Community Strategic Visioning Programs

Introduction

- During the past decade, local leaders have taken an increasing role in managing the future of their communities. Local leaders had to manage change — responding to either population declines and a stagnating economy, or population increases as residents moved from the suburbs into the surrounding countryside.

- Local officials and community leaders need a strong vision and action plan for their communities to prosper in this environment. Leadership requires a clear direction of where the community is headed and how ir is to get there.

Introduction

Role of Strategic Visioning Planning

- Faced with unique and complex problems, community leaders must find ways to review their local economies or direct growth and change in ways envisioned by residents. The lack of experience and time to become acquainted with such practices often means that relatively little community development planning occurs.

- Recognizing the importance of strategic visioning planning in communities and the lack of local resources to carry out these activities, some agencies began an organized effort to provide technical assistance to interested cities.

Essential Elements

- The strategic visioning process allows the community to stretch beyond what exists now to reach new potential for the future.

- Differences between various interests give way to a single community vision. Local resources can then be coordinated and maximized to achieve the community's desired future.

- Innovative, creative solutions that meet the changing times are developed through the interaction of leaders and citizens working toward common goals.

Different Planning Approaches

- **During the 1960s**
  - Community planning was not widely practiced prior to World War II.
  - Postwar needs brought forth a plethora of federally funded programs ranging form highway construction and suburban housing to urban renewal and antipoverty program during the 1960s.
  - Community leadership was held in the hands of a few people who initiated and carried out local programs.

Different Planning Approaches

During the 1970s

- The planning approach shifted in the 1970s to focus on comprehensive, long-range plans. Theses plans provided a rational order to the community's future based on projections of existing trends.

- Comprehensive planning was primarily a technical planning process. Citizens are usually informed about the effort and have opportunities to participate in policy discussions at community forums held throughout the planning process.

- Professional planners were often hired to develop a plan for the community. Citizen ownership and commitment to the development plan are frequently limited.

Different Planning Approaches

During the 1980s

- Federal dollars declined substantially in the 1980s and strategic planning began to emerge in the public sector. Strategic planning offers a structured way for a community to analyze itself through both internal and external examination.

- Critical issues to be resolved are identified and a realistic vision of the community's desired future is developed.

- As opposed to previous planning approaches, strategic planning brings key stakeholders in the community, both citizens and leaders, into the process as active participants.
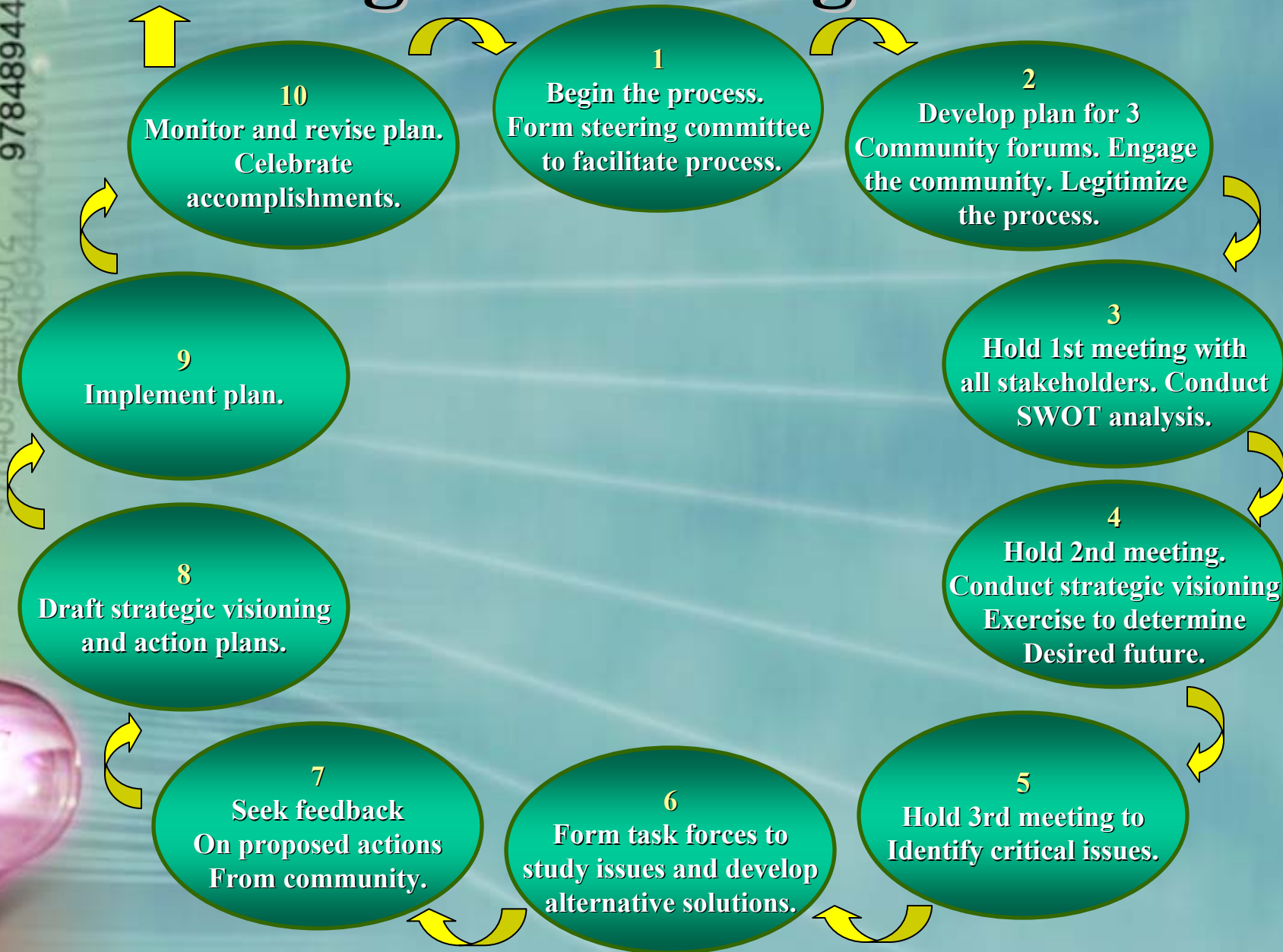
Different Planning Approaches

