

Planning for a Purpose:

An Action Planning Model for Communities and Organizations

For communities, neighborhoods, committees, or organizations, or when a project is already agreed upon, an efficient and streamlined action planning process is sometimes sufficient. For many types and sizes of organizations and agencies, such as non-profits, service organizations and community committees, a streamlined action planning process can move a group from inertia to action, stimulating additional planning and accomplishment. During the initial planning meeting, the steering committee or organizing group identifies what they hope to accomplish, determines the scope and goals of planning, then identifies a group to participate in the four-meeting process. The four-meeting cycle can be repeated to accommodate more projects or goals.

Meeting 1: Creating a Preferred Future or Vision

This first meeting focuses on what the group wants to accomplish within their community, organization, or group. By creating a “vision,” the group can articulate the goals they want to work toward. As a starting point, the facilitator provides examples of vision statements from similar groups.

Meeting 2: Identifying Assets

Many communities or groups focus on dollars, whether it be fundraising, grant writing, or agency funding. The focus on funding may obscure many of the community’s non-monetary assets. Using the “Community Capitals” approach, the group works through an exercise that helps them realize how many resources or assets they already have within their community or organization.

Meeting 3: Bridging the Gaps

The third meeting focuses on the gaps between the “vision” and the current state of the community, organization, or group. By planning what must happen to create the vision, the group begins a “to do” list and sets priorities for action. Often, they find that reality is not as far from the vision as they first thought. At this meeting, the group starts brainstorming projects to bridge the gaps. This should be in the form of true brainstorming, where no idea is too far out to be listed. Ideas which must be more fully developed can be saved for later.

Meeting 4: Writing Action Plans

During this fourth and final meeting, each participant completes as many project sheets as they choose. On these forms, participants list their project idea, what community assets can be leveraged to make the project a reality, and what they, personally, are willing to do to make the project happen. There is also space on the form to list others they are willing to recruit.

Once the group has completed the project sheets, each participant is invited to “sell” his or her idea to the rest of the group. By the end of the meeting, the group chooses three to five projects to start on, some which may not require any funding. Quick wins should be the focus of these first few projects. After some successful projects, the group should be able to recruit more workers, and take on more challenging projects.

Rather than creating a final formal plan, the result of these meetings will be the creation of a few committed action teams with short written summaries of the situation, the goals, and the action plan(s). The group sets a time to meet, once a month or every quarter, to hear progress reports and to identify more projects.

