Setting A Community Agenda

Building Capacity for Local Decisionmaking

Number 3 in a Series of Learning Guides

3

A Dedication to Tom Joe

This series of Learning Guides is dedicated to Tom Joe, founder of the Center for the Study of Social Policy and its Director for 21 years. Tom believed that one of the Center's most important contributions was to build the capacity of local decisionmakers. By that, he meant giving ordinary people the information and tools they needed to improve conditions for children and families in their communities.

Tom first conceived of these Learning Guides in 1997 and was their original champion, but he died in 1999 before they were completed. Tom would be proud of the final products. They are based on a premise that he spent his life developing: that government, in tandem with citizens and community organizations, can and should do a much better job of helping disadvantaged people. Tom was a fierce critic of the way human services have evolved. He described the problem this way:

> *"A family should be able to get what it needs, based on its particular circumstances, not given some treatment or service because that's the only thing the government will pay for. Our human services systems are still in the dark ages. Instead of looking at what the whole family needs and how the individual pieces can work together toward those goals, we've built up this crazy collection of categorical programs that have little or nothing to do with the family's real needs."*

To him, our social service systems had grown fragmented, unresponsive, and even harmful to the people they were intended to serve.

Tom proposed various solutions that evolved over time. In the last 20 years, he argued passionately that the best way to break out of the current morass was to empower people at the local level. While simultaneously giving communities local authority, one could break down the current categorical systems and create new approaches to help families in need. Tom knew early on that the federal government could not do this alone, and he became an early advocate for the concept that no one sector of our society, alone, can achieve better outcomes for children and families. He hoped that local leaders and citizens could take up the challenge, generating their own ideas about what communities needed to help families prosper.

Federal and state governments' roles would then be to figure out how to align with communities, and avoid bureaucratic rules, to make it happen. As he put it:

> *"Since as far back as 1972, I tried to get services integrated for people. While others were trying to get the federal government to integrate services from the top down, I suggested a different angle. I said, 'Let's allow the community to propose what they want to do and then ask the federal government for waivers to integrate programs when the community runs into problems.' Of course, communities would have to develop a proposal explaining the results they were trying to accomplish and why. I still think that's the best strategy, but we have to prepare communities with the capacity, skills and staff to propose to the federal and state government what they want to do."*

Tom believed that this series, *Building Capacity for Local Decisionmaking*, was a valuable tool to equip communities to move in this direction. If average citizens—computer technicians, teachers, stay-at-home moms, and sales managers—could learn how the current systems work, with their flaws and opportunities, they would be able to figure out better ways to use existing resources to help struggling families. To do this, Tom knew that we first have to provide people with skills, knowledge, and tools as well as the confidence in their capacity to plot an effective agenda of their own.

All of Tom's work and the Center's has promoted the involvement and leadership of citizens in community-based problemsolving. In 1997, under Tom's leadership, the Center embarked upon a four-year effort with its partners in Georgia, Missouri, and Vermont to develop this series of Learning Guides. With these, we hope that any group of citizens with the will to accept the challenge of improving results for children, families, and communities would have the critical understanding of social policy needed to succeed. That is Tom's legacy and was his hope for the future.

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Acknowledgments

Building Capacity for Local Decisionmaking

This series of Learning Guides was developed by a consortium of partners convened by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, including Georgia's Family Connection, Missouri's Family Investment Trust, and Vermont's Agency for Human Services. The Annie E. Casey Foundation supported the Center's time and publication of these guides.

Center for the Study of Social Policy

The Center for the Study of Social Policy was established in 1979 with the goal of providing public policy analysis and technical assistance to states and localities, in a way that blended high academic standards with direct responsiveness to the needs of policymakers and practitioners.

The Center's work is concentrated in the areas of family and children's services, income supports, neighborhood-based services, education reform, family support, disability and health care policy, and long term care for the elderly. In all of its work, the Center emphasizes several common themes:

- An approach based on results accountability,
- Community service strategies that reach across categorical boundaries and are truly community owned,
- New forms of state/local governance,
- More flexible financing strategies linked to results, and
- New approaches to professional development and local capacity building.

Georgia's Family Connection

Georgia's Family Connection is a state-level, public-private entity created in statute to support the work of Georgia's 155 partnerships. It is comprised of state agency directors, corporate, and civic leaders.

The work of the local partnerships is dedicated to positively affecting outcomes related to children's health, safety, success in school, and self-sufficient families.

Missouri's Family Investment Trust

Caring Communities Partnership (CCP) is Missouri's system reform initiative to achieve its core results through partnerships between communities and state agencies. The Family Investment Trust (FIT) is Missouri's state-level body, created in 1993 by Executive Order of the Governor, to assist communities and state agencies in achieving the core results. The FIT Board of Directors is a 17-member governing body comprised of the directors of eight state agency partners as well as business and civic leaders.

The CCPs are the local decisionmaking bodies, broadly representative of a county or multi-counties, which partner with the state agencies to plan, develop, finance, and monitor strategies to achieve the state's core results. The Partnership, in turn, serves as the parent board to neighborhood or site councils, which also broadly represent decisionmaking entities at the neighborhood or site level. The neighborhood councils partner with their individual Community Partnership to plan, develop, finance, and monitor strategies to achieve the core results.

Vermont's Agency for Human Services

Vermont's Agency for Human Services and the Department of Education, together, have given broad discretion and support to twelve Regional Partnerships.

Vermont's system of local governance is less formal than either Georgia's or Missouri's, in keeping with the small size of their communities and the more informal political culture of the state. The partnerships focus their work on achieving a core set of results agreed upon by the state.

Contributors

Lisbeth Leeson, Consultant to the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), wrote the guide in narrative form. Barbara Pearson, Instructional Designer with Georgia Academy, turned it into a curriculum guide with exercises and activities. Cheryl Rogers at CSSP put the guide in its final form.

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Appendices

Preface

Georgia, Missouri, and Vermont have forged an alliance, supported by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), to help local decisionmakers acquire the skills needed to improve conditions for children and families in their communities.

In a number of states, including these three states, local businesses, civic leaders, and other citizens are working through Local Governance Partnerships (LGPs) to improve children's health, safety, success in school, and movement to a productive adulthood. These partnerships are being asked, usually by state or local government, to come up with new strategies for improving specific results and to monitor the community's progress over time.

Partnership members are assuming ever-greater responsibility for important decisions affecting public sector resources, staff, and service delivery. Yet, community members are rarely equipped to handle these tasks because they have not been given the skills and knowledge needed to carry out their new roles.

To help meet this demand, Georgia, Missouri, Vermont, and the Center for the Study of Social Policy have developed a set of curriculum materials for local governance members and staff. These materials represent our collective best effort to communicate what we think community members need to know in order to make local decisionmaking a successful venture. These guides are meant to help develop local members' capacities, skills, and knowledge, not to lead to a specific product or blueprint.

Local Governance Partnerships in Georgia, Missouri, and Vermont

Georgia, Missouri, and Vermont have created new decisionmaking structures at the local level through which communities are mobilizing resources to improve child, family and community well being.

Georgia

Georgia has established 155 local partnerships dedicated to achieving statewide outcomes related to children's health, safety, success in school, and self-sufficient, strong families. The partnerships are made up of public and private agencies, parent and neighborhood representatives, community organizations, faith community leaders, business people, and other community representatives. Their work has been supported at the state level by the Georgia Policy Council for Children and Families, a public-private body created in statute, comprised of agency heads, and corporate and civic leaders.

Missouri

Missouri currently provides funding to 21 Caring Communities Partnerships (CCPs) serving 24 counties. The CCP is Missouri's systemic reform initiative to achieve their core results. The partnering state agencies have pooled approximately $24 million for the Caring Communities initiative. The dollars are used to build local infrastructure, conduct assessments and evaluation, and enhance or expand existing strategies. The Family Investment Trust (FIT), Missouri's state-level entity created by Executive Order of the Governor in 1993, assists communities and state agencies in this work. The FIT is a 17-member governing body comprised of the directors of eight state agencies as well as business and civic leaders. Through this systemic reform process, Missouri is using its community partnerships to help redesign core programs, such as welfare reform.

Vermont

Vermont has formed 12 Regional Partnerships in a system of local governance that is less formal than either Georgia's or Missouri's, in keeping with the small size of their communities and the more informal political culture of the state. Vermont's State Team for Children, Families and Individuals has given broad discretion to the Regional Partnerships to work on achieving a core set of results agreed upon statewide. Vermont's outcomes help to sharpen the focus and work of the Regional Partnerships. The outcomes begin with the goal of assuring that pregnant women and young children thrive and progress developmentally. The State is witnessing significant reductions in the rates of reported child abuse and neglect as well as improvements in other indicators in the jurisdictions in which the community partnerships have been developing preventive programs and family support.

Audience for the Learning Guides

The primary audience for this series of Learning Guides includes local governance board members, their community partners, and staff. This comprises a broad range of people, including local elected officials, business people, staff of local service organizations (both public and private), representatives of the faith community as well as consumer parents, and other lay citizens involved with helping children and families.

An equally important audience for this series of Learning Guides is state officials who are supporting the Local Governance Partnerships. These officials are among the state executive and legislative branches; others include key staff from state agencies that work with children and families. Staff from the following state departments could also benefit from these Learning Guides:

- Education
- Economic Development
- Mental Health
- Corrections
- Health
- Employment
- Social Services
- Public Safety

Description of the Six Learning Guides

The six Learning Guides developed by this consortium include the following:

Learning Guide 1: Theory and Purpose of Local Decisionmaking

This guide sets forth the theory and purpose of local governance. It begins with issues and problems facing today's children, families, and communities, and an analysis of the categorical human services system. It proposes an alternative—local governance and a Local Governance Partnership (LGP)—as a means of addressing these problems and improving results.

The basics about an LGP are presented: its role, defining characteristics, functions, how it relates to existing entities, decisions about structure and legal standing, relationships with state and local government and relationships with neighborhoods.

Learning Guide 2: Forming and Sustaining a Successful Partnership

This guide focuses on the roles and responsibilities for board members of Local Governance Partnerships. It includes skills for building trusting relationships, negotiating with partners, effective decisionmaking, ensuring meaningful parent and community member involvement, and racial, ethnic, and gender diversity.

Learning Guide 3: Setting a Community Agenda

This guide presents the knowledge and supports the skill building needed for creating a community agenda. It includes identifying community conditions, gathering community perspectives, and mapping community assets. It shows how this information is used to create a vision—with results and indicators—and establish community priorities. Finally, it presents ideas and guidelines for building a wider circle of support and consensus for the agenda.

Learning Guide 4: Strategies to Achieve Results

This guide presents the requirements for developing effective strategies. It contains knowledge and skill building activities in systems thinking, researching promising practices, and synthesizing the information collected into a comprehensive community strategy and a plan for implementation.

Learning Guide 5: Financing and Budgeting Strategies

This guide presents the basics to financing a comprehensive mix of strategies. It includes a collaborative view of financing and ways to identify existing funding and resources, develop a core funding base, obtain discretionary and grant funds, restructure and repackage resources, obtain informal and in-kind resources, and develop a financial plan and a budget.

Learning Guide 6: Using Data to Ensure Accountability

This guide deals with accountability and the Local Governance Partnership. It presents a results framework and roles and responsibilities for shared accountability. Subsequent chapters present knowledge and skills for setting up a data collection system, including collecting, reporting, and using data to determine progress toward improving results.

Together, these six guides are intended to give local people—both professionals and non-professionals—the knowledge and skills needed to become active decisionmakers on behalf of children and families in their community.

The Development Process

- CSSP drafted an initial outline of topics to be included in each guide.

- Each of the three states formed a design team of state staff and community representatives to draft one guide. CSSP consultants helped each design team write the guide and gather resource materials. CSSP drafted three guides.

- CSSP and each state partner reviewed the work of each design team, providing written feedback. Each guide was revised based on this feedback.

- CSSP contracted with a curriculum design team of instructional designers and training experts to translate the content for each guide into a learning tool and a training program.

- The revised learning guides and accompanying training programs were pilot tested with Local Governance Partnership members in at least one of the three contributing states to make sure the information and activities were appropriate and relevant. The Learning Guides and training programs were then revised based on the pilot tests and community feedback.

What do you think?

The project partners are interested in your reaction to the Learning Guides.

- What is your reaction to the Learning Guides?

- How could they be more useful to you?

Please contact the Center for the Study of Social Policy at: http://www.CSSP.org and click on "Contact Us" at the bottom of the page.

Introduction

This Learning Guide is an introduction to a community approach that places the responsibility for improving results for children, families, and communities with a group of local stakeholders. This includes the parents, community members, and youth who live in the community as well as service providers, elected officials, business representatives, the faith community, and members of non-profit and community organizations. Local governance places the decisionmaking and the responsibility for effective strategies in the hands of those who are most affected by the decisions.

As the first guide in the series, Learning Guide 1 provides definitions, explanations, examples, lessons learned, how-to's, discussion activities, and resources. It addresses the structures that need to be in place to support Local Governance Partnerships (LGPs) and ways to build relationships with state and local government and with neighborhoods.

Using the Learning Guide

Most users of this guide will be new to the concept of local governance and LGPs; yet those with experience should still find new insights and information to add to their existing knowledge and skills. Because the guide is intended for a broad and diverse audience with a range of experience, it was purposely designed to provide options in the way that it is used.

- You may want to start at the beginning and study each chapter sequentially,

- You may want to refer to the table of contents and select the chapters that capture your interest,

- You may want to take the assessment in the last chapter, Moving Forward, to determine the aspects of local governance and LGPs that need your attention, or

- You may want to use the Appendices to locate resources and find contacts, or use the activities to facilitate discussions among those interested in forming a partnership.

Overview of Chapters and Appendices

When thinking about local governance, many questions may come to mind. You may ask yourself or others some of the following questions. Information related to these questions may be found in the respective chapters and appendices.

Chapter 1: Challenges Facing Today's Children, Families,
and Communities

Would you like to know more about the critical issues facing children, families, and communities today?

Chapter 2: The Categorical Service System

How is the current service system structured? How did it become so complex? Have there been attempts to change this system? Why is it so hard to find out how children, families, and communities are faring?

Chapter 3: Local Governance: The Process and the Partnership

Why does local governance have the potential of improving results when other attempts have not been successful? What are the defining characteristics of local governance? How does an LGP fit with existing state, local, and community structures? What are the functions of an LGP? What does it do? What is key to an LGP's success? What hinders or gets in the way of success?

Chapter 4: Structures to Support Local Governance Partnerships

What is involved with forming a partnership? What are the possibilities for legal standing? What makes an LGP different from other organizations? What are some guidelines for developing an operational structure?

Chapter 5: Relationships with State and Local Government

How does an LGP relate to existing state and local government structures? How can state government support an LGP? How can local government support an LGP?

Chapter 6: Relationships with Neighborhoods

Why are neighborhoods so important and what is an LGP's relationship with neighborhoods? How can an LGP and neighborhoods work together? What is critical to working with neighborhoods? What challenges need to be addressed?

Chapter 7: Moving Forward

How can we use this Learning Guide to continue to build our knowledge? What do we already know about local governance and LGPs? What topics do we need to know more about?

Appendix: Glossary

What are the definitions of local governance terms used throughout this Learning Guide?

Appendix: Activities

What are some ideas for discussing issues of local governance and the information presented in this Learning Guide? In what ways can we expand our learning and learn from others?

Appendix: Resources

What references were used in the development of this Learning Guide?