- **During the 1990s**
  - The planning approach of the 1990s, strategic visioning, addresses the realities of communities through creatively and innovation.
  - Strategic planning focuses on strategic fit, whereas strategic visioning focuses on what strengths must be developed to reach a desired end state.
  - Leadership in a community strategic visioning effort is more participatory than in past planning approaches. Citizens share in the knowledge and power as active participants in developing a vision and action plan for the community.

Strategic Visioning Process

1 — Begin the process. Form steering committee to facilitate process.

2 — Develop plan for 3 Community forums. Engage the community. Legitimize the process.

3 — Hold 1st meeting with all stakeholders. Conduct SWOT analysis.

4 — Hold 2nd meeting. Conduct strategic visioning Exercise to determine Desired future.

5 — Hold 3rd meeting to Identify critical issues.

6 — Form task forces to study issues and develop alternative solutions.

7 — Seek feedback On proposed actions From community.

8 — Draft strategic visioning and action plans.

9 — Implement plan.

10 — Monitor and revise plan. Celebrate accomplishments.

Strategic Visioning Process

Phase I — Preparing for the Program

- The strategic visioning process begins with a dedicated group of citizens who initiate and facilitate the effort.

- They should be enthusiastic about the strategic visioning process, have some community leadership experience, and be willing to devote the time and energy necessary to plan and carry out the program.

- Major sectors of the community should be identified and brought into the sponsorship and planning of the program in the initiate phase.

Strategic Visioning Process

Phase I — Preparing for the Program (cont.)

The steering committee provides overall leadership to the strategic visioning effort including the following responsibilities:

- Plan the strategic visioning process.
- Legitimize the effort with key community.
- Identify a person to facilitate the meeting.
- Identify and contact people to participate in the program.
- Make all arrangements for the community meetings.
- Handle financial obligations.
- Inform the public about the program.

Strategic Visioning Process

Phase II — Initiating the Program

- The process is a learning experience where information and action planning are cumulative.Even more important is the trust level that is built within the group at each meeting.

- The community forums provides time for people to reflect on the meetings, yet maintains peoples's interest and the momentum of the effort.

- The time for reflection and the discussions is valuable to build interest, knowledge, and commitment to the effort.

Strategic Visioning Process

Phase II — Initiating the Program (cont.)

