Alumni Community Assessment 101

Why should your Alumni Chapter or group of alumni conduct a Community Assessment?

An Alumni Chapter or group of engaged alumni volunteers should conduct a community assessment prior to developing and implementing an Annual Action Plan. The alumni community assessment provides validation and reasoning for a Chapter/group’s focus, and answers the “why” in terms of the priorities of activities, events, and outreach that alumni volunteers will conduct. Rather than simply existing as insular groups of connected individuals, the Alumni Chapter/alumni volunteers will be able to serve as ambassadors of all alumni in that country by focusing on meaningful and relevant issues.

There are many benefits for an Alumni Chapter/group to conduct a community assessment, including the following:

• There is increased understanding within the alumni community about needs, why they exist, and why it is important for the needs to be addressed
• Alumni engagement (and support for initiative) is increased because ALL alumni members from different parts of the country are included in discussions about needs, assets, and community’s response in regards to youth
• Ensure that the efforts and activities are representative of many alumni and not just the interests of 1-2 alums in the country
• Alumni have an increased awareness of how they can contribute to their community’s assets
• There is data for making decisions about the actions that can be taken to address what the alumni community would like to address and how to use the available assets
• Data can be used to inform strategic planning, priority setting, program outcomes, and program improvements

Step 1: Set the Scope & Determine Format

The scope of the alumni community assessment should help answer the larger question of:

How will we, the Alumni Chapter of ________________ (or alumni in ________________ if there is not yet a Chapter), transform the community/country?

Next, the alumni volunteers must reach out to the Center’s Alumni Relations team at alumni.relations@yalieastafrika.org in order for the Center to help communicate with ALL alumni in that country. This will ensure that all alumni are included and feel welcome in the process.
There are many ways of assessing your alumni community. One way is to host a forum or a gathering during which alumni and current participants can come to discuss issues that are important or relevant to them. This will allow the alumni volunteers to not only understand the priorities and critical needs of the alumni community, but to also include current participants who have an interest in being involved once they’ve completed the YALI RLC East Africa program. If an in-person/physical meeting is not feasible, consider a Google Hangout, Facebook group, Whatsapp chat, group Skype, and/or other virtual options. The method is not as important as the idea that all alumni are encouraged to participate.

Alternatively, or in addition, an Alumni Chapter may opt to distribute a survey to alumni in order to assess the most critical needs and issues that are important to alumni. There are several other methods for collecting primary sources of data for your community assessment, including questionnaires, observation, focus groups, interviews, and case studies.

**Step 2: Implement Assessment**
Through whichever method your alumni group chooses, implement the alumni community assessment (survey, gathering, Google Hangout, etc.). Be sure to keep track of attendance and note all ideas and outcomes from the assessment.

**Step 3: Set Priorities and Create an Action Plan**
The next step of the community assessment process is to set priorities based on your findings and create an action plan to guide your post-assessment planning. Priority setting is difficult. It requires developing consensus among alumni and participants with different opinions and views on how community issues should be addressed. If 4 alums would like to work with animal shelters and 4 alums would prefer to work with youth literacy, there must be discussion to allow for a shared focus. Utilizing the Annual Action Plan template (found on UConnect), determine how your group will measure the effectiveness of your actions.

**Step 4: Share Your Findings**
After the priorities have been set and you’ve submitted your Chapter’s Action Plan for approval by the YALI RLC East Africa Alumni Relations team, communicate them to all alumni and participants.

**Step 5: Implement the Action Plan**
After obtaining (Center) approval for the Action Plan and sharing the findings of its community assessment with stakeholders, the Alumni Chapter can begin implementing the activities and events as outlined within the priorities. Chapter leaders can also determine which particular activities or events would qualify for consideration for financial support/underwriting under the Transformation Fund (details found on UConnect). Applications for the Transformation Fund will necessitate a solid and well-devised Action Plan that is based upon a strong community assessment.

The community assessment can be likened to a strong cement foundation from which a YALI Regional Leadership Center East Africa Alumni Chapter/group can continue to build a sustainable structure within which to house opportunities to transform entire communities and countries.
Community Assessment Tips

- Make sure that the individuals who are responsible for carrying out the priorities are involved in the community assessment methodology
- Keep community partners and stakeholders apprised and involved in the implementation (as much as possible) of the action plan
- Don’t choose too many priorities to focus on; choose between 1-3 priorities
- Some of the most-identified priorities derived from the Community Assessment exercise may not be feasible for the Alumni Chapter to implement; move on to another priority that the Chapter is able to implement but be able to validate this move