Appendix: Contacts

Who can we contact for more information? What are the specialty areas for different organizations?

Learning More About Local Governance

The Learning Guides are intended for use as a series, although each guide is a valuable resource and learning tool by itself.

If you would like to build on the knowledge you gain from this guide, review the following topics. Use the list to refer to other Learning Guides in this series.

Refer to Learning Guide 2: Forming and Sustaining a Successful Partnership

- ✍✍ The roles and responsibilities of LGP members and staff.
- ✍✍ Critical factors to effective working relationships.

Refer to Learning Guide 3: Setting a Community Agenda

- ✍✍ How a community agenda is developed.
- ✍✍ How to build consensus for the agenda in the broader community.

Refer to Learning Guide 4: Strategies to Achieve Results

- ✍✍ Systems thinking and how it applies to services and supports.
- ✍✍ How to develop a community strategy to improve results.
- ✍✍ What makes a community strategy effective.

Refer to Learning Guide 5: Financing and Budgeting Strategies

- ✍✍ What is meant by a collaborative view of financing.
- ✍✍ How to identify existing funding and resources.
- ✍✍ Ways to build a core funding base.
- ✍✍ Ways to round out the core funding base.
- ✍✍ How to develop a financial plan and a results-based budget.

Refer to Learning Guide 6: Using Data to Ensure Accountability

- ✍✍ The meaning of results-based accountability.
- ✍✍ How to set up a data collection system for collecting, reporting, and using data related to results.

Review

A Local Governance Partnership

Learning Goal

You will recall the functions and defining characteristics of a Local Governance Partnership.

A Community Approach

Glossary

Local governance — A decisionmaking process whereby the community takes responsibility for making decisions about developing and implementing strategies to improve results for children, families, and communities.

Local Governance Partnership — A decisionmaking partnership between the state, private sector, local government, community and neighborhood leaders, and residents to carry out the process of local governance.

Communities are beginning to look at the well-being of their families and children. They are identifying conditions that must improve if all children, families, and communities are to prosper.

Research, innovative programs, and promising practices indicate that a community approach is a viable solution to existing human services systems. These systems are complex and categorical—that is, they are fragmented into separate and narrow service categories. A community approach can support families in a more holistic way. Thus, building strong and healthy families and communities requires change both within the current system and in how a community uses its resources.

How does this change come about? What is a process for eliciting decisions from a community, while still involving those who are currently making decisions about services and financing?

A promising answer to these questions is local governance.

This chapter presents an overview of local governance and the functions and defining principles of a Local Governance Partnership (LGP). For some readers, this chapter will be a review; for others, this information will lay the groundwork for subsequent chapters about forming and sustaining a partnership.

Local Governance

Glossary

Stakeholders — Those who have a vested interest or "stake" in improving results, which may include parents, neighborhood residents, local businesses, elected officials, local and state agencies, and private-sector organizations.

Local governance is a decisionmaking process that brings together state and local government, the private sector, elected officials, and community members to take responsibility for improved results for children, families, and communities.

- Local governance builds on community strengths and supports incremental and long-term change in categorical systems.

- Local governance embraces the hopes of all families and community residents that their children will grow up healthy, safe, well educated, and prepared for a productive adulthood.

A Local Governance Partnership

An LGP is the entity that carries out the process of local governance.

- An LGP provides a focal point for multiple partners working together to develop and implement community and neighborhood-based strategies targeted to improving results for children, families, and communities.

- An LGP pulls together information across all agencies and sectors to build a community profile of its strengths and needs.

- An LGP provides a forum for all stakeholders to present their perspectives, offer their resources, ask for assistance, and negotiate a common plan of action.

- An LGP serves as the mediator, convener, problemsolver, information sharer, and mentor. An LGP has the potential of being a catalyst for reshaping the community service system.

Local Governance Partnership: Functions

The functions of LGPs, and their capacity to carry out these functions, vary; however, the following functions are essential to the work of any LGP:

Identify Community Strengths and Needs

Analyze community-wide and neighborhood or locale-specific problems and resources.

Set Results and Indicators

- Establish results and indicators that stakeholders agree on wanting to achieve.
- Use the results/indicators to guide actions.
- Use the results/indicators as a basis for accountability.

Develop Comprehensive Strategies

- Understand:

  Existing programs, activities, and resources,

  Promising practices,

  The structure and system of services at the state and local levels of government,

  The parts of the system difficult for families to access,

  What services could be more accessible to families of different cultures, and

  What opportunities could bridge separate service systems and lessen the duplication of bureaucracy.

Local Governance Partnership: Functions (Continued)

Develop Comprehensive Strategies (Continued)

✍✍Translate this understanding into strategies that can have a positive impact on priority areas and results agreed upon by the community.

✍✍Develop strategies that encompass multiple services and systems involving formal and informal resources.

✍✍Develop strategies that reach across an entire community: counties, cities, towns, and neighborhoods.

✍✍View services as part of an overall strategy that includes programs, activities, and resources to address the combined social, health, and economic well-being of families.

Design Financing Strategies

✍✍Understand the full range of current resources and how they are used.

✍✍Coordinate and combine public and private resources to implement the strategies.

✍✍Realign current resource allocations (human, material, and financial) to implement an LGP's strategies.

Support New Ways of Working

✍✍Provide training and professional development in the skills needed for working with families in new ways.

✍✍Ensure availability of the support and professional development needed by frontline workers.

✍✍Facilitate rethinking of personnel policies, workload standards, and standards of effective practice.

Local Governance Partnership: Functions (Continued)

Support New Ways of Working (Continued)

- Support staff working across systems by providing a common perspective about helping families, knowledge of available resources, and a set of core skills for use across systems.
- Support training and capacity building for community members, including leadership skills, decisionmaking, group processes, and problemsolving.

Monitor and Evaluate Progress

- Develop a data collection system.
- Develop interim measures to continually assess progress toward specific results.
- Maintain standards of accountability for all children and families as well as for systems to accomplish results.

Defining Characteristics

Focus on Results

Results are the organizing principle for an LGP. Its decisions and actions are based on desired results. In the long run its success is judged by results—i.e., whether conditions improve for children, families, and communities.

Inclusion, Diversity, and Outreach

The heart of an LGP is a more inclusive process for making decisions. As many individuals, organizations, and perspectives as possible contribute to the decisions made by the LGP about its work. Families and community residents are explicitly engaged as active and equal voices.

Manageability, Scale, and the Right Geographic Scope

An LGP's geographic scope should cover a large enough area to be recognized by community-wide institutions, yet manageable enough to be responsive to residents' needs.

Comprehensive Strategies Involving Informal Supports

The intent of an LGP is to develop and implement strategies that encompass multiple services and systems. A comprehensive strategy would involve informal supports, the natural helping system, and formal service providers.

Influence Over Resources

Influencing the allocation of resources across systems is necessary to improve results for children, families, and communities. An LGP has to influence how funding is spent and how staff members are deployed.

Defining Characteristics (Continued)

Legitimacy and Credibility

To adequately represent local residents and their communities, an LGP needs legitimacy and credibility. Legitimacy implies formal recognition by key constituents; credibility addresses the less formal trust earned from the community.

High-Level Commitment

High-level commitment from state government is necessary to confront ineffective traditional ways, support new service delivery options, and transfer some decisionmaking authority to the local level.

Chapter 1

Getting Started

Learning Goal

You will know how to begin the process of setting a community agenda and how to use this information in planning for strategic action.

Slow Down, Plan Carefully

Glossary

Community — An identified geographic area that may be one or more neighborhoods or an entire city or region.

With the promise of improved results for children and families, many Local Governance Partnership (LGP) members are eager and ready to identify community problems and plan for their solutions. In many instances, enthusiastic LGP members assume that they already know the problem issues (aren't they obvious?) and want to head straight into strategic action for improving results.

While welcome, this spirited commitment needs to be tempered with thoughtful and deliberate planning. Harnessing this energy is critical for thinking through the issues and moving with solutions toward success.

This chapter defines a community agenda and presents a starting point for setting up one. First, an LGP needs to know what it can really do. Understanding the scope of its authority will give the LGP context and parameters for its work. Next, planning considerations vary, ranging from ways to get stakeholders involved to assessing costs associated with staff activities. You can use the information in this chapter to guide your discussions and decisionmaking in order to begin the work involved in setting a community agenda.

What is a community agenda?

The term "community agenda" means different things to different people, including different LGP members. Does a community agenda imply a list of issues important to the community? Does a community agenda mean adopting recent assessments that various agencies have performed? Does a community agenda require acceptance from governmental bodies, such as county commissions or school boards?

The answer, of course, is "yes" to all of the above—plus some. A community agenda is the result of careful identification, selection, and definition of one or more issues that a community considers important to address along with the intended results to achieve. The process of creating a community agenda is not quick and easy. It requires a vast amount of information about what issues are important to a cross-section of the community, an understanding of those issues, and a consensus on which issues to address or how to select them.

A community agenda is:

- A list of issues important to the community.
- A set of priorities to address and results to achieve.
- The thoughts, opinions, and beliefs of community members, including stakeholders who don't typically speak out or provide input.

A community agenda is *not*:

- A process in which a small number of community leaders sit around a table deciding important issues for the community at large.
- An invitation for community members to attend one or two meetings or forums to give input only, then dismissing them from the rest of the process.

Glossary

Community agenda — The priorities that a community wants to address and the results to achieve.

Results or outcomes — Conditions of well being for children, families, and communities to be achieved through services or strategies. Although these terms are interchangeable, the Learning Guides will use "results."

Setting a community agenda

Setting a community agenda cannot be done quickly or easily for a variety of reasons. It requires:

- A vast amount of information about the issues that are important to a cross-section of the community.
- A fundamental understanding of the important issues.
- Agreement about these issues and the results to achieve.
- Consensus and ownership of these issues and results by all stakeholders.
- Responsibility for inviting input and designing opportunities for stakeholder involvement.
- A shift from only providing services to thinking more broadly about what policies and supports a community wants in place to improve conditions.
- A focus on the belief that the community is all of us and avoidance of an “us vs them” mentality.

How does an LGP prepare for setting a community agenda?

Glossary

Neighborhoods — Sub-components of a community. In some states, particularly rural areas, the term "localities" is used.

In the beginning phase of developing a community agenda, the work of an LGP is to reach agreement among members and key stakeholders about what a community agenda means in the *context* of their own work. To determine context, an LGP can ask the following questions?

- How broad is our authority?
- What is our geographic scope?
- For what purpose were we created?
- Who do we represent?

According to Arthur Mendonsa in *Helping Children to Become Successful Adults: A Planning Manual for Communities*, LGPs may be either formal and structured organizations with legal status or formal or informal organizations *without* legal status.

LGPs with legal status:

- May derive their authority from enabling state legislation (e.g., states, such as Georgia and Missouri, have used this method).
- May be incorporated as nonprofits under the authority of state laws governing corporations.
- Have the power to enter into contracts and receive funds directly.
- Have their scope of power vary, usually as specified by legislation.

Continued

LGPs without legal status:

- Usually come together because of common interests, concerns, and geography.
- May be created by local government with specific duties and responsibilities.
- Have influence in lieu of power because of their credibility and political will.
- Cannot enter into contracts or receive funds directly.

Regional Partnerships in Vermont have no legal status, but they are well accepted as the collaborative voice for the twelve regions of the state. Often LGPs without official legal status are just as powerful and effective as those with legal status.

The size of the community, the authority and roles of the LGP, the public agencies involved, and the issues or desired results are all considerations that shape how and why a particular structure and level of authority are selected. Once an overall structure and its accompanying authority are determined, each LGP will likely decide on unique ways of using its structure and authority.

Refer to Learning Guide 1: Theory and Purpose of Local Decisionmaking, Chapter 4, Structures to
Support Local Governance Partnerships.

ALERT!

A critical prerequisite to discussing a community agenda is that all members of an LGP understand what their authority and responsibilities are. Be sure that all involved—including any governmental body that established the LGP—have a clear understanding and set of expectations. Articulating this in writing is useful.

PROFILE

Authority for Vermont's Regional Partnerships

In 1994, the state of Vermont agreed to create Regional Partnerships (RPs) to help drive local services and supports for families and children. Today, twelve partnerships serve as Vermont's Local Governance Partnerships.

The RPs do not have legal status and they were not created by legislation. Instead, they are based on the willingness of state and local stakeholders to share decisionmaking and their commitment to improve results for children and families.

Annual letters of agreement are negotiated between the state and the RPs to identify expectations and the priority results that will be addressed.

Members of RPs include family members, providers, agencies, businesses, community groups, and other local partners concerned with improving the well being of children, families, and individuals.

LGPs need to keep their authority and scope in mind for deciding how, when, and where to get input for the community agenda. ➔

What planning decisions are necessary?

The planning process is time consuming and can be costly , but the time and dollars are well spent. The end result is a strong community agenda. A thoughtful planning process allows community members and stakeholders to feel ownership and responsibility. Toward that goal, an LGP needs to answer the following questions:

About the context for the community agenda:

- Should the agenda encompass the entire county or is the agenda for a particular neighborhood, city, or region?
- If the LGP encompasses neighborhood sites, have these sites developed their own agenda? If so, how will each site's agenda be incorporated into the planning?

About the process for setting a community agenda:

- How will input be gathered? Will community mapping help determine what assets are available in neighborhoods? Will canvassing agencies, like the United Way, be effective in obtaining their recent needs assessments and plans for action? What kind of additional information is needed to learn about community issues, and where can this be found?

  Refer to Chapter 3: Gathering Community Perspectives, and Chapter 4: Identifying Community Assets.

- How will the information collected be compiled, organized, analyzed, and reported? Who has the expertise to do this?

  Refer to Chapter 5, Creating a Vision and Setting Priorities.

- When should the community agenda be completed? Have funders or other entities placed time constraints that require moving quickly through the information gathering and consensus phases?

TIP

Establish who will be responsible for each step of the process within a specific time frame. Put it in writing so everyone will be aware of his or her duties and commitments.

Once LGP members have decided on the context and process for developing a community agenda, discussion should turn to questions of time, staff, technical assistance, and funding.

Time

The process of developing a community agenda is time intensive. Being realistic about the amount of time involved is important.

- How much time is available to accomplish broad community input, neighborhood mapping, discussions with current service providers, etc.?
- Should unveiling the community agenda coincide with other opportunities or events, such as the local United Way campaign, a major initiative of state or county government, or a particular month honoring families or children?

Staff

Planning a community agenda is a serious task. Much time and work is required. This task is probably *not* one that an LGP can outline and then ask staff to fill in the details.

Who is going to do this planning work? Some possibilities include: members of the LGP, other participants from members' agencies or neighborhoods, college students as part of their coursework, contract workers as part-time staff, parents contracted to interview other parents, or volunteers.

Technical Assistance

Although each community is unique, developing a community agenda doesn't have to reinvent the wheel.

- Are local community-based organizations adept at gathering input, mapping assets, and/or designing interviews?
- Have other LGPs already created a community agenda and are they willing to share lessons learned or provide technical assistance?

Some states, such as Missouri and Georgia, have structures set up for state-level technical assistance, which might provide materials or other help in this process.

ALERT!

Beware of letting the planning process take too much time and energy.

If the planning process is too intensive, no one will want to work on implementation.

Instead, spend time developing a reasonable plan that fits within the LGP's context of authority, its scope, and resources.

Funding

Costs are involved in developing a community agenda. Before searching for resources, plan a budget.

