

Surveying Your Community



Sharing the gospel outside the four walls of your church and inviting families affected by disability to join your local church happen best when you are intentionally connecting with your local community. As you seek to connect with your neighbors, it can be helpful to research the demographic patterns of your surrounding area. The following websites and resources can help you as you study your community.

If you are interacting with this digitally, each header underneath “online resources” is hyperlinked directly to the website that is mentioned.

Online Resources

[Percept Group](#)

This organization will provide a personalized, faith-based, demographic *Ministry Area Profile* for churches and communities. There is a fee for the service, but many denominations already have accounts which their member churches can use for free.

[American Community Survey of the U.S. Census Bureau](#)

This website is a good source for statistics on disability in your community. It lists basic stats state by state.

[The Disability Statistics Annual Report](#)

This publication of the *Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Statistics and Demographics* also offers statistics on disability.

[The Easter Seals Living with Disabilities - Key Findings](#)

This study, published in 2010, provides great information on living with disabilities and related statistics. For information specific to your geographic area, check out the local and regional websites of the Easter Seals.

[Disability Statistics - Online Resource for U.S. Disability Statistics](#)

This website, maintained by Cornell University, provides a wide variety of statistics and information about disability, including reports organized by state.

Identifying the Needs in Your Specific Community

Community Mapping – Erik Carter

In his book, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities*, Erik Carter describes how a church can begin to know its neighbors through a community mapping process. He encourages churches to choose from a variety of approaches such as visiting local organizations, mailing out surveys, interviewing community members, and driving through your neighborhood. He recommends spending several, continuous months on the mapping process to gather quality data. Regardless of the methods a church may choose, Carter suggests using several basic questions as a foundation for your research:

- What congregations, agencies, institutions, informal organizations, associations, and networks are already present in your community?
- What do these groups do and why do they do it?
- What resources are already available to the members of these groups? To everyone in the community?
- What community services and support systems are already available to people with disabilities in your local area? To everyone in the community?
- What resources might they be willing to offer to your church, if asked?
- What talents and gifts reside among the members of your community?

Community Conversations

A more detailed approach to learning about your community could be to engage in *Community Conversations*. This model of community research was developed by Beth Swedeen, Molly Cooney, Colleen Moss, and Erik W. Carter. A *Community Conversation* is a way of gathering people from various occupations and backgrounds in your community to discuss community concerns and collaborate on solutions.

A *Community Conversation* will probably be a new experience for most participants, and you may see some hesitation to engage. As people begin to verbalize their concerns and share in the common purpose of finding solutions, most participants will overcome their fears. As an example, you may consider hosting a *Community Conversation* on inclusion for individuals with disabilities in your community. For a more detailed description of *Community Conversations* and guidelines, you can review the article linked above.