- The 1st meeting focuses on people becoming acquainted by sharing their perceptions, hopes, fears, and expectations of the communities.

- The 2nd meeting focuses on participants' visioning for the future of the community.

- The 3rd meeting focuses in critical issues that must be addressed if the vision is to become a reality.

Strategic Visioning Process

Phase III — Analysis of Critical Issues

- From these meetings, people become acquainted, learn about the community, develop notions about the future, and identify the critical issues that must be addressed in order to move forward.

- Task forces are formed around each of the critical issues to further study the issues, gather necessary data, identify alternative solutions, and make recommendations on specific actions.

- After a common understanding has been reached, the group works toward finding a common solution.

Strategic Visioning Process

Phase III — Analysis of Critical Issues (cont.)

- In a democratic process such as strategic visioning the risk always exists the differences cannot be worked out, in which case the decision is made at another level.

- Critical thinking abilities, challenging ideas, and probing to find creative solutions should be a part of a fruitful discussion.

- The facilitator may want to develop rules of appropriate behavior with the group to keep the discussion from becoming explosive and escalating into conflict.

Strategic Visioning Process
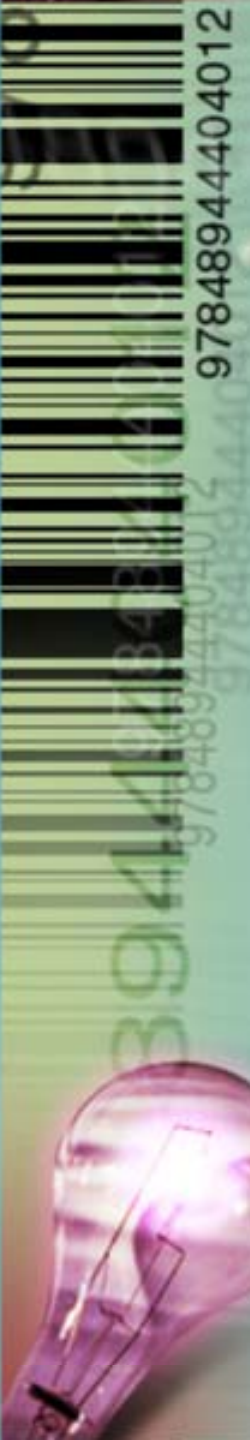
Phase III — Plan of Action

- This phase involves writing a document that contains a summary of the process used to create the vision, the vision statement, analysis of the critical issues, recommendations, and the plan of action.

- The plan should identify specific actions, who will be responsible for their implementation, what resources will be needed, a time line, and expected outcomes.

- Resources outside the community should be sought and used to leverage local funds.

Strategic Visioning Process

Phase IV — Implementation

- The implementation phase involves carrying out the actions and monitoring process.

- Benchmarks are critical to measuring achievements.

- Keeping the communication channels open between all sectors of the community is an important aspect of the action phase.

Strategic Visioning Process

Phase V — Monitoring Progress

- Periodic reviews are necessary to determine what has been accomplished and of any revisions to the plan of action are needed.

- Updating short-term objectives will keep the plan moving forward.

- Community forums held throughout the year to assess progress, update plans, and celebrate accomplishments will also keep people engaged in the program.

Essential Elements

Shared Leadership and Power

- The common form of power structure is one with many interest groups, each focused on a narrow purpose. This scenario frequently creates a situation where community efforts move in different directions or are at cross-purposes with each other.

- The strategic visioning process creates a forum to bring leaders and citizens with diverse perspectives together to discuss, debate, and develop future direction for the community.

- The role of community leadership in a strategic visioning effort is to facilitate the process.

Essential Elements

Shared Leadership and Power (cont.)

- The notions of shared power and facilitative leadership necessitate a shift in think about leadership from a focus on leaders' positions, power, and control over resources to a focus on ways to develop collective thought and actions involving many diverse interests.

- Theses include the ability to do the following:

    - Listen to understand others' perspectives.

    - Operate in an environment with high levels of ambiguity, complexity, change, and conflict.

    - Facilitate problem-solving processes based on collaboration and consensus building.

    - Negotiate agreement for action.

    - Mobilize and coordinate resources for action.