- Will neighborhood residents be hired for mapping?
- Will additional staff time be necessary?
- What will it cost to gather information?
- Will meeting space be needed for meetings and forums?
- What about food, refreshments, and materials?
- What about costs for childcare and transportation?

Possible funding sources include: the state or state agencies; community foundations or other local funders; members of the LGP with small contributions or in-kind resources, such as borrowed staff, meeting rooms, refreshments, materials copied, interview questions designed, or bus tokens for getting community members to meetings.

Steps For A Community Assessment

The following is adapted from *Know Your Community: A Step-by-Step Guide to Community Needs and Resources Assessment*, The Family Resource Coalition of America, Chicago, 1995.

- Establish a community planning team
- Define community boundaries
- Gather information
- Develop statistical profiles of each neighborhood and/or community
- Compile thoughts and concerns of residents
- Identify the community's assets and resources
- Summarize and analyze the data collected
- Develop a list of community concerns and issues
- Identify the individuals affected
- Share findings with the community
- Assign priorities
- Provide feedback to the participants involved in planning

What's next?

Once an LGP has come to consensus on the meaning of a community agenda, understands its scope and authority, and is aware of the planning decisions needed, it can then turn to learning more about community conditions.

A key element in this process is information. Information collected for decisionmaking is critical to creating a "community portrait."

The next chapter introduces the data-collection process. Subsequent chapters address ways to gather community members' perspectives and the importance of uncovering community assets.

Chapter 2

Identifying Community Conditions

Learning Goal

You will understand what is involved in collecting information about current conditions and how to apply this understanding to setting a community agenda.

A Community Portrait

Glossary

Data — Information, especially that organized for analysis or used as a basis for decisions.

Click. A city council meeting. *Click*. A schoolyard filled with children. *Click*. A retirement community. *Click*. A youth detention center. *Click*. A neighborhood fundraiser. *Click*. A family resource center. *Click*. A meeting announcing layoffs at the local factory. *Click*. More visible law enforcement in the downtown area. *Click*. The smiling faces of a record-breaking number of high school seniors headed for college.

As the camera clicks away, a portrait of the community emerges; however, these few images are just a beginning. Many rolls of film would be needed for a true picture of a community. A community "portrait" would be a composite of numerous photos depicting all facets of the community, including its assets and its needs. The images would capture the unique culture of the community, including— individual community members' beliefs and opinions. From this composite, community conditions become evident. This evidence begins to uncover the issues and problems that must be addressed to improve results for children and families.

This chapter presents part of the process for creating a community portrait. It presents an overview of the process of collecting information with a focus on quantitative data. It emphasizes a focus on uncovering root causes and inventorying existing programs, activities, and resources. You can use this information to begin planning information collecting efforts, which will help identify community conditions. You will begin to create a portrait of your community.

Why collect information for a community agenda?

Consider the following:

- Every community is the product of numerous elements and influences that shape trends, opportunities, and issues.
- In order to develop a community agenda, a clear picture of how these elements affect the well being of children, families, and the community is important.
- All issues and problems that affect the community have root causes, which may not initially be clear. When root causes are uncovered, then strategies can be tailored to address them. This scrutiny will guard against a quick fix or a "band-aid" solution to a complex situation.

  Refer to Learning Guide 4: Strategies to Achieve Results, for more information about developing a comprehensive mix of strategies.

Keep in Mind…

One type of information alone, viewed apart from other types of information, cannot create an accurate community picture. Each type of information is part of a whole.

A Local Governance Partnership (LGP) needs to collect information about *all* aspects of the community. Facts and figures go hand-in-hand with community opinions. Together, this information completes a portrait of the whole community.

What are different types of information?

Overall, information is characterized in two ways:

- Numbers and facts, which are referred to as "quantitative data."
- Individual testimony or opinion, which is referred to as "qualitative data."

Different types of information tell different stories. For example:

- Graphs visually organize information into different categories, such as geography (all youth in a given county), or age (ages 11 through 17). Graphs allow different categories of information to be compared. They are particularly helpful in seeing change over a period of time.
- Census reports provide quantitative information that describes the demographics within a zip code area, including age, income level, and educational achievement.
- Health statistics provide quantitative data about health. Information may be linked to certain conditions, such as the number of individuals with asthma and specific environmental conditions.
- Interviews and focus groups provide qualitative data about given topics. This narrative format may reveal how individuals in a particular location feel about certain topics, such as community members' beliefs about crime in their neighborhood.

  Refer to Chapter 3, Gathering Community Perspectives, for more information about interviews and focus groups.

Information may be massed together or organized by distinct groups. Aggregated data are information taken together, such as teen pregnancy rates for all age groups. Disagrregated data are information broken out into distinct categories, such as teen pregnancy rates by age groups, neighborhoods, economic status, and/or race.

Glossary

Quantitative data — Pertains to numeric information, answers the questions how much or how many. Also referred to as statistical data or hard data.

Qualitative data — Pertains to narrative information, opinions, and beliefs about a given topic. Also referred to as soft data.

Aggregated data — Information that is massed together, a total of all its parts, e.g., national poverty statistics.

Disaggregated data — Information that is broken out into distinct groupings, e.g. geographic region, economic level, or age group.

What approach best collects data for the community agenda?

Glossary

Baseline — A picture of where we've been and where we're headed if we stay on our current course.

Indicators or benchmarks — Measures for which information is available to help quantify progress toward achieving a result.

No one-size approach fits all data collection. The best approach will depend on the maturity, resources, and needs of each LGP.

- Some LGPs don't begin the quantitative data-collection process until they've collected information from community members about their most pressing concerns and interests.
- Other LGPs collect quantitative data first and use some of it as a means of getting community members' reactions and ideas about root causes.
- Some LGPs ask community members about the issue for which they have the most passion and then verify the passion with information. If information does not exist, then community members can be asked to provide the evidence.
- Some LGPs gather quantitative and qualitative data at the same time.

Newer, emerging LGPs are likely to have different needs than more mature ones. For new LGPs, data collection may be focused on baseline conditions in order to target specific results and indicators as the community agenda emerges.

More mature LGPs may focus their data-collection efforts on measuring the effectiveness of their strategies or complying with partnership agreements.

Refer to Learning Guide 6: Using Data to Ensure Accountability, for more information about collecting data throughout the process of local governance.

A Focus On Root Causes

As issues emerge, an LGP will seek information about:

- The underlying or root causes of issues or problems.
- Characteristics of those most affected by each issue or problem, i.e., ages, gender, or ethnic group.
- Risk factors that contribute to the issue/problem.
- Protective factors that prevent the issue/problem.
- Any location where the issue/problem seems more concentrated.
- Attitudes and beliefs of community members about the issue/problem.

Glossary

Root cause — The primary source or origin of an issue or problem, underlying cause.

Risk factors — Conditions that put children and/or families at risk of leading healthy and productive lives. Examples include inadequate health care, poverty, and substance abuse.

Protective factors — Conditions that help children and/or families develop resilience to avoid or overcome risks. Examples include family life with a high degree of love and support, a caring and encouraging environment, or strong ties to a faith community.

How do you analyze root causes?

Example

Priority Area: High School Dropouts

Issue: An increasing number of students, male and female, are dropping out of school.

Desired Result: Students will complete high school on time.

Steps: Find out about the characteristics of high school dropouts.

Listen to views of teens who have dropped out of school.

Find out the community factors that put teens at risk.

Find out the community factors that protect teens from dropping out.

Find out the community attitudes and values about high school education and issues related to dropouts.

1. Gather the best research available about the underlying causes of each issue/problem, the conditions that contribute (risk factors) and the conditions shown to reduce it from occurring (protective factors).

2. Discuss the root causes with community members through focus groups and personal interviews. Find out which causes of the issues/problems seem to be particularly relevant for the community. Ask community members why they think this is the root cause.

3. Summarize and analyze all the information. Look for themes, trends and patterns. Work with someone with skills in analyzing data and with someone knowledgeable about the issue/problem.

4. Develop clear understandable charts, tables, graphs and/or maps about the root causes and thoughts of community members. Organize the information in such a way that it will inform and guide the planning process.

Keep in Mind…

When LGPs continue to seek the root causes of an issue/problem by probing and digging deeper, the information will point to solutions that are more likely to be effective.

Collecting Information for the Community Agenda

Before starting to collect information, the LGP will need to determine:

- The geographic boundaries for collecting the data, and
- The timeframes for which the data are needed.

Geographic Boundaries

Although most LGPs have a clearly defined geographic jurisdiction, information need not be collected throughout the entire area.

For example:

- If an LGP decides to uncover the assets of a particular neighborhood, the confines of that neighborhood will define the area for data collection.
- If an LGP wishes to begin with some baseline information about teen pregnancy for an entire county, then the county of interest determines the geographic boundaries for the information collected.

Time Frames

Time frames for collecting information are based on the reasons why the information is needed.

For example:

- If the LGP is interested in creating a baseline of information about the rate of kindergarten readiness of children entering school, information may be helpful throughout a 5, 10, or 15-year span.
- If the community wants to know the effectiveness of outreach efforts for a recently passed federal Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), a single year of information for comparison may be sufficient.

The following sections present ideas for collecting quantitative data and for inventorying existing programs. ➔

How do you collect quantitative data?

Quantitative data are collected in many ways. Each LGP and each individual may have a preferred approach. The following steps are recommended as an overall approach to help in this task.

1) Create a source list.

2) Identify gaps in information.

3) Develop a data agenda.

Step 1: Create a Source List

At this point, an LGP knows why it is collecting information; it knows the geographic boundaries and time frames, and; it knows the type of information needed. The next step is logical—where to get the information.

Instead of gathering as much information as possible, an LGP should first think carefully about potential information sources. In this way, an LGP can channel its energy and resources and, at the same time, have a system available in the future for other data-collecting purposes.

Develop a list that outlines:

- Information sources
- Contact persons
- Types of information available
- Years or months for which information is available
- Costs to obtain it

This list will help an LGP gather the necessary information quickly whenever it is needed.

Potential information sources include LGP partners representing agencies, federal sources, foundations, existing reports, and local sources.

Following are some guidelines for accessing these sources. ➔

Collecting Quantitative Data (Continued)

Begin with LGP Partners Who Represent Agencies

Since many LGPs have member representation from public agencies (usually local agencies, but often under state agencies), schools, law enforcement, judicial, private agencies, and faith groups, some information is easily available.

Explore what these LGP member agencies have available and useful in their current format. The format can also be revised to fit the LGP's information needs.

For example:

- School records contain information on educational achievement, health, immunizations, and screenings necessary for school entry. Schools may also be able to provide information about parent participation in school-related activities.

- Chambers of Commerce provide information on community institutions and associations and other physical resources in the community. (The amount of useful information will vary from chamber to chamber.)

Tap Federal Sources

The federal government is a comprehensive source of information. Although this source typically provides a national view, rather than city or community statistics, an LGP can use this information for purposes of comparison.

For example, the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics is an especially good source of information about the well being of families and children. This report is a collaborative effort by 18 federal agencies produced annually for several years. The report contains national and state data on economic security, health, behavioral and social environment, and education.
http://www.childstats.gov

Use the information from this report to compare national statistics on the well being of children and families with statistics in your community or neighborhood.

Information Available through the Census

Basic Descriptors
Number of people and households
Population/household composition
Race/ethnicity

Social and Economic Characteristics
Adults by years/type of education
Household income
Poverty rate
Labor force
Employment (by type, occupation, and industry)
Self employment rate
Unemployment rate
Households receiving public assistance

Housing
Number of housing units
Housing units by type
Rate of overcrowding
Housing affordability
Value and rent levels
Vacancy rate

Mobility
Households moved in the past five years

From *Building and Operating Neighborhood Indicator Systems,* The Urban Institute, October, 1998.

Keep in Mind...

For consistency of comparison, use the original source(s) each time you collect data on a particular topic.

Another federal source—and one of the best sources of neighborhood-specific data—is census information. The federal government generates census information every decade. The information collected includes number of children in age categories, composition and ethnicity of families, poverty and employment status of families, education level of adults, and housing information. Census information is found in public libraries.

Use the latest census to discover patterns about housing, employment, family structure, family earnings, education, and ethnicity in neighborhoods and entire communities. This information is often arranged in disaggregated formats for easy comparison.

Contact Foundations

Foundations are also good sources of information. The Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Kids Count Data Books* and its *Right Start* report trace the well being of children over a period of years in all states. Most states collect the same or similar information for their counties.

Review Existing Reports

Sometimes reports with pertinent data have been compiled by agencies with representation on an LGP.

For example:

- If information collected by an LGP indicates that teen pregnancy is a critical issue in the community, check whether the local health department has compiled any recent reports using current data and local trends.
- The local United Way and other community organizations typically develop position papers on certain issues. Such organizations are excellent sources of information.
- Colleges and universities often conduct studies. Graduate students may be available to analyze the results and write a summary of issues and trends for the LGP.

Glossary

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) — An information system that indicates the location of various public infrastructure items, such as roads, water, sewer, parks, etc.

Databank — A mass of data that has been collected from one or more sources.

Data definitions — Parameters for gathering data. For example, seniors may be defined as 65 years and older.

Expand by Checking Local Sources

An LGP can brainstorm answers to the following questions:

- How can we expand our data horizons?
- Where else is LGP-friendly information available?

LGP members may find a number of additional sources, including local newspapers and local government data systems.

- Sometimes local newspapers run opinion surveys or collect information on a given topic.
- Local governments are beginning to build Geographic Information Systems (GIS), which contain a wide variety and amount of detailed information about public infrastructure, e.g., housing, streets, water, sewers, and other city/county services. Databases contain crime and public health statistics and information collected by the educational system. An LGP needs to involve partners whenever possible to tap into these data systems.

Step 2: Identify Information Gaps

In reality, the information that an LGP needs is often not readily available or not in a usable format. LGPs need to identify their information gaps and determine whether they're due to availability or format.

Unavailable Data

- Certain demographic information related to "place," such as where pockets of poverty are located or where elderly residents live or where licensed childcare homes are located, can be hard to find.
- Information for certain time periods may not be available, i.e., information may have been collected only up to or from a certain date.

Keep in Mind…

Mature and influential LGPs might approach consistency among data definitions by working with public agencies to agree upon data definitions. More often than not, this type of project is too big, too time consuming, or outside an LGP's scope.

Glossary

Data agenda — A list of information that is currently missing or not in a usable format, but is still needed to complete an accurate picture of a particular issue.

Data Available, But Problems With Format

Sometimes the problem is not lack of information but that the information is organized in an unusable format for an LGP.

- Information may be in different categories. For example, state, county, or even citywide information may not be disaggregated or broken down by neighborhood.
- The timeframes used for collecting the information may be a problem. For example, information may be available annually but not monthly or quarterly.
- Different sources of information may use different definitions. For example, several agencies may collect information on a particular topic, but they each use different definitions, e.g., seniors might be defined as individuals over 50 years of age by one agency and another agency may define seniors as over 65.

Step 3: Develop a Data Agenda

Problems with missing information or with its format don't mean that an LGP should give up its efforts to collect meaningful and useful information. Instead, an LGP needs to discuss and plan steps for filling in the gaps. To help guide this process, an LGP develops a data agenda.

A data agenda lists information that the LGP believes is needed to fully understand community conditions. This information is also needed to develop and agree upon strategies for action.

Refer to Learning Guide 4: Strategies to Achieve Results.

