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# Unique Framework Helps Louisiana Community Prioritize Its Investments in Children and Families

## Abstract

In 2008, the Shreveport-Bossier Community Foundation selected education, health, and poverty as funding priorities. But the foundation realized that it needed more specific guidelines on how best to distribute grants. RAND developed a framework for making investment decisions that incorporates the best of traditional decisionmaking approaches. The framework focuses on the intersection of needs, assets, and best practices. For the Shreveport-Bossier community, assets such as health care providers, public school teachers, and resources at Barksdale Air Force Base can help address the community’s needs in the specific areas of infant health, child maltreatment, and educational attainment.

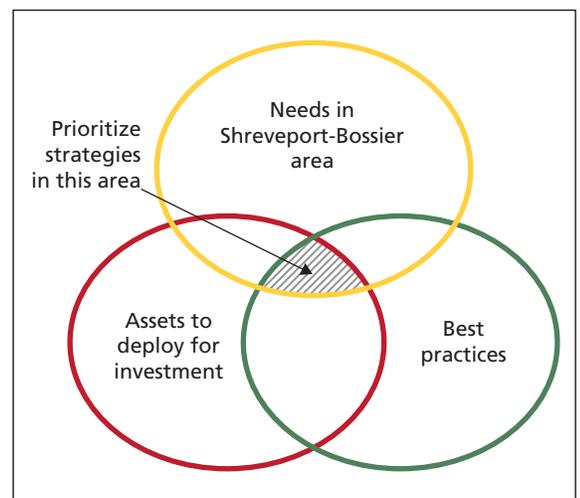
investments and found that three major approaches have been used extensively in similar contexts: assessing needs, inventorying assets, and documenting best practices. All three had strengths, and all three incorporated the values that community members described in meetings: emphasizing areas of greatest need, data and evidence over public opinion, and best practices.

Rather than selecting one approach, as has been done traditionally, the RAND team used all three simultaneously to identify priorities for investment in children and families. With this unique framework as a guide, the researchers systematically reviewed data and information related to each of the three approaches in order to objectively identify strategies at their intersection (see the figure).

## Areas of Need

The RAND team identified eight indicators as high-need areas for children and families in the Shreveport-Bossier City area. These indicators are in three broad areas:

## Framework for Investment: Intersection of Need, Assets, and Best Practices



In Louisiana, the Community Foundation of Shreveport-Bossier pools funds from sources in Caddo and Bossier Parishes, manages the funds, and allocates the funding within the two-parish region. (The City of Shreveport is in Caddo Parish; the city of Bossier City is in Bossier Parish.) In 2008, the foundation sponsored the first annual Shreveport–Bossier City *Community Counts* annual report. Based on the findings of this report, the foundation decided to develop new funds focused on three priority areas: education, health, and poverty. These focal areas were still very broad, however, and the foundation asked the RAND Corporation to assist with further refinement of priorities for its investments, with an emphasis not only on the three priority areas but also on children and families.

RAND researchers reviewed the literature that describes different strategies for prioritizing

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1. Infant health
  - preterm births
  - infant mortality
2. Child maltreatment
  - neglect
  - physical abuse
  - sexual abuse
3. Educational attainment
  - math proficiency in 4th grade
  - math proficiency in 8th grade
  - high school graduation.

In each case, the indicator for at least one of the parishes was either 30 percent worse than the average for the state of Louisiana or 50 percent worse than the average for the United States. These are arbitrary cutoff levels, but these cutoffs served to narrow the original set of more than 30 indicators to eight.

### Community Assets

The strongest assets in the area that may represent opportunities for improving the well-being of children and families include the following resources:

- Health care facilities and providers: large quantity and highly regarded by the community

- Public school teachers: relatively well paid and well educated
- Barksdale Air Force Base: large number of family-oriented programs and potential sources of volunteers and children’s services workforce.

### Best Practices

Finally, evidence-based research indicates that there are a number of effective approaches to improving the areas of need. Many are described on the Web site for the RAND-led Promising Practices Network ([www.promisingpractices.net](http://www.promisingpractices.net)), a group of organizations that are dedicated to providing quality evidence-based information about what works to improve the lives of children, families, and communities. The table indicates the types of approaches that could address the areas of need while taking advantage of the community’s resources.

Giving priority to strategies that lie at the intersection of need, assets, and best practices may raise the likelihood that investments in children and families produce gains. However, identifying strategies with a high probability of success is only the first step in the process of improving the well-being of children and families. The success of these strategies depends critically on effective implementation. To realize the promise that these priorities may offer will require community buy-in, careful planning, faithful replication of evidence-based approaches, and ongoing monitoring. ■

### Evidence-Based Strategies at the Intersection of Region’s Needs and Assets

Assets	Area of Need		
	Infant Health	Educational Attainment	Child Maltreatment
<b>Health care facilities and providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving women’s preconception and interconception health</li> <li>• Pregnancy screening and healthy pregnancy behaviors</li> <li>• Parent education and home visitation programs</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent education and home visitation programs</li> </ul>
<b>Public schools and teachers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educating young women on preconception and interconception health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentoring, counseling</li> <li>• Smaller group settings and personalized instruction</li> <li>• Interventions emphasizing behavioral change</li> <li>• Academic-focused intensive programs</li> <li>• Data systems to monitor trends and identify at-risk students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skill-based curricula or life skills training for children and youth</li> </ul>
<b>Barksdale Air Force Base</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same approaches as in health care sector</li> <li>• Train spouses to provide education and home visiting services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide mentors for preteens and teens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Base awareness campaigns</li> <li>• Parent education and home visitation programs</li> </ul>

This research brief describes work conducted within RAND Child Policy in collaboration with the RAND Gulf States Policy Institute and documented in *Priorities for Investments in Children and Families in Caddo and Bossier Parishes: Application of a Unique Framework for Identifying Priorities*, by M. Rebecca Kilburn and Shannon I. Maloney, TR-821-CFSB, 2010, available at [http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical\\_reports/TR821/](http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR821/). This research brief was written by Shelley Wiseman. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND’s publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark.

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