

TOOL: TIPS FOR ACTION PLANNING

WHAT IS AN ACTION PLAN?

An action plan is an opportunity to turn your dreams for your community or initiative into a reality. It is also an opportunity to make your organization's vision concrete. An action plan outlines the strategies and action steps your organization will use to meet its goals and objectives.

WHY DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN?

Developing an action plan is a critical first step toward ensuring project success. An action plan may lend credibility to your organization and its initiative, increase efficiency, and provide accountability. In addition, the action plan provides a tool for mobilizing the community or group and encouraging members to share responsibility for solving the problems and improving the situation you have decided to change.

WHO DEVELOPS THE ACTION PLAN?

You can invite these people to help prepare an action plan:

- Influential people from all groups affected
- People directly involved in the problem or issue
- Members of grassroots organizations
- Members of ethnic and cultural groups of the community
- Different sectors of the community: media/business community/religious groups/schools/youth organizations/social service organizations/health organizations

HOW DO I DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN?

First, clarify your charge. Is it to work to reduce adolescent pregnancy in your community? Or are you working to increase the rate of home ownership? Your goal will provide the backbone of your action plan.

Your action plan should include the strategies you plan to use and the action steps you will take to achieve your goals and objectives. It should also identify a role for each sector of the community or group involved in your effort.

For each action step or change to be accomplished, list the following, with a due date for each:

- What actions or changes will occur-by when?
- Who will carry it out-by when (or for how long)?
- What resources are needed-by when?
- Communication (who should know what)-and when?

A SUCCESSFUL PLANNING PROCESS Adapted from an *Action*

Planning Guide for Community-Based Initiatives, the University of Kansas Work Group on Community Health and Development

BE INCLUSIVE

Good planning is active and inclusive. Seek out key players with diverse viewpoints on the problem or issue. Once a diverse group of important players is at the table, it is important to get them to communicate with each other. Effective leaders often call on silent members during pauses in the discussion. They convey the value of each person's voice on the issues.

Occasionally, it may be necessary to discourage an overly enthusiastic member from talking too much or dominating meetings. Leaders may do so by thanking them for their comments and indicating the importance of hearing from other members of the group.

MANAGE CONFLICT

If the group is effective in attracting diverse views, conflict among members may result. Group facilitators can recognize differences, perhaps noting the diverse experiences that give rise to divergent views. To resolve conflicts, leaders may attempt to elevate the discussion to a higher level on which there may be a basis for agreement. By reminding the group that we all share the vision of a healthy community, leaders can help members find common ground.

USE BRAINSTORMING RULES

Group facilitators must avoid making judgments about ideas and suggestions. Brainstorming rules apply. All ideas must be heard and noted without criticism.

BE EFFICIENT

Planning meetings must be efficient, starting and ending on time. It is helpful to have an agenda or to build a consensus at the beginning of the meeting about what will be accomplished and in what time frame.

COMMUNICATE PRODUCTS OF PLANNING

Planning will result in a useful product. Try to structure every planning session so that it results in a product, such as a list of issues or ideas. Show off the product at the end of planning meetings, distributing copies of the products of planning to all members.

PROVIDE SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Finally, it is important to provide support and encouragement throughout the process of planning. Good planning takes time; it usually requires months to produce a detailed plan of action. Acknowledge the contributions of all participants, especially key leaders. Let the group know when it is doing a good job. Positive feedback feels good, particularly to those who are used to being criticized for their work.