The data agenda clearly describes the information needed. If a strong case is made for the importance of missing data, an LGP can seek resources to pay for developing the information and/or using other approaches to fill in the gaps. The LGP may want to:

- Broaden the scope of its information search.
- Be creative about the search and/or the use of the information.
- Develop its own databank.

Glossary

Extrapolate — To estimate or infer from what is known.

Broaden the Scope

For a given topic, the LGP can go beyond the obvious sources of information by thoroughly analyzing the issue and noting all possible relevant sources.

For example, if a community indicates that underage drinking is a problem for several neighborhoods, the obvious information sources would be school and law enforcement records. However, if the reach were broadened, research sources could include local newspapers and/or organizations concerned with alcohol abuse, e.g., MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Drivers) as well as interviewing those "touched" by the problem, e.g., parents, youth, and teachers.

Be Creative

LGPs can handle information gaps by thinking about data creatively. An LGP may:

- Consider the types of data that it can substitute for the information that was originally desired.
- Learn how to extrapolate useable information from larger data sources.
- Ask agencies that have information to help extrapolate from larger data sources.

Develop an LGP Databank

An LGP can also develop its own databank. Possible approaches include:

- Creating meaningful information by using surveys, focus groups, questionnaires, and door-to-door canvassing.
- Inviting the help of university partners who can offer student and faculty assistance with data-collection projects.
- Tapping the interests and abilities of other LGP partners and potential partners, e.g., regional planning commissions often collect information. Determine what other stakeholders can lend assistance.

ALERT!

Beware of the downside of data.

Just as information helps us understand an issue, information can also misrepresent or obscure the real meaning of an issue. When collecting data, keep in mind the following red flags:

- The sample group or the numbers reviewed may be too small to draw a solid conclusion about the information gathered.
- Information may be manipulated to emphasize a particular point for political or personal reasons.
- Data-collection instruments may vary in how a question is posed, which skews the responses so that, even on the same topic, results cannot be fairly compared.

Therefore, be reasonable—don't give numbers too much power. Remember to confirm them and validate them with qualitative data from community members.

Inventory of Existing Programs, Activities, and Resources

Once the quantitative information is gathered, it is time to look at existing community programs, activities, and resources that address the LGP's concerns. This research will reveal a wealth of information about what is going on in the community. It will uncover formal and informal activities and various resources, such as neighborhood parks and meeting facilities. It will include a wide range of providers from public and non-profit agencies to local businesses and neighborhood-based organizations.

The key word to inventorying existing programs, activities, and resources is "comprehensive." The more comprehensive the inventory, the more information to construct an effective strategy.

Why is it important to identify and evaluate existing programs, activities, and resources?

- To help determine the existing resources that will support a vision for a comprehensive community strategy.
- To help determine changes and/or enhancements needed to existing resources.
- To provide information about each program so there can be informed decisions about what needs to be strengthened, refined, or added to create the best possible community strategy.
- To provide opportunities to expand and deepen partner involvement with the strategy development process.
- To contribute to the planning process. The more comprehensive and deliberate the planning, the better the decisions, and therefore, the greater potential for strategies to have an impact on results.

Glossary

Community Strategy — An array of mutually supported and integrated programs and activities, both formal and informal, tailored to meet the needs of the target population and coordinated among organizations and community networks for positive results.

Programs — A set of services, such as parenting education, job training, mental health counseling, or family preservation services, provided by a public or private organization or a distinct and formally structured component of an organization, operated and administered with a formal budget.

Activities — Efforts, such as day care, after school activities, etc., that occur in a community to promote positive results or prevent or mitigate risk factors for children and families. Activities may be either informal or formal.

PROFILE

Benefits of Taking Inventory of Existing Resources

Gwinnett County's Coalition for Health and Human Services (LGP) in Georgia found that to adequately address the needs and resources of their county, it had to develop assessment tools to collect local data. The LGP combined two surveys to assess the needs and strengths of youth in their county: one from the Search Institute focusing on developmental assets of youth and another instrument from the Centers for Disease Control focusing on youth risk behavior.

The resulting "Comprehensive Youth Health Survey" was administered to a random sample of middle and high school youth—approximately 6500 students in Gwinnett County Schools in the fall of 1996.

The LGP also mapped community assets for local neighborhoods. Results of this mapping revealed which groups needed to be brought to the decision making table.

As a result of these assessment efforts, the LGP was able to plan and implement locally developed strategies to address children and family issues. The LGP's Executive Director reports that the county has *"made great strides in identifying and implementing initiatives that focus on children and families"* as evidenced by the following:

- A 3-year $6 million grant was awarded to strengthen after school efforts in two neighborhoods.
- An African American church and a predominantly Caucasian church decided to combine and expand their youth development programs.
- Youth are developing a master plan for an underutilized park in their neighborhood.

How do you identify existing programs, activities, and resources?

1. Start with existing lists of community programs. You may find these from your local United Way, library directories, or public information bulletins. Find out more about each program or activity; for example, its critical components, evidence of effectiveness, the population it serves, location of the delivery sites, times of operation, capacity of program, use of volunteers, etc.

2. Plot location of programs, resources, and activity delivery sites throughout the community on a local community map.

3. Summarize findings. List programs and activities currently offered.

Refer to the Inventory Example on the following page for a way to record information gathered about each program and activity.

Examples

Formal programs and resources to prevent high school dropout:

After school tutoring program for 8^{th} and 9^{th} grades provided by the school

Communities in Schools program for at-risk youth

Counseling services provided to elementary students and their families by the Department of Mental Health

A quality child-care center accredited by NAEYC serving 45 pre-school children

Informal resources and activities to prevent high school dropout:

Two outdoor basketball courts maintained by the Parks and Recreation Department

A public library with a community meeting room

A church which offers life skills classes to high school students

A Rotary Club that has a once a year build a Habitat House project

Inventory Example

What We Have Resource Description

(Circle one) Existing Formal Program or Informal Activity or Resource The 3:00 Project	
Description A program developed by the Georgia School Age Care Association (GSACA) to address the after-school needs of middle school youth. The program uses a research-based curriculum that focuses on the development needs of young adolescents.	
Critical components Provision of a safe environment where young adolescents can learn under adult supervision Activities: academic enrichment, community service, communication strategies, and recreation/socialization	
Evidence of effectiveness Data shows that a majority of the participants had improved grades in one or more classes and none had reduced grades. 70% of teachers and parents agreed that attendance in school improved for participants in the 3:00 Project. (1996, GSACA)	
Implementing organization GSACA	**Location** Progressive County Middle School
Population served 60 youth, boys and girls from grades 6-8	**Capacity to serve** Based on staff available. No more than a 1-15 ratio
Months/days/hours of operation 3:00-6:00, Monday through Friday during the school year	**Staff, volunteers involved** 3 paid staff and 1 full time volunteer
Necessary conditions Program should take place at a school site or at a nearby recreation center	**Program contact** Henry Hope, Program Director
Source of information Program Director and Executive Director of GSACA, Susan Brown	Other GSACA provides on-going technical assistance for all 3:00 sites

What is a gap analysis?

Glossary

Gap analysis — A process that analyzes the difference between a current situation and a desired situation

Now that the LGP has information about existing programs, activities and resources, what does it do with it? This is when a gap analysis is conducted.

A gap analysis looks at the difference between what currently exists and the desired condition. It analyzes the gap between present and future—what you have and what you want.

However, it is more than saying, “We have a day care center. We want an after school program too.” It is discovering what it would take to get from Point A to Point B, or from a community that also has supports for families with preschool children to a community that has supports for families with older children. From this analysis, the LGP will come up with a list of needs or what is missing in order to achieve the desired condition.

The following steps show how a gap analysis is conducted. You may want to use the chart on page 48 to organize your information.

1. List current programs, activities, and resources (“What We Have”).

2. Consider the match between what you have and your desired results.

3. Consider the needs of the target population and the community.

4. If feasible, meet with a group of experts in fields related to the priority area. Ask their opinions about what would be effective for the target population and the community. Discuss promising practices, or “what works.”

   Refer to Learning Guide 4: Strategies to Achieve Results, for information about researching promising practices.

Gap Analysis (Continued)

5. If the analysis uncovers a lack of information in certain areas, expand the research to include focus groups, interviews and/or surveys.

6. Analyze the gap between what the research shows works and what already exists in the community. List programs, activities, approaches, and resources that would fill the gap ("What is Missing").

7. Repeat this process for other goals, issues/problems and priority areas.

Refer to the blank inventory on the next page.

Inventory

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Result

Issue/Problem</td></tr>
<tr><th>What Works</th><th>What We Have</th><th>What Is Missing</th></tr>
<tr><td>Promising Practices</td><td>Existing <u>Formal</u> Programs and Resources</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Existing <u>Informal</u> Resources and Activities</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
</table>

ALERT!

Beware of potential pitfalls in gathering information about community conditions, such as:

- Not allowing enough time to do the research.
- Gathering too much irrelevant information.
- Using an overly academic approach to reporting the information.
- Not involving the population(s) most affected by the issues.

What's next?

A community portrait is beginning to emerge from the collection of quantitative data about current conditions. The general well being of children and their families is becoming evident. However, LGPs still need more information.

Remember that facts and figures go hand-in-hand with community members' opinions. *Together,* they comprise a clear picture of conditions. The community perspective or community members' views and opinions are critical for determining the most pressing issues.

The next chapter focuses on gathering community perspectives.

Chapter 3

Gathering Community Perspectives

Learning Goal

You will understand the importance of gathering input from community members and how to effectively plan for gathering this information.

Adding to the Portrait

Consider the following statewide statistics for Georgia from the national *Kids Count Data Book*, 1998.

- Teens (ages 16-19) who are high school dropouts: percentage of change between 1985-1995 = 7% better.
- Teens (ages 16-19) not attending school and not working: percentage of change between 1985-1995 = 23% better.
- Juvenile (ages 10-17) violent crime arrest rate (arrests per 100,000 youths): percentage change between 1985-1995 = 152% worse.

What do these numbers mean? What are the stories behind the numbers? Community members are in the best position to know the answers to these questions. They can give meaning to the quantitative data collected about community conditions.

Understanding community conditions serves a Local Governance Partnership (LGP) well. The information may also be surprising. For example, an LGP may find a large gap in perceptions between youth and adults. Or, it may find a lot of passion about a certain issue, which seemed less critical before the LGP started surveying community members.

This chapter emphasizes the importance of getting input from community members to shape a clear and comprehensive picture of the community. The chapter presents why some community members do *not* get involved and suggests ways for an LGP to be more inclusive in its data-collection process. The chapter describes different methods for gathering community perspectives, such as focus groups, interviews, and town meetings. You will be able to use this information to plan ways to gather information from community members more effectively.

Why is community members' input important?

A community agenda that closely reflects the views, priorities, and needs of community members is more likely to be accepted and effective.

Spending time upfront to ensure that community members are included, and it *is* time consuming, is better than waiting until later in the process. Waiting to involve community members has a potential of creating disharmony about the project down the line.

The process of reaching out and collecting community perspectives will also strengthen community members' resolve and commitment toward the community agenda, and, therefore, its implementation as well.

Input from community members is important for several reasons:

- To understand how families are faring under the current system of services.
- To gain insight about families' attitudes and experiences with the current system.
- To determine whether the current system of services is meeting families' needs.
- To help understand the perspective of family and community members.
- To give "life" to the quantitative data collected.
- To enable community members to "own" the process and *their* agenda.
- To build support and acceptance of the process and the agenda.

Keep in Mind…

Getting community input and giving the community feedback is a long-term, ongoing process that needs attention on a regular basis.

Engaging a wide audience in the planning process is crucial for developing an effective community agenda. Consider the factors that experience teaches are important to effectively bring about change:

- Legitimacy and credibility,
- Strong and sustaining leadership,
- A locally generated planning process,
- Broad agency, citizen, and parent involvement, and
- A focus on results and accountability.

When broad input is sought and integrated into the planning process, the resulting community agenda has more opportunity for success. Clearly, local residents and community organizations are in the best position to determine:

- Strengths and needs of their community,
- Needs of their children, youth, and families,
- The best way to meet these needs, and
- The best way to develop a unified approach toward achieving goals.

The opinions and views of all community members are important, especially those who are most vulnerable. Individual residents and families are in the best position to know which issues are most important to address and what resources are available. Their input is critical for understanding specific community priorities, then translating these priorities into a community agenda and a community strategy to achieve results.

Refer to Learning Guide 4: Strategies to Achieve Results, for information about developing strategies.

Importance of Community Members' Input (Continued)

Sometimes community members do not get involved. LGPs need to understand the reasoning behind their absence and take steps to include them. An LGP can determine the level of involvement by considering the responses to the following:

- Have any groups within the community not been asked for input?
- Do community members understand how they and the community will benefit from the LGP's work?
- Do community members feel that they can make meaningful contributions? If they don't, why not?
- Is distrust of the project the result of experiences with other projects in the past?
- Is an "us vs them" attitude preventing those involved from feeling like equal partners?
- Do community members feel that the community agenda is already set, and asking for their input is only courtesy—or worse, cosmetic?
- Do community members understand that they can play a role in local decisionmaking? Can they envision a role for themselves?

How does an LGP ensure broad-based involvement so that community members are contributing opinions and ideas? ➔

How do LGPs gain a broad community perspective?

In planning for a broad perspective to ensure diverse community input, an LGP needs to consider the following:

- Are all stakeholders participating?
- Are all voices heard?
- Are we effectively working to ensure participation?

Are all stakeholders participating?

An LGP needs to remember to:

- Involve citizens, parents, community-based groups, and community leaders in setting priorities and reacting to them once set. Groups whose priorities are not selected may have strong reactions if they are not included in the planning process.
- Involve the full diversity of perspectives in multicultural communities.
- Involve community leaders and residents in well-defined roles throughout the planning process, especially those whose voices are rarely heard.

PROFILE

A Checklist for Participation

Many collaboratives in Georgia use a checklist found in the *Planning for Change Workbook*.

Has your LGP considered a full range of participants in the planning process for a community agenda? Use this checklist to consider who could be involved in the planning. Ideally, you will have some opportunities to involve representatives from:

- Parents
- Youth
- Public and private service providers
- Educators and school board members
- Faith institutions
- Law enforcement and court officials
- State and local government
- Healthcare and managed care organizations
- Grassroots and neighborhood leadership
- Senior citizens
- Recreational organizations
- Service organizations
- Media
- Childcare
- Higher education
- Individuals with disabilities

From *Planning for Change Workbook*, The Family Connection and Georgia Academy, 1998.

Keep in Mind…

Some participants may need aids to help with participation, i.e., an individual who is deaf may need an interpreter.

Are all voices heard?

The community agenda should reflect the voices of people who are not typically heard as well as those who are often heard. An LGP needs to take time for thinking about the individuals and groups least likely to have a voice, e.g., individuals with disabilities, senior citizens, middle school students. (This list, of course, will vary from community to community.)

The discussion about missing voices is most valuable early in the process of setting the community agenda. An LGP should not wait until the community agenda has already taken shape to recognize gaps in process.

Gaining a Broad Perspective (Continued)

Are we effectively working to ensure participation?

An LGP should invite community members to a *variety* of information-gathering opportunities and help community members feel welcome and comfortable in these settings. An LGP can put community members at ease by:

- Describing to them the type of setting to expect.
- Suggesting appropriate clothing to wear, e.g., "comfortable" or "casual."
- Starting and ending the meeting on time.
- Discussing childcare and/or transportation concerns. If childcare and transportation services can be provided free, let all know how to access these services.
- Always having refreshments.

