setting, patient population, and access to resources. Then assess current knowledge or skill level against the desired level, and note preferred learning styles.

Because disadvantaged or underrepresented groups within a target audience are often missing from routine data sources, the SPC should consider participatory methods, such as direct consultation with learners, to discover needs that standard evaluation summaries or survey data alone may miss. The strongest needs assessments draw on multiple methods and link identified needs to improved patient care.

To uncover the needs of the target audience, the SPC could discuss the following questions:

- How common is the need among our target audience?
- How many different assessment sources indicate this need?
- How significantly will the unfulfilled need hinder health care delivery?
- How directly is the need related to actual physician performance?
- How likely is it that a CPD activity will improve practice behaviour?
- Are sufficient resources available to address this topic effectively?
- How receptive will our target audience be to this topic?
- Does the target audience include groups whose needs may be underrepresented in existing data, and how will we capture their input?