Essential Elements

Collaboration & Consensus-Building Processes

- Key to a community's ability to address critical issues are the process used to bring people together to deliberate the issues and work together and to make decision (consensus).

- Collaboration means co-labor, to create a shared vision and joint strategies to address concerns extending beyond those of any single organization.

- In a consensus process (a decision-making method), separate interests work together to clarify issues, educate each other about respective concerns, generate options, and then reach agreements that everyone can accept.

Essential Elements

Collaboration & Consensus-Building Processes (cont.)

- There are several advantages of using a collaborative, consensus approach:
  - Education – Individuals learn from one another regarding their perceptions of the issues, their values, hopes and fears.
  - Better decisions – Drawing on the joint thinking of a group can generate greater creativity and a lot of options of better quality.
  - Acceptance of the outcome –Participants who have worked together to understand the issues and have developed solutions using consensus will see the reasoning behind a recommendation or solution.
  - Faster implementation –Resources are easier to mobilize when issues and solutions are clearly articulated and community support is established.
  - Trust and new relationships –Participants establish relationships with each other that will serve the community in the future.

Essential Elements

Collaboration & Consensus-Building Processes (cont.)

- An effective collaborative process works best under the following conditions:
  - The facilitators of the process model honest, trustworthiness and the ability to envision the future.
  - Time is made available for people to become acquainted.
  - People listen to one another for understanding.
  - Training and technical support are provided when needed.
  - Meeting are well organized and produce results.
  - Time is allocated to understanding different points of view and resolving conflicts along the way.
  - Milestones are celebrated as well as individual and group accomplishments.

Essential Elements

Creating a Community Vision

- Creating a shared vision in a community is hard work. Most people find it difficult to move beyond the current, most pressing issues. A community vision is a dream, and ideal.

- A vision is like painting a picture of what the ideal community will look like in the future. It requires sufficient detail so that others can envision the same picture.

- It is a carefully formulated statement of intentions that defines a destination or future state of affairs which an individual, group, and organization find desirable.

Essential Elements

- **Creating a Community Vision (cont.)**
  - A vision is not the same as a mission, although the words are often used interchangeably. A mission refers to the purpose of an organization.
  - A single mission statement in a community is not as useful as it is in an organization because communities serve many purpose.
  - A vision is useful at a community level because it provides focus and direction, not purpose. A vision should articulate the values and hopes of residents.

Essential Elements

Creating a Community Vision (cont.)

- A community can judge the quality of its vision by three criteria.
  - Timeless
  - Inspirational
  - Provide clear guidelines for decision making
- It is important to discuss key components of a vision and to draft a rough statement early in the process.
- As the group continues its work, the vision can be refined and modified as people become clearer in their thinking about the kind of community they want in the future.

Essential Elements

- Implementation of a Community Vision
  - Implementing a plan of action to reach a vision is a challenge in communities. There are many barriers to over come, including issues of trust, organizational turf, scarce resources, and the commitment to follow through on actions.
  - Many efforts break down after the planning phase. A conscious shift in thinking is required to go from planning to implementation.
  - The extent to which the above key elements are addressed successfully affects the results of the implementation phase.

Essential Elements

Implementation of a Community Vision (cont.)

The following points are essential elements:

Key stakeholders with a vested interest in the community should be active participants in the strategic process. Stakeholders also bring resources to the planning effort that can be used in collaborative ways to undertake actions and attain established goals.

By using collaborative, consensus-building processes, issues of trust and organizational turf will be minimized. The opportunities to explore various views, values, and knowledge are fundamental to successful implementation. Management of the process becomes even more important in the implementation phase.

Essential Elements

- The following points are essential elements (cont):

  - Participants in the process must identify methods to implement solutions and monitor progress. Some of the tasks to oversee the implementation phase include a clearly defined plan of action that details roles, responsibilities, and time lines. Resources must be identified and mobilized to reach goal.

  - The community's vision create through this process should inspire and motivate people to action. The challenge to the management team then involves keeping the vision in from of the public, coordinating efforts toward the vision, and keeping the momentum going.

Summary & Conclusion

The approaches used over the years by leaders to plan for their community's future have changed as issues have become more complex, the community more fragmented, and as federal funding sources have diminished. Today more is expected of local communities in solving their own problems with their own resources. Strategic visioning offers an approach for communities in meeting today's challenges.

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