PROFILE

Involvement in Missouri

In *Missourians Working Together: A Progress Report*, the activity level is described in this way:

"During this period, members went from one meeting to the next meeting…and then to the next. Meetings to develop the plan, meetings to canvass neighborhoods, and meetings to identify ways to invite parents and residents to participate. Meetings to map assets and needs and more meetings to update neighborhood residents, parents, school personnel, and service providers."

The point is clearly made. Finding and involving stakeholders is only limited by the imagination and by available resources (including time).

PROFILE

Thoughts from a Parent/Community Member Participant

1. Where is the meeting? I want to get to the meeting on time and choose my seat. If I have to enter the meeting late, I will probably just go home.

2. Who is going to be there? Will anyone I know be there? Are other parents/community members present at this meeting? Can two parents go as a team? Do I need to bring lunch? Do I need to bring money? How do they feel about young children attending?

3. What is my role? Why are you inviting me to attend? Am I going to be a “token” parent or are the other participants invested in having input from the community? I want to know what this meeting is going to feel like. Is it professional? Is it a relaxed atmosphere? What are people wearing? I don’t want to show up in jeans if everyone else is wearing a suit.

4. Will I be asked to do any jobs? I like to know what may be expected of me before I attend the meeting.

5. Are there any orientation materials? It helps tremendously if someone can take the time to give me some history before the meeting starts; if not I will probably sit quietly and not participate.

6. How do I find out about reimbursements? It feels horrid to have to track someone down after a meeting and ask for money. Tell me about reimbursement policies and give me the forms ahead of time. You must also consider the timeliness of your reimbursement. Babysitters are not used to waiting two weeks for the purchase order system to work. If reimbursement doesn’t come quickly, this hardship for parents will cause their attendance to drop.

So, to all of you who are trying to boost your parent participation, I would like to challenge you to be my mentor—be my friend. Call me before the meeting and remind me of date, time, and location. (You might need to call more than once.) Make a point of attending the same meeting and, if possible, offer me the seat beside you. Call me after the meeting to see if I am clear about what went on. What I have to say is important—help me find my voice. Thanks.

Written by Pru Pease, Orange/Windsor Partnership, Vermont.

Involving Residents in Your Community Agenda

The following list is adapted from *Know Your Community: A Step-by-Step Guide to Community Needs and Resources Assessment*, The Family Resource Coalition of America, Chicago, 1995.

- Conduct a meeting for all residents who might be interested in working on the community agenda.
- Give the participants an outline of proposed activities, schedule of meetings, and a timeline for the work.
- Offer residents opportunities to get to know each other and discuss their views of the community and its current systems of support for families.
- *Don't* fill the room with "professionals," but let residents feel free to exchange ideas in their own language before they meet with a larger planning team.
- Use outreach efforts to contact those invited, reminding them of the meeting time and place as well as reducing any barriers that may prevent them from attending.

What are some ways to gather community perspectives?

Glossary

Key informants — Individuals who, because of their public positions, relationships with other families, or memberships in professional associations, are particularly important sources of information about the community.

Keep in Mind…

Some ideas for gathering community perspectives require resources. Remember to include this in the budget for setting the community agenda.

Encouraging community members to "add their voice" will require organized outreach. Many avenues exist for gathering perspectives and involving stakeholders. Following are some ways for community members to get involved, both during and after the agenda-setting process. Use the following ideas as a starting point and then brainstorm other ways for stakeholders to be involved in the community agenda.

Community members can:

- Provide input at meetings,
- Become members of an advisory group,
- Become members of the LGP,
- Help to map the assets and needs in their neighborhoods,
- Gather data throughout the community, and/or
- Contribute to the development of survey instruments.

Community members can provide input at meetings.

Seeking input will probably begin with those closest to an LGP—the members themselves. Moving outward in concentric circles, an LGP can seek out more voices. After talking with or interviewing a particular individual or group, the LGP can inquire about others that should be asked for their opinions and perspectives. In this way, the list of "key informants" will grow.

Continued

An LGP should design a number of different opportunities for gathering input, such as:

- At regular meetings of the LGP,
- At public hearings held in convenient and comfortable locations around the community,
- Through surveys given at community festivals or schools, and
- Through telephone interviews.

A diversity of ways to obtain input is important, since everyone does *not* have access to telephones, read English, or have proficient language skills.

Keep in Mind…

If community members are asked to participate in meetings or forums, the cost of childcare and/or transportation needs to be added to the community agenda budget.

Community members can join an advisory group.

Some LGPs create *ad hoc* or ongoing advisory groups to offer advice on community issues. The advisory group may recommend the best way to:

- Obtain input from a diverse group of individuals,
- Reach out to nontraditional stakeholders, and/or
- Understand the issues from a variety of viewpoints.

Community members can join an LGP.

Although resolutions, laws, or bylaws limit some LGPs to a given number of members, many LGPs are pleased to extend membership to a broad cross-section of the community, even when the membership is large. Some community members will become so interested in the process of creating the community agenda that they will want to become active members of the LGP.

Ways to Gather Community Perspectives (Continued)

Community members can help map the assets and needs in neighborhoods.

Community members will all have different interests and abilities. Some will not be interested in attending meetings or becoming members of a committee, but they may be willing to help in discovering the assets and tabulating the needs of their neighborhoods. Community members are effective "asset mappers" because they typically live in the neighborhood and are recognized and welcomed by neighbors.

Refer to Chapter 4, Identifying Community Assets, for information about Asset Mapping.

Community members can gather information throughout the community.

Most communities have a lot of information, but only in rare cases is the information readily available. Therefore, LGPs end up spending considerable time and energy trying to locate useful information for the "portrait" of community conditions. Community members are closer to and more aware of the community information sources, e.g., local organizations and agencies. In some instances, they may already work with relevant information in their jobs. Some community members may be effective in helping to gather and then to analyze this information.

Community members can help develop survey instruments.

A sample of individuals who are going to answer the questions can test the effectiveness of the survey instruments by reviewing them beforehand. Community members can help determine if the surveys developed are relevant to their communities. They can offer advice and ideas about language, jargon, and questions that should (or shouldn't) be used in the survey instruments.

Community members can conduct surveys.

Surveys are sometimes conducted over the telephone or at various community gathering places, e.g., schools or festivals. Community members can help with these surveys. Typically, volunteers or paid workers are needed, especially if a sizable sample of community residents and stakeholders is surveyed. All who administer the surveys will need training so they will feel comfortable with the survey process and the questions.

Keep in Mind…

Youth typically prefer to be interviewed by other youth, rather than by adults.

PROFILE

Community Dialogues in Georgia

Sometimes a community assessment does not fully elicit a broad base of community opinions. In that case, Georgia's Family Connection Collaboratives conduct a community dialogue between members of the LGP and a member of the state technical assistance team. The purpose of the dialogue is to help an LGP clarify its issues and assets. Key questions for a community dialogue include:

- What is keeping your community from doing what needs to be done to improve results?
- What are the underlying causes or reasons for these barriers?
- What is your community currently doing to address these issues?
- What makes leadership difficult on these issues?
- Do you know of any specific examples of people or groups working together to improve results? How did this come about? Who was involved? What was accomplished?
- What are the most important lessons you learned from both successful and unsuccessful efforts to improve results?

Several methods exist for obtaining community input. ➔

What are some methods for obtaining community perspectives?

A number of ways exist to gather opinions, ideas, and perspectives from community members. For example, some LGPs have developed their own internet websites to gather information as well as to keep community members informed.

An LGP needs to provide a variety of avenues for community members' input, because different types of information will emerge from each method. A clear picture of the community comes from combining the information from more than one method. Each method has its own characteristics and situations in which it works best. The next several pages describe four different methods. The appendices in this guide contain additional tools and resources.

- Focus groups
- Key informant interviews
- Community surveys
- Town hall or large group meetings

Focus Groups

Purpose: To ask for opinions or perspectives on various issues or topics.

Participants: Small group meetings, usually about 8 to 10 participants, typically sharing a common characteristic or interest, e.g., youth 11 to 13 years old; individuals involved with or interested in home-based childcare programs.

Staff: A facilitator and usually a recorder.

Method: Open-ended questions are posed (usually one at a time) to the group; responses are recorded.

End Result: The opinions and ideas will give the LGP a sampling of community perspectives.

Successful Resident Focus Groups

Several factors are essential for successful focus groups with parents or neighborhood residents:

- Make the meeting family friendly and interesting, so that participants will want to attend. Offer childcare, refreshments, transportation, and other enticements.

- Create a climate of openness so that families will be comfortable and speak freely with their views. Nurture and respect different perspectives.

- Ensure that the focus groups represent families, especially those who are likely to be residents in any targeted jurisdictions or neighborhoods.

Adapted from *Know Your Community: A Step-by-Step Guide to Community Needs and Resources Assessment,* The Family Resource Coalition of America, 1995.

Tips for Successful Focus Groups

- Identify important constituencies whose views can help fashion the community agenda.

- Develop open-ended questions that will encourage discussion.

- Identify and train group facilitators.

- Recruit group participants who represent different perspectives.

- Prepare focus groups with sufficient background materials.

- Record as much discussion as possible.

- Interpret the results of the focus group, while remembering that each group represents only one perspective on the issue.

Adapted from *Charting a Course: Assessing a Community's Strengths and Needs,* Bruner, et al., a resource brief by the National Center for Service Integration, 1993.

Refer to the Appendix, Tools, for sample discussion questions for Focus Groups.

Keep in Mind…

The key informant interviews need to represent the diversity of the community in terms of ethnicity, income, education, cultural background, and other factors important in the community.

Key Informant Interview

Purpose: To gather direct, personal information about issues from individuals in a one-on-one situation.

Participants: Individuals who, because of the positions they hold, where they live, or the influence they have, are particularly important sources of information.

Staff: Trained interviewers.

Works Best With: Individuals who may be reluctant to speak out in a group or not likely to attend a group meeting.

End Result: Specific information from the perspective of someone with first-hand knowledge.

Sample questions for key informant interviews

- What is your experience with XYZ services in this community?
- What is the most difficult problem you struggle with in your life?
- Based on the information you have available, what is the most important issue for this community to focus on and why?

Refer to the Appendix, Tools, for tasks involved with preparing for Key Informant Interviews.

Community Surveys

Purpose: To collect community members' ideas, their visions for the future, and their perspectives on various issues.

Participants: Surveys, distributed in schools, neighborhoods, libraries, neighborhood stores, laundries, festivals, or other locations have the potential to reach a large number of individuals.

Staff: Best to have surveys developed by experienced staff; may be distributed by volunteers and college students.

Continued

Works Best With**:** Large groups; respondents have a chance to be honest, since surveys should be anonymous.

Method: Surveys need to be written in the respondents' language and designed for their reading and comprehension level. The length should be reasonable; no more than 10 or 15 minutes to complete. Once developed, surveys can be mailed, distributed door-to-door, handed out at designated locations throughout the community, or placed online with community or computer bulletin boards or community-based webpages to be filled out electronically.

End Result: Depending on how many survey responses are received, and how diverse the respondents are, this means of collecting data can be either a statistically valid way to understand the community or simply one more set of ideas and visions.

Keep in Mind…

A statistically valid survey may be expensive, but it will lend credibility to the community agenda. Many communities have businesses that conduct surveys or universities with research departments do this type of community survey.

Town Hall or Large Group Meetings

Purpose: Gives people an opportunity to share their ideas, to make connections with others, and to socialize.

Participants: Include all community stakeholders; number of participants can vary.

Staff: Volunteer staff, e.g., university students or staff, trained community members; or paid staff.

Method: The meeting may be a large or small facilitated group discussion. Participants may have opportunities to present "testimony" on a given issue. The meeting may also have a question-and-answer component. Whatever format is selected, respectful listening is critical to the meeting's success. Preferably plenty of "listeners," including key public officials, should be in attendance to hear participants' views.

Town Hall meetings should be well publicized with the invitation attractive enough to gain attention and encourage individuals to attend. The purpose of the meeting needs to be clear. The invitation should include:

- Where and when the meeting will be held. (Make sure the location is convenient and in a safe area.)

- Both the beginning and ending time of the meeting. (Times should be honored).

Make sure that refreshments are provided.

Refer to the Appendix, Tools, for steps in getting started on the data-collection methods described in this chapter.

What's next?

Involving a wide range of community members, including leaders, residents, and representatives from local clubs and faith groups, is a key ingredient for a thoughtful community agenda. The more people involved in planning, the better the community agenda will be. An agenda that represents a broad consensus of the larger community will have a strong foundation for ensuring implementation.

With quantitative data about community conditions and qualitative data from community members' opinions, the "portrait" of the community seems complete. Yet, there is more. Another aspect of developing a community agenda is knowing the assets upon which a community has to build. The next chapter presents asset mapping as a way to accomplish this task.

Chapter 4

Identifying Community Assets

Learning Goal

You will understand the potential of asset mapping for identifying assets in the community and how to use asset mapping as part of setting the community agenda.

Completing the Picture

Glossary

Community assets — Gifts, skills, and capacities of community residents, formal and informal community associations, and formal institutions located in the community.

Often in the process of improving results, the focus of discussion is on problems and what is *not* happening. Even in gathering quantitative and qualitative data, the emphasis tends to be on deficiencies—what is wrong and what needs to improve. The end result of this kind of thinking is a list, often a long one, of problems to address. As a result, the community is viewed as "needy."

Yet, every community has valuable gifts, skills, and capacities that can contribute to improving conditions. These assets have the potential to offset the problems through strategic action and creative solutions.

This chapter defines community assets and their importance. You will see that assets are more than money and resources. In fact, the chapter will point out assets that, at first glance, may not seem assets at all. This asset-based approach is from the work of John Kretzman and John McKnight. You will be able to use this approach in discussing and deciding on ways to continue gathering information for the community agenda.

What are community assets?

Until the last five or ten years, only money and possessions were thought of as "assets." Fortunately, a relatively new philosophy found its way into the thinking and planning of many communities. We now understand the notion that every person, every family, every neighborhood, and every community has assets upon which to draw. Consider the following:

- A vacant lot that can serve as a ball field
- Bike paths, hiking trails
- Artists willing to participate in an after-school program
- Elderly citizens with skills, experience, and time to share
- Libraries
- Schools and community colleges
- Parks and "green spaces"
- Local service associations
- Faith groups
- Art museums and theaters
- Community centers and places for people to gather
- Healthcare providers and other social services and facilities

These items are just the beginning of a potentially long list of community assets. Each community holds a unique combination of assets, which can help bring about changes in the well being of children and families. With such a resource base, communities can change their perception as needy.

Local Governance Partnerships (LGPs) can uncover a wealth of opportunities and resources to build upon by conducting asset mapping of their neighborhoods and communities. What exactly is asset mapping? ➔

What is asset mapping?

Glossary Reminder

Neighborhoods — Sub-components of a community. In some states, particularly in rural areas, the term "localities" is used.

Two leaders in the field of Urban Studies, John Kretzmann and John McKnight, offer important ideas about building communities. They have helped to shape the definition of "assets" by recognizing that every individual has gifts and skills, every neighborhood has informal associations, and every community has formal institutions: all are considered assets. Kretzmann and McKnight contend that *"every community boasts a unique combination of assets upon which to build its future*."

The concept of recognizing assets is quite the opposite from recognizing deficiencies. Individuals don't survive and thrive because of their shortfalls; they succeed because of their strengths. These gifts and capacities help build strong families and strong communities.

