

IFAS Community Development: Empowering Your Community, Stage 5, Implementation^[1] M. A. Brennan^[2]

This paper is part of a series of discussions on community development. This series includes specialized papers on civic engagement, community action, and other topics important to the development of community.

Introduction

The *Implementation* stage launches all planned efforts and directly attempts to facilitate community change. Building on the previous four stages of community action (Theodori, 2004; Brennan, 2005a; Marcus and Brennan, 2005; Brennan and Regan, 2005; Brennan, 2005b), the time is now at hand to commit all resources and transform plans into action.

Including Implementation in Your Extension Work

Throughout the previous stages, resources were gathered and assessed, subgroups formed to focus on specific tasks, and active citizens recruited. In the implementation stage, these resources are formally committed and people are given the task of going forward to achieve the goals established by the organization and its subgroups. To maximize their impact, each subgroup should:

1. Meet to review goals, objectives, and immediate steps for action

As action efforts are launched, it is essential that all participants be clear about the planned goals and the methods for meeting these goals. It may be the case that newer activists are uncertain or unclear about the specifics of how change will be achieved. A brief meeting or transmission of information (email, fax, action guide, etc.) would be useful in making certain that everyone involved is aware of (1) how to proceed and (2) the resources available to support successful action.

2. Identify clear and measurable stages or benchmarks for all objectives

While goals, objectives, and action plans have already been established (stage 3) it will be useful to identify clear benchmarks or measurable impacts. This will serve to provide activists with feedback and to show that action efforts are making progress. Such measurable impacts will also show the general public that the organization is fostering positive changes on behalf of the community. As milestones are achieved, these can be promoted and marketed accordingly.

3. Take action

Empowered with plans and a detailed background, activists and subcommittees can move forward. As they take action, opportunities and mechanisms for feedback and discussion should be presented. These opportunities can be through meetings, informal gatherings, email communications, or established contacts that can be reached to provide the insight and advice needed to adjust action plans.

4. Celebrate achievements (and failures)

As achievements are made and measurable impacts achieved, it is important to celebrate and promote them through informal celebrations, in the media, and in other promotional avenues. It may also be the case that some action efforts have failed. The fact that these did not reach success is irrelevant, and should be celebrated as the first efforts of what will be many valid action efforts. Community development is achieved if diverse groups are brought together and channels of communication established. From this process, future efforts will emerge that will achieve success.

5. Evaluate and readjust

Community development and locally based action is a never ending process. Both need to be continuously cultivated. As progress in various forms is made, it is essential that mistakes, obstacles, and inconsistencies in application be identified and addressed. To fine tune our action efforts, opportunities to effectively measure outcomes and provide feedback are vital to the long-term achievement of goals.

To provide feedback, formal debriefing meetings should be established at the conclusion of action efforts. These meetings can evaluate progress, identify obstacles, and explore new means for dealing with unforeseen problems. At these debriefing meetings, all subgroups/committees can report on their activities, progress, obstacles, and methods for adjusting to challenges. All of meetings set the stage for long-term action efforts and continued social changes. The development of community is not a one time event in which success or failure is detailed. It is a process where the bringing together of actively interested and diverse community people is a measure of success.

Conclusions

Through all of the stages discussed, but most directly seen in the implementation stage, local residents unite and work towards shared goals. In the community action process, channels of communication and interaction are established that cut across class and other lines. This is a remarkable achievement and represents community development. This process must be promoted and fostered on all possible occasions. Building on the success achieved by this active group, the long-term process of achieving social change can begin. This long-term course of action will be characterized by numerous successes, as well as failures and setbacks. By producing a cohesive group of residents, a structure is in place that will operate proactively to positively shape local well-being. This group will also be able to respond to threats and emerging problems within the community. In the end this coordinated local capacity will contribute social and economic changes that benefit all local residents and groups.

References and Useful Reading

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Useful Web Sites

Community Development Institute East. <http://www.ext.wvu.edu/cdi-east/>

The Community Development Society. <http://www.comm-dev.org/>

Community Resource Group. <http://www.crg.org/>

Civic Practices Network <http://www.cpn.org/>

Grass-roots.org. <http://www.grass-roots.org/>

International Association for Community Development. <http://www.iacdglobal.org/>

Southern Rural Development Center. <http://srdc.msstate.edu>

Sustainable Development Communication Network. <http://www.sdgateway.net>

Footnotes

1. This document is FCS9230, one of a series of the Family, Youth and Community Sciences Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date September 2005.
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