Mapping these assets, or asset mapping, can help to:

- Discover a more precise set of resources than any service system could identify.
- Mobilize community members as they are recognized for a useful value to their community.
- Identify gaps in services and supports, which can provide insight for strategy development.
- Find individuals with gifts and skills, including leadership for the LGP, its committees, and working groups.

By casting a broad net to uncover assets, an LGP will add a large group of resources to the mix. From a full menu, LGPs can begin to sort out priorities, neighborhood needs, and specific results and indicators for their community agenda.

Categories for Asset Mapping

Kretzmann and McKnight organize community assets into three categories: (1) individuals, (2) associations, and (3) institutions. Mobilizing this combined talent, resources, and productive skills can build a strong community and contribute to improving results.

The following information about categories for asset mapping is excerpted from *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*, John Kretzmann and John McKnight, 1993.

Individuals

Individuals are community assets. Even individuals who don't have a lot of academic degrees have a wealth of skills, talents, and knowledge to contribute. They may know how to care for their neighbors, cook meals, help in offices, repair and maintain homes or cars, provide childcare, provide transportation, play music, or organize recreation and leisure activities.

Associations

Local citizen associations are assets. Associations or organizations are defined as "a group of citizens that come together for common purposes." For example, service clubs, youth softball leagues, neighborhood crime watch groups, garden clubs, senior citizen recreation groups, book clubs, church youth groups, scouts, political action groups, coalitions for the arts, church study groups, and neighborhood dance troupes.

Associations of citizens exist in every neighborhood. However, the number of associations and amount of participation vary by neighborhood. For example, a newly built suburban neighborhood may have few associations because people don't know each other yet. A well-established stable middle-class neighborhood may have many associations. In older, lower-income neighborhoods, associations may or may not be common. However, researchers in one lower-income Chicago neighborhood found over 150 associations.

Institutions

Formal public, private, and not-for-profit institutions are assets. Such institutions usually represent significant concentrations of resources and influence. Even neighborhoods that don't have many economic advantages still have some formal institutions and each has assets. Consider that schools have buildings, equipment, teachers, books, youth, and transportation. Hospitals, parks, libraries, police and fire departments, community colleges, religious institutions, and grocery stores are other examples of institutions that are, and have, assets to offer the community.

How do you map community assets?

A number of ways exist to map assets in the community. The mapped assets are often placed in an interactive database for users to access.

In order to use the information efficiently, a map showing the location of identified assets is helpful but not sufficient. The information should be organized into written graphs or one-page summaries by neighborhood, community, or some other jurisdiction. In this way, members of an LGP and other stakeholders can clearly identify the assets available and the gaps in services.

The following pages outline some approaches for uncovering community assets. Before starting, find out if any other group or agency has already conducted asset mapping. Also, consider collaborating with other LGPs or linking with work already in progress.

As asset mapping becomes a popular and more conventional method for discovering community assets, the number of potential "mappers" will grow.

PROFILE

Mapping in Missouri

"The Community Collaboratives turned their attention to involving community members in mapping the community's assets, resources, and needs. For example, the Jefferson County Community Assistance Network conducted an extensive survey involving hundreds of county residents, winning a Governor's Award for their efforts."

From *Missourians Working Together: A Progress Report*, 1997

Mapping Individual Assets In The Community

- Conduct one-on-one neighborhood interviews.
- Discuss individual assets in a small group setting, asking individuals to take a few minutes to complete a survey. Surveys may be oral or written.
- Conduct telephone surveys.
- Use and/or adapt a survey instrument, such as a *Capacity Inventory,* designed by Kretzmann and McKnight. This inventory is organized into four parts: skill information, community skills, enterprising interests and experiences, and personal information.

Keep in Mind…

Some individuals do *not* communicate in English as a primary language or may not have a strong grasp of the written word.

- Look for the natural ways in which individuals share their capacities, e.g., one neighbor repairs a dress, while the other neighbor watches her children.

Refer to the Appendix, Resources, for the Kretzman/McKnight resource that includes a
Capacity Inventory**.**

PROFILE

Mapping Youth Assets

America's Promise: The Alliance for Youth is a nonprofit organization serving as a national catalyst to urge communities, businesses, and others to focus their talents and resources on the positive development of youth. With the Search Institute, America's Promise developed a tool to gather information on youth assets.

The *Survey of Student Resources and Assets* is a tool that helps individual communities gather information on the extent to which their youth are experiencing the five fundamental resources (as determined by America's Promise) and the 40 developmental assets.*

Profile (Continued)

The survey, designed for youth in grades 6 through 12, can help communities determine what assets already exist. Based on a well-tested and credible survey, information about what assets are lacking can also be given.

Communities of all sizes around the nation, including in Missouri, Georgia, and Vermont, are using the Search Institute to mobilize individuals and organizations to help children and adolescents.

* 40 Developmental Assets

The Search Institute has identified 40 building blocks of healthy development, which help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. The 40 assets are divided into the following eight categories:

- Support
- Empowerment
- Boundaries and expectations
- Constructive use of time
- Commitment to learning
- Positive values
- Social competencies
- Positive identity

To learn more about the Search Institute's 40 developmental assets as well as how various communities are using these assets to improve the lives of families and children, visit their web site at: http:// www.Search-Institute.org.

Mapping Associations In The Community

- Ask LGP members about associations they belong to or know. Then, brainstorm additional local associations and organizations.
- Include informal associations, e.g., a group of single parents who rotate having sleepovers to give each other a night off, a group of church members who transport older members to stores.
- Use local newspapers. Community newspapers usually publish community calendars, announcing information about local organizations.
- Review directories of informal associations published by communities and/or neighborhoods.
- Check with the local ministers, pastors, and other faith leaders.
- Talk with neighborhood librarians about what groups meet at the library.
- Check with park and recreation staff, since many groups meet in local facilities managed by park and recreation agencies.
- Call, write, or visit neighborhood association presidents and community service clubs, i.e., the Lions Club or the League of Women Voters.

Mapping Institutions In The Community

Glossary Reminder

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) — An information system that indicates the existence and location of various public infrastructure items, such as roads, water, sewer, parks, etc.

- Ask LGP members to list all the institutions with which they interact in the targeted areas. Then compare lists and watch the asset map grow.
- Use local phone books, as they often have special sections that identify agencies and institutions in the community.
- Don't stop once the obvious institutions are mapped. Check with leaders of minority and ethnic groups to find out local institutions of which they are aware. A surprising number of local institutions may be available but just aren't in the "mainstream."
- Some LGPs are using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), which plot a community's infrastructure (roads, sewers, utilities, housing, etc.).
- Encourage institutions to become more closely linked to local and neighborhood activities. The resulting interaction will generate more opportunities for new relationships.

Keep in Mind…

Some places are often taken for granted or not even noted. Yet these everyday assets may help to strengthen families and neighborhoods.

For example, the locations of doctors' offices, banks that cash public assistance checks, public swimming pools and parks where children play, laundromats, meeting places and libraries, public transportation access points, and supermarkets that offer low prices.

PROFILE

Asking Youth to Draw the Map

Throughout the country, dozens of cities and jurisdictions are participating in the "Community Youth Mapping" project. The program, a public-private partnership, is being funded through local private and public funds. This unique approach to data gathering and analysis was developed by the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research at the Academy for Educational Development (AED), a nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC. The idea is to let youth discover and record the data themselves.

With assistance from adults in the planning process (including training in team building, conflict resolution, and interviewing skills), youth mappers, as they are called, conduct interviews and collect information about community resources. The information collected includes many different assets for youth, including places to study after school, after-school activities, employment centers, drug-and-alcohol treatment centers, teen centers, and businesses that are youth friendly.

Youth mappers use the information that they collect to create a first-of-its-kind database on youth services. More than just a database, it can include such information as whether jobs, programs, or internships are available for young people, how accessible they are to individuals who are disabled, and which languages are spoken in the workplace. Mappers are also on the lookout for affordable places to eat, places to play basketball, or opportunities to join dance groups.

After conducting standardized interviews at each address, the mappers assess the "youth friendliness" and assign one of five ratings: awesome, real good, okay, needs help, or poor. After conducting each survey, the youth leave behind a sign saying "We're on the Map!"

When the information is entered into a computer by the youth mappers, the database becomes accessible to youth, their families, service providers, and policymakers.

To learn more about Community Youth Mapping, contact: Raul Ratcliffe, Program Officer at the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, Academy for Educational Development, 1825 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington D.C. 20009-5721, (202) 884-8295, email: Rratclif@aed.org, or visit the web site at http://www.aed.org.

Excepted and adapted from *The Washington Post*, July 9, 1999.

What's Next?

Mapping assets is an important part of developing a community agenda. It changes the focus from deficiencies to strengths. It recognizes the power of individuals to contribute significantly and the power of the community to reshape its well being.

Asset mapping can ensure that an LGP understands and mobilizes the resources across neighborhoods as well as across various service systems.

Over time, as information is collected in a variety of ways and from a variety of sources, patterns and trends will emerge. Community priorities will become evident. The next chapter addresses what to do with all the information collected—create a vision with results and indicators and set priorities.

Chapter 5

Creating a Vision and Setting Priorities

Learning Goal

You will understand how to create a vision with results and indicators and how to set community priorities by analyzing the data collected.

Putting It All Together

Imagine if you were to take a series of photographs that showed community conditions, perspectives, and assets. Consider hundreds of photographs randomly strewn over a large table. What if you were asked to sort them, perhaps compile them into an album? How would you organize them?

As you sorted the photos, patterns would start to emerge. If you grouped all the photos involving children, you would see trends that told stories. Or, if you grouped all the photos with people but no children, that would tell another story. Information is collected, sorted, and organized in the same way. Patterns and trends emerge from that data. The issues that are important to the community, its priorities and vision for the well being of children and families, will be evident from the data.

This chapter describes how a vision emerges—with results and indicators—from the reams of information collected. The chapter provides guidelines for analyzing information and approaches for setting priorities. You will be able to use these ideas as starting points for discussing and deciding how to handle the information collected.

What is a shared vision, and how is it created from the data collected?

Glossary

Vision — A dream about the future. Describes what the community hopes for its children and families.

Keep in Mind…

Some LGPs develop a vision statement *first* and then ask for community input on the vision, important issues, and results to achieve. Other LGPs develop the vision statement *after* receiving community input. Both approaches work.

After compiling both qualitative and quantitative data, a Local Governance Partnership (LGP) will have the information necessary to help determine the most agreed-upon priorities to define the community vision. The LGP can then begin to set a community agenda that corresponds to this vision, to the LGP's authority, and to the community's resources.

Refer to Chapter 1, Getting Started, for information about authority and resources.

Building a shared vision is a key step in most collaborative ventures. As LGPs gather input from broadly diverse community members, they will also gain valuable insight into what the community feels is important for its future well being. Building a shared vision that all stakeholders can rally around begins with this input.

Characteristics of a Shared Vision

- A vision describes the community's view of its ideal—positive results for children, families, and communities.
- The vision develops from the community input gathered. When stakeholders are talking or writing about community assets, needs, and priorities, they are providing the raw material to forge a shared vision.
- A vision reflects the key themes that repeatedly surface during town hall meetings, asset mapping, and interviews. It reflects what community members talk about most—whether healthy families, children succeeding in school, or simply feeling safe while taking evening walks.
- The vision provides a reason and rationale for collaborative action by parents, neighborhood leaders, elected officials, and other key community members.
- A vision is one that the community-at-large can embrace. According to *Together We Can: A Guide for Crafting a Pro-Family System of Education and Human Services,* a shared vision to which partners are truly committed is key to the collaborative process.

PROFILES

Georgia's Dream for the Future

A vision may be a dream about what the future should look like. It should be built upon the personal visions of each member of the community. It defines the results that a community hopes for its children, youth, and families. Thus, the vision provides direction for the collaborative's strategic plan.

Building a shared vision is a prerequisite for developing a collaborative plan that can improve results for children, youth, and families. The process of building a shared vision takes time, communication, and an open sharing of ideas and dreams.

From *Planning for Change Workbook*, Family Connection and Georgia Academy, 1998.

Developing a Shared Vision in Georgia

Georgia's Family Connection developed a series of assessment tools to help each collaborative identify its developmental stage. The following is excerpted from the assessment tool used in conjunction with developing a shared vision.

Beginning stage: The collaborative has not developed a shared vision and/or goals focused on children and families.

Low-intermediate stage: The vision and goals are developed by a small group of service providers in response to a grant.

Intermediate stage: A broad-based group of members participate in developing the vision and goals, but individual and organizational contributions are not clear.

Proficient stage: All members of the collaborative and broad-based representation from the county participate in developing the shared vision and goals. All participating groups promote the vision. Partners are accountable for their group's contributions.

Refer to the Appendix, Tools, for a checklist for developing vision statements.

Focus on Results

Glossary Reminder

Results or outcomes — Conditions of well being for children, families, and communities to be achieved through services or strategies. Although these terms are interchangeable, the Learning Guides will use "results."

The work of an LGP is judged by one criterion: Did the strategies translate into better conditions for children, families, and communities?

These desired results apply to all children and families in a community, not just to small subgroups, such as teenage mothers or children in poverty. The LGP's interest lies with all the residents of the community and the fundamental interests of all citizens.

Desired results are expressed in terms of specific conditions of well being for children and families, such as the extent to which parents are working, or the extent to which children are attending school and mastering educational objectives.

Desired results do *not* refer to the process or the means of achieving improved conditions, like the number of visits caseworkers make to client families.

Defining Results

Results are statements about what the LGP intends to accomplish. Based on the information from the community assessment and community priorities, results address the conditions that need to be changed for children, families, and communities. The LGP uses results to:

- Guide their actions, and
- Serve as a foundation for accountability.

Examples of results to be achieved:

- All children will graduate from high school with the required skills to successfully enter post secondary education, the military, or to obtain a job.
- All families will remain stable and self-sufficient.
- All communities and neighborhoods will be safe.

Notice how these statements describe the status of children, families, or communities. They go beyond merely telling what a community will do (e.g., "provide tutoring to students with a C average or lower") to actually describing the results to be accomplished.

How do results relate to the community's shared vision?

Some LGPs develop their list of results from their shared vision, while others develop a vision that is a compilation of results to achieve.

In both approaches, the vision statement and the list of desired results are closely related. Together, the vision and results make a clear statement about the community's beliefs and desires for its children and families.

In preparation, an LGP gathers ideas and suggestions about the most important, pressing issues for community members. After an LGP has listened to voices across the community, it will likely group the input into categories.

This input becomes the basis for determining the community's desired results. If the LGP has done a thorough job of collecting information from community residents, then the community will support the results selected.

PROFILE

Vision and Results

Alliance for Building Community (ABC), a Regional Partnership in Vermont, presents the following vision and results in their December 2000 document, *Outcomes, Indicators, and Strategies: An Update on Turning the Curve*.

Vision: A healthy community built on natural community supports (families, neighbors, friends, churches, synagogues, associations, etc.) complemented by formal services.

Outcomes: (1) Families, youth, and individuals are engaged in and contribute to their community's decisions and activities; (2) Pregnant women and newborns thrive; (3) Infants and children thrive; (4) Children are ready for school; (5) Children succeed in school; (6) Children live in stable, supported families; (7) Youth choose healthy behaviors; (8) Youth successfully transition to adulthood; (9) Elders and people with disabilities live with dignity and independence in settings they prefer; and (10) Families and individuals live in safe and supportive communities.

A critical aspect of developing a list of results is ensuring that indicators correspond with the results to achieve. ➔

How do indicators relate to results and a community's shared vision?

Glossary Reminder

Indicators or benchmarks — Measures for which data are available to help quantify progress toward achieving a result.

ALERT!

Indicator research can be tedious. Everyone does not have to participate. Instead, have a workgroup propose a "top 10" set of indicators to the large group and seek consensus.

Indicators are measurements that help quantify the achievement of a result. Indicators answer the question, "How would we know a result if we achieved it?" They tell you where you've been, where you are, and where you want to go.

The concept of indicators is widely accepted in the business environment. An enterprise that doesn't have indicators to adequately describe its direction—in terms of sales, cash flow, target markets, etc., will probably not succeed. In the same vein, indicators can help LGPs determine progress in achieving results.

Dozens, if not hundreds, of different indicators are available to help measure progress. LGPs across the country have used a number of these indicators.

But as each community and LGP differs in how each would measure a result, each may choose a different indicator. This difference in choices is primarily due to the priorities that reflect what is most important in each community.

For example, if a desired community result is "healthy children and families," dozens of measures are available to indicate progress toward achieving it. An inner city might choose "reduced levels of lead paint-related illnesses" as an indicator of healthy families, while a rural community might choose "a reduction in the rate of low birth weight babies."

Sometimes states will create a beginning list of optional or mandated indicators to reflect progress on agreed-upon results. Communities and neighborhoods can add to these lists, using indicators that are particularly important to their community members.

Refer to Learning Guide 6: Using Data to Ensure Accountability, for more information
about indicators.

PROFILE

Indicators

ABC, the Regional Partnership in Vermont, presents the following indicators for one of its outcomes in a December 2000 document, *Outcomes, Indicators, and Strategies: An Update on Turning the Curve*.

Outcome #1: Families, youth, and individuals are engaged in and contribute to their decisions and activities.

Key Indicators: Percentage of eligible populations voting, percentage of youth contributing to family and community, and percentage of community members volunteering with ABC.

PROFILE

Selecting Indicators of Well Being

Child Trends, Inc., tracks initiatives that are using indicators of child and family well being. Its recently published report is *Indicators of Child, Youth, and Family Well Being: A Selected Inventory of Existing Projects*.

This inventory, containing over 80 projects, includes a brief description of each, a list of relevant publications, and websites, as well as contact information.

The inventory focuses on projects that seek to improve well being for entire jurisdictions, not just a single population group, along with projects that examine multiple areas of well being.

The report is a useful tool for LGPs to review work on results and indicators throughout the country and to gain new ideas and insights on how they achieve success.

Refer to the Child Trend website at http://www.childtrend.org or contact them at (202) 362-5580.

What are guidelines for analyzing data?

Analysis of data is as important as collection. To understand the stories behind available data, the information must be reviewed and must make sense. Following are some ideas for analyzing the available data.

- Review both quantitative and qualitative data.
- Look for alignment between facts/figures and perceptions/beliefs.
- Pay attention to connections.
- Use comparative data.
- Learn to recognize priorities.

Keep in Mind…

An LGP should decide during the planning stage of its agenda-setting process how to analyze and review the information to be collected.

Review both quantitative and qualitative data.

Remember that personal interviews and/or surveys of youth, their parents, service providers, and other key individuals in the community (qualitative data) provide valuable information to complement the facts, figures, and statistics (quantitative data) collected.

Important or difficult issues for the community will surface, along with opportunities and ideas for how to improve family and child well being.

Look for alignment between facts/figures and perceptions/beliefs.

Compare facts, figures, and statistics to what families living in the area have to say about their needs, assets, and dreams. When all sources of information—whether statistics, surveys, interviews, or focus groups—point to the same issue, then alignment and agreement exist.

Sometimes, however, the data are not in alignment. Consider the following examples:

- Healthcare statistics indicate a critical issue, but the issue never comes up in surveys and interviews of community members. This discordance may reflect individuals' reluctance to talk about the issue. For instance, statistics show that child abuse is a problem, but community members don't mention this painful and often "hidden" issue.

- Minority groups probably have a special interest that is not experienced by the larger population. For example, a focus group of senior citizens brings up concerns that are not issues for the larger population.

- An individual or a vocal group of community members may have a "pet" concern, but the statistical data show that this concern is not an issue for the entire community.

If no alignment exists, then the LGP needs to:

- Go back to the drawing board and gather more information,

- Clarify existing information, and/or

- Seek additional community input.

Guidelines for Analyzing Data (Continued)

To determine whether areas of conflict or items not in alignment exist and should be explored further, an LGP can ask the following questions:

- How important is this issue to the mission and purpose of the initiative? If the initiative is aimed at improving results for children and families, then even a single mention of child abuse may be relevant and important enough to explore further.
- Who felt that the issue was important? If the purpose of the initiative is serving a specific population, then responses from that group would carry a lot of weight.

From *Know Your Community: A Step-by-Step Guide to Community Needs and Resources Assessment*, The Family Resource Coalition of America, Chicago, 1995.

Keep in Mind…

Conflict between the opinions of residents and professionals in the community is sometimes resolved by placing more weight on the opinions of residents.

Pay attention to connections.

During the data-collection process, some interesting information may arise that helps connect issues with unintended consequences. For example, while a workforce development council may report an increase in single mothers gaining employment, schools may report an increase in student tardiness and absences. Perhaps, previously unemployed mothers are now leaving the house earlier than their school-age children, which might account for more school tardiness and absences.

As information and perspectives are gathered, an LGP will want to pay attention to the interconnectedness of issues in their community. These interconnections are opportunities to work *across* issues, not just *within* single issues.

Use comparative data.

Comparative data are often important in truly understanding how critical an issue is to the community agenda.

For example, if the infant mortality rate in a particular community is 15.5 per 1,000 live births, what does this mean? Does it mean that this community has a serious level of infant mortality? To fully understand this, the information would need to be compared with population statistics for other similar communities.

For example, what if the average teen pregnancy rate is 10 percent? How does this compare with other communities or the state average or national statistics?

Learn to recognize priorities.

When reviewing and organizing input, an LGP should be able to recognize priority issues as they emerge from the data. Typically, the priority issues continue to arise with different data-collection methods and with different data sources.

Keep in Mind…

- If two or more sources agree that an issue is important, then it should be viewed as a potential priority.
- If an issue generates a lot of passion from community members, then it should be considered a priority.
- If an issue doesn't emerge as crucial from any source but each source notes it, then the issue should, nevertheless, be considered for long-term attention.

From: *Know Your Community: A Step-by-Step Guide to Community Needs and Resources Assessment*, The Family Resource Coalition of America, Chicago, 1995.

Guidelines for Analyzing Data (Continued)

LGPs can further analyze input for additional information to help set a community agenda and decide on relevant strategies.

Refer to Learning Guide 4: Strategies to Achieve Results.

- Look for the details in the comments. When parents talk about their children succeeding in school, do they focus on the issues that arise in middle school or high school? When youth discuss the need for more activities, do they mention parks, arts, or clubs?

- Look for preferences. When community members talk about their desire to connect more with each other, do they mention a website, neighborhood newsletter, or simply walking through the neighborhood and talking to people on their porches? The comments will give clues to preferences, e.g., reading information and being somewhat impersonally connected as opposed to communicating directly and informally.

- Look for clues underlying issues. When service agency directors describe their gaps in services, what *underlies* what they say? A program director may say that a certain area is not fully serviced. Is this a staffing issue, a caseload issue, or both? Are services available but community members don't use them?

Once information is collected and analysis is complete, how is the information used to set priorities? ➔

What are approaches for setting priorities?

Once information is gathered from a variety of sources and analyzed, the LGP will have a list of issues that concern the community. From this list, what are the priorities? What should be addressed first, second, and third? What should be addressed right away, within the first year, or in the second year? Approaches for setting these priorities may include:

- Cross-checking assumptions
- Grouping issues within categories

Glossary

Priority areas — Topics of importance to a community. Examples of priority areas are school dropouts, teenage pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, and safe neighborhoods. Within each priority area, more specific issues/problems can be addressed.

Validity — Well-grounded, proven sound and effective.

Cross-Checking Assumptions

Assumptions made during analysis need confirmation from community members to give the analysis validity. To continue with the examples mentioned previously, double check to see if middle school students are the focus for children succeeding in school. If community members say they want to be more connected to their neighbors in a direct and informal way, is this true? Is the real issue gaps in services or lack of access?

One approach to validating assumptions before setting priorities is to hold community meetings or forums. The more inclusive the process or wider the scope of community members invited to the meeting(s), the greater the support for the decisions that result.

Refer to Chapter 3: Gathering Community Perspectives, for more information about meetings
and forums.

Approaches for Establishing Priorities (Continued)

Grouping Issues within Categories

To help community members decide on priorities, the issues can be grouped into categories. LGPs need to consider costs and time for implementation on the issues of special community concern or those that require the "most energy." Some categories might be those that:

- Affect populations relevant to the LGP's mission and purpose for the initiative.
- Affect a broad range of children, families, and community members.
- Already have resources upon which to build strategies.
- Do *not* have resources or have other constraints so that immediate action is more difficult.

What's next?

For a community agenda to be implemented effectively, rallying around a vision for children, families, and communities must cut across neighborhoods, service providers, and associations.

Creating a community agenda is as much an art as a science. It requires a passionate group of individuals who believe in their work to improve results for families and children. It requires energy, patience, and tireless listening. The analysis phase of the process can be rewarding. A clear portrait of the community emerges as community members begin setting priorities.

But, what will move the community agenda forward? The next chapter addresses ways to build broad-based support and "critical mass."

Chapter 6

Building Consensus for a Community Agenda

Learning Goal

You will understand the importance of widening the circle of support for the community agenda and how to apply this for engaging a broader group of stakeholders.

Widening The Circle Of Support

Picture yourself trying to get ketchup from a bottle. You have the bottle tilted. You tap it. You tap it again. How many taps will it take before ketchup comes out? You don't quite know. You know that to get the ketchup out you have to keep tapping.

Building support and "critical mass" for the community agenda is like getting ketchup to flow. A Local Governance Partnership (LGP) needs to take the agenda to the larger community to continue building momentum until the flow or "tipping point" is reached. Then, energy flows throughout the greater population to support implementation of the agenda.

This chapter discusses critical mass and how to build support and consensus, including ways to communicate and promote the community agenda. The information in this chapter can help you decide when to take the community agenda to a wider audience for a wider level of acceptance.

PROFILE

Building Critical Mass in Vermont

"Critical mass, in the physical world, creates gravity. In Vermont's community development initiative, local collaboratives have gained enough momentum and touched enough lives that they are developing a sort of gravity, or critical mass, of their own—drawing ideas, energy, outcomes, technology, programs, and people into the overall prevention and outcome agenda. In turn, this creates more energy and more critical mass. All this helps develop a strong system of accountability."

From *Vermont Communities Count: Using Results to Strengthen Services for Families and Children*, Cornelius Hogan, 1999.

Why continuing to engage more stakeholders is important?

A wide circle of stakeholders and support is needed to:

- Bring about community change on a large scale,
- Facilitate implementation plans for the community agenda,
- Encourage wide-range rethinking about how community assets and resources are used, and
- Rally united support for improving results.

Although each LGP determines the number of partners and stakeholders needed to accomplish its strategies for achieving results, LGPs still need to engage an increasing number of stakeholders over time. Eventually, this diverse group will "speak as one" and progress can continue toward desired results.

To illustrate this point, imagine one parent advocating education reform. This parent joins with other parents. The group builds to include teachers, administrators, and school board members. Now all members of this group are interacting with peers and constituents. Those participating include state teams and businesses, each being asked the question, "What can *you* do help kids succeed in school?" Eventually, a point will come where these individual voices speak as one. That is critical mass.

An expanded world of stakeholders can rally around the community's vision, results, and priorities and helps mobilize its assets and resources to support children, families, and communities.

Building Critical Mass

Gaining support for the community agenda involves friendships and relationships. It means reaching out and putting forth effort to sustain and nurture the bonds created. For example, a buddy system could pair a community member with a professional to individualize community support.

For a successful and effective community agenda, the "critical mass" of stakeholders eventually needs to encompass the following groups for their support.

- Powerful and influential individuals in the community, e.g., the mayor, governing councils, school boards, and administrators, need to become familiar with the community agenda and agree to help move it forward.
- Service agencies, including their directors, staffs, and boards of directors, need to agree with the community priorities and commit resources and energy for implementing the strategies developed for the community agenda.

  Refer to Learning Guide 4: Strategies to Achieve Results.
- Service clubs and business leaders need to be familiar with the community agenda in order to discuss ways they can help.
- Media need access to details and stakeholders in order to write articles about the community agenda or to push their editors to run stories in the local news on community successes.
- Families and youth are the most important stakeholders! They are key partners in any community agenda and must be aware and supportive of the priorities.

PROFILE

Business Has A Stake, Too

Vermont believes in prevention and early intervention as wise public policy, which will benefit both business and Vermonters as a whole.

The Business Roundtable of Vermont is a not-for-profit organization chartered under the national Business Roundtable umbrella, which is geared to provide information and education about the essential role that business plays in our lives. As such, the Roundtable is active in policy development and analysis in many sectors, including technology, education, energy, and government.

Vermont's Business Roundtable intends to make getting books as easy for children as getting their first medical checkup. The theory behind the new program is simple: since 95 percent of Vermont newborns make a six-month wellness visit at the doctor's office, why not get books into parents' hands at that early date? The sooner parents have books, the sooner they can start reading to their children. Therefore, each family will receive at the doctor's office a bag of four books provided by the Business Roundtable.

This "Born to Read" initiative, which costs $500,000, is funded by the Business Roundtable and its members as well as by the Freeman Foundation. Members point out that this program is not just altruistic.

A literate customer base is much more economically capable. By encouraging literacy now, businesses will gain later—both in customer spending and worker productivity. Even before this investment pays off, society will realize the gain. Children who learn to read at an early age stand a much better chance of succeeding in school and a much poorer chance of ending up in jail.

Actions Required for Building Critical Mass

According to *Collaborating to Improve Community Health: Workbook and Guide to Best Practices in Creating Healthier Communities and Populations,* creating a critical mass requires the following actions:

- Identify major collaborations and other potential partners.
- List groups that care about the issues, assess their degree of connections (on a scale of 1-5), and determine a place for their participation.
- Strengthen connections with priority groups.
- Look at what is already going on and plan to “piggy-back” as much as possible.
- Anticipate resistance and develop strategies to counteract it.
- Invite people’s involvement.
- Leverage relationships.
- Continue to build momentum.

How can LGPs communicate and promote the community agenda ?

In order to bring about community-wide change on a scale envisioned by most LGPs, the entire community must be informed and involved. LGPs must communicate the messages about desired results to a broader audience than the usual human services and education stakeholders. This larger community needs to hear the message and understand its value.

Just as corporate and political groups “market” their message to diverse and scattered populations, an LGP needs to develop a strategy to communicate and promote the community agenda. Key elements of such a strategy include:

- Increasing public awareness about the LGP’s work and role in the community.
- Building credibility and legitimacy for targeted results through the use of information and human interest stories.
- Expanding public awareness, interest, and participation so that everyone knows they have a stake in bringing about change for children and families.

One Approach for “Marketing” the Community Agenda

- Organize a committee or work group.
- Include public speaking engagements.
- Capture public interest with data.

Organize a committee or work group.

A first step for promoting the community agenda is to organize a committee or work group. Members of this group could expand beyond interested LGP members. Consider individuals with specific skills, talents, and experience in marketing, public relations, graphic design, etc.

Keep in Mind…

The purpose of including community members—residents, parents, and youth—while shaping the message is to ensure that it speaks clearly to different targeted audiences.

Include public speaking engagements.

Over time, more and more opportunities will emerge to expand lines of communication. One effective means of doing this is to identify knowledgeable individuals from neighborhoods, agencies, and organizations who are willing to speak publicly about the community agenda. They can emphasize the importance of a community-wide effort as an effective way of improving the well being of children and families. Consider all the possibilities for speaking engagements: presentations at meetings of service clubs and neighborhood associations, radio or public television talk shows, and city council and other public forums.

Capture interest with information.

Compelling information presented in easy-to-understand formats has the potential of capturing interest and widening the circle of stakeholders. An LGP needs to consider ways to infuse meaning into seemingly uninteresting data and statistics. Capturing the attention of the media as well as the public-at-large is critical.

The information presented should celebrate community assets as well as highlight community needs. A story needs to be crafted that tells what needs to change, why, and how children and families will be affected. The issues must be brought to life so that citizens can relate to them.

PROFILE

Communicating the Community Agenda in Georgia

Georgia's Family Connection developed an assessment tool to help its collaboratives determine their developmental stage in external communication to the general public. For example:

Beginning stage: Collaborative group produces and distributes a variety of print materials to the community.

Low-intermediate stage: Collaborative group has a systematic communications plan, including routine media coverage and staff to implement the plan.

High-intermediate stage: Collaborative group hosts events (seminars, town hall meetings, and focus groups) to inform the public and elicit perspectives from the community at large.

Proficient stage: Communication is highly interactive between the collaborative and the community and includes both solicited and unsolicited information.

What's next?

The next chapter, Moving Forward, contains assessment tools to help review what you've learned and determine whether you want to reread any chapters or sections.

Keep in Mind…

These assessments can also be diagnostic tools to help gauge levels of knowledge or skill before reading the Learning Guide. This use is especially helpful for those experienced with local governance who are developing a community agenda. As diagnostic tools, these assessments can point out specific areas of need.

Chapter 7

Moving Forward

Learning Goal

You will have access to tools that can help you assess learning and plan for continued development.

Next Steps

Keep in Mind…

You can always return to portions of this guide and revisit topics to expand your expertise.

This Learning Guide is meant to be a continual learning tool as well as a reference. You can reread key chapters to help increase your knowledge and skills for setting a community agenda.

The next steps are up to you. At this point, you may:

- Assess your individual knowledge and skills.
  Go to the Self-Assessment in this chapter.

- Assess the knowledge and skills of your LGP.
  Go to the LGP Assessment in this chapter.

Activities and Worksheets, Tools, Resources, and Contacts are located in the Appendices.

Self-Assessment

Assess your knowledge and skills. Respond to each question with "Yes," "Somewhat," or "No." For questions marked "Somewhat" or "No," plan for improvement. You may want to refer back to pertinent chapters or seek additional information from the Resources list.

Are you able to…	Y	SW	N	Page References	Ideas for Next Steps
Chapter 1: Getting Started					
Describe a community agenda?				Pages 16-18	
Identify how to prepare for setting a community agenda?				Pages 19-21	
Identify the planning considerations necessary for getting started?				Pages 22-25	
Chapter 2: Identifying Community Conditions					
Describe types of information and approaches for collecting available data?				Pages 28-31	
Identify steps for analyzing root causes and collecting quantitative data?				Pages 32-41	
Identify steps for identifying existing programs, activities				Pages 42-49	

and resources?					

Self-Assessment (Continued)

Are you able to…	**Y**	**SW**	**N**	**Page References**	**Ideas for Next Steps**
Chapter 3: Gathering Community Perspectives					
Recognize the importance of gathering community perspectives and understand why some community members do not get involved?				Pages 52-55	
Identify ways of gaining a broad perspective from community members?				Pages 56-64	
Identify methods and their characteristics for gathering community perspectives?				Pages 65-69	
Chapter 4: Identifying Community Assets					
Describe community assets and their importance?				Pages 72-73	
Define asset mapping?				Pages 74-76	

Identify approaches for identifying community assets?				Pages 77-82	

Self-Assessment (Continued)

Are you able to…	Y	SW	N	Page References	Ideas for Next Steps
Chapter 5: Creating a Vision and Setting Priorities					
Describe a shared vision for children, families, and communities?				Pages 85-86	
Describe results and indicators and their relationship to a shared vision?				Pages 87-91	
Identify guidelines for analyzing information to create a vision, results, and indicators and to set community priorities?				Pages 92-98	
Chapter 6: Building Consensus for a Community Agenda					
Recognize the value of engaging an increasing number of stakeholders over time?				Pages 100-101	
Describe “critical mass” and what it means in gaining support for the community agenda?				Pages 102-104	
Identify ways to communicate and promote the community agenda?				Pages 105-107	

KEY: Y = Yes, SW = Somewhat, N = No

Local Governance Partnership Assessment

Assess the knowledge and skills of your LGP. Discuss each question and respond in the “Yes,” “Somewhat,” or “No” column as it applies to your LGP as a whole.

Is your LGP able to…	Y	SW	N	Page References
Define its context for developing a community agenda?				Pages 16-21
Make planning decisions in preparation for setting a community agenda?				Pages 22-25
Decide on the best approach for collecting information?				Pages 28-31
Make decisions about collecting quantitative data?				Pages 36-42
Decide on the best approaches for gathering community perspectives?				Pages 56-69
Make plans for mapping community assets?				Pages 72-82
Create a vision, results, and indicators for children and families?				Pages 87-93
Analyze information collected to establish community priorities?				Pages 94-100
Communicate, promote, and build “critical mass” for the community agenda?				Pages 102-109

KEY: Y = Yes, SW = Somewhat, N = No

Appendices

Glossary

Activities and Worksheets

Tools

Resources

Contacts

Glossary

Local Governance Terms

Local Governance—A decisionmaking process whereby the community takes responsibility for developing and implementing strategies to improve results for children, families, and communities.

Local Governance Partnership (LGP)—A decisionmaking partnership between the state, private sector, local government, community and neighborhood leaders, and residents to carry out the process of local governance.

Results or outcomes—Conditions of well being for children, families, and communities to be achieved through services or strategies. Although these terms are interchangeable, the Learning Guides will use “results.”

Indicators or benchmarks—Measures for which information is available to help quantify progress toward achieving a result.

Formal resources—Services and supports that traditionally serve children, families, and communities, such as public agencies.

Informal supports—Nontraditional resources and supports, such as businesses, the faith community, civic organizations, citizen groups, and the natural helping system. These supports are not usually provided by government agencies and are not part of any formal service system.

In-kind resources—Donated goods, services, or space that support services and activities, but not in cash, typically include space for meetings, use of office equipment, lending of staff, or employees volunteering during work hours. Sometimes called informal resources.

Natural helping system—An informal network of extended family, friends, neighbors, and community leaders.

Resources—Funding, staff, leadership, information, physical space, and equipment that can be used to support the work of an LGP.

Stakeholders—Those who have a vested interest or “stake” in improving results, which may include parents, neighborhood residents, local businesses, elected officials, local and state agencies, and private-sector organizations.

Terms Presented in Learning Guide 3

Activities—Efforts, such as day care, after school activities, etc., that occur in a community to promote positive results or prevent or mitigate risk factors for children and families. Activities may be either informal or formal.

Aggregated data—Information that is massed together, a total of all its parts, e.g., national poverty statistics.

Community—An identified geographic area that may be one or more neighborhoods or an entire city or region.

Community agenda—The priorities that a community wants to address and the results to achieve.

Community strategy—An array of mutually supported and integrated programs or activities, both formal and informal, tailored to meet the needs of the target population and coordinated among organizations and community networks for positive results.

Community assets—Gifts, skills, and capacities of community residents, formal and informal community associations, and formal institutions located in the community.

Baseline—A picture of where we've been and where we're headed if we stay on our current course.

Data—Information, especially that organized for analysis or used as a basis for decision.

Data agenda—A list of information that is currently missing or not in a usable format but that is still needed to complete an accurate picture of a particular issue.

Databank—A mass of data that has been collected from one or more sources.

Data definitions—Parameters for defining information. For example, seniors may be defined as 65 years and older.

Disaggregated data—Information that is broken out into distinct groupings, e.g., geographic region, economic level, or age group.

Extrapolate—To estimate or infer from what is known.

Gap analysis—A process that analyzes the difference between a current situation and a desired situation

Geographic Information Systems (GIS)—An information system that indicates the existence and location of various public infrastructure items, such as roads, water, sewer, parks, etc.

Interactive database—A database that can be queried by users and provides information based on those queries. In short, 2-way communication is used: from the user and from the database.

Key informants—Individuals who, because of their public positions, relationships with other families, or memberships in professional associations, are particularly important sources of information about the community.

Neighborhoods—Sub-components of a community. In some states, particularly in rural areas, the term “localities” is used.

Priority areas—Topics of importance to a community. Examples of priority areas are school dropouts, teenage pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, and safe neighborhoods. Within each priority area, more specific issues/problems can be addressed.

Program—A set of services, such as parenting education, job training, mental health counseling, or family preservation services, provided by a public or private organization or a distinct and formally structured component of an organization, operated and administered with a formal budget.

Protective factors—Conditions that help children and/or families develop resilience to avoid or overcome risks. Examples include family life with a high degree of love and support, a caring and encouraging environment, or strong ties to a faith community.

Risk factors—Conditions that put children and/or families at risk of leading healthy and productive lives. Examples include inadequate health care, poverty, and substance abuse.

Qualitative data—Pertains to narrative information, opinions, and beliefs about a given topic. Also referred to as soft data.

Quantitative data—Pertains to numeric information, answers the questions how much or how many. Also referred to as statistical data or hard data.

Validity—Well-grounded, proven sound and effective.

Vision—A dream about the future. Describes what the community hopes for its children and families.

Activities and Worksheets

Chapter 1
Getting Started

Learn by Discussing

Understanding Scope and Authority

Identify the scope and authority of your LGP.

What is your understanding of the authority and scope of your LGP?
Is this understanding shared by all LGP members?

At this beginning phase in developing a community agenda, the work of an LGP is to reach agreement among members and key stakeholders about what is meant by a community agenda in the context of their own issues. Use the continuum on the following page for your discussion.

1. Individually, mark your understanding of your LGP's scope, authority, purpose, and representation on the continuum.

2. As a group, discuss responses. You may be surprised by differences of opinion. In any case, the discussion should help clarify the context for setting a community agenda.

Keep in Mind…

You may have to gather more information about areas in which you don't know the answer.

Context for Setting a Community Agenda

Read the descriptions in the left- and right-hand columns for each category: Authority, Geographic Scope, Purpose, and Representation. For each category, determine where your LGP falls on the continuum. Mark with a check or by darkening the area**.**

Authority: How broad is our authority?													
We can undertake solutions, contract for services, and make decisions about public funding.													We were created to make recommendations to a governmental body.
Geographic Scope: What is our geographic scope?													
We represent a region that includes a number of communities and neighborhoods.													We represent a neighborhood.
Purpose: For what purpose were we created?													
We were formed to develop strategies that affect statewide-supported results for children and families.													We were formed to develop strategies targeted on a specific issue, e.g., decreasing the teenage pregnancy rate in our community.
Representation: Who do we represent?													
Our representation is broad, inclusive, and diverse, including parents, youth, and community residents as LGP members.													Our representation includes local service providers.

Learn by Doing

Starting the Agenda-Setting Process

Discuss and make planning decisions in preparation for setting the community agenda.

Is your LGP ready to begin the agenda-setting process? The worksheets on the following pages will provide guidelines for discussion and planning.

---

1. Individually, review the discussion worksheet on the next page. Respond to each question by checking YES, NO, or DON'T KNOW.

2. As a group, come to consensus on the affirmative responses and discuss what is needed to change the negative and uncertain responses to "Yes."

3. Review the planning worksheet. For each question, refer to chapters in this Learning Guide, if needed, for more information. Use the right-hand column for your thoughts and ideas in contributing to the LGP's decisions.

Getting Started

Discussion Worksheet

Discussion Question	Y	N	DK	What more can we do?
Do we thoroughly understand our authority? How much can we really do?				
Do we know our geographic scope?				
Do we understand the reason our Local Governance Partnership was created?				
Do we know who we represent? How broad is our representation?				
Are we clear about the area encompassed by the community agenda?				
Do we know if any neighborhood site has developed its own agenda?				
Do we know how input will be gathered?				
Do we know how input will be compiled, organized, analyzed, and reported?				
Do we know when our community agenda should be complete? Do we have any time constraints to consider?				

KEY: Y = Yes, N = No, DK = Don't Know

Starting Work on a Community Agenda
Planning Worksheet

Planning Consideration	Refer to Chapters	Thoughts and Ideas
How will we collect information?	2, 3, 4	
What kind of information do we need?	2, 3, 4	
Where will we collect the information?	2, 3, 4	
What are the timeframes?	2	
Who will collect the information?	2, 3, 4	
How will the information be compiled?	2, 3, 4, 5	
Who will analyze the information?	5	
What kind of training and/or technical assistance do we need?	2, 3, 4, 5	
How are we going to fund this work?	2	

Use this information as a starting point. From the thoughts and ideas, develop action steps and a work plan.

Chapter 2
Identifying Community Conditions

Learn by Discussing

Attitudes about Collecting Data

Assess your attitude about data and data collection.

Review the statements at the bottom of this page. Rate your level of agreement with each statement. Your responses will provide insight on your attitude toward collecting data.

Discuss your responses with other members of your group. Help each other lay the groundwork for a positive approach to the task. Often, knowing more about the process of collecting information and hearing about others' experiences are key to feeling comfortable.

SA	A	N	D	SD	Statements About Collecting Data
					Collecting data is an intimidating and overwhelming task.
					Collecting data involves so much that the undertaking is confusing.
					Little information is available about the issues affecting our children and families.
					Many existing information sources can be tapped.
					Information about conditions can unite stakeholders around a common cause.
					Information is useful in making decisions.
					Information can help the LGP gain important insight into how children and families are faring in its community.
					LGP partners can be instrumental in collecting and interpreting data.

KEY: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Chapter 2 Identifying Community Conditions

Learn by Doing

Information about Community Conditions

Discuss and make decisions about gathering data.

Has your LGP discussed all aspects of collecting information about community conditions? Does it have a plan for collecting quantitative data? The worksheets on the following pages will provide some guidelines for discussion and planning.

Materials

Copies of worksheets

Individually, review the "Information about Community Conditions Discussion Worksheet" on the following two pages. Respond to each question by checking YES, NO, or DON'T KNOW.

As a group, come to consensus on the affirmative responses and discuss what is needed to change the negative and uncertain responses to "Yes."

Use the "Data Collection Framework Planning Worksheet" on page 130 to discuss and plan for collecting data about community conditions. For each topic area, discuss the geographic boundaries for the search, the timeframes, and type of information needed. Anticipate potential challenges in obtaining available data and possible solutions.

Use the "Data Source List Planning Worksheet" on page 131 to create a source list for collecting quantitative data about community conditions. Think of as many sources for the information as possible. For each source, note a contact person, the type of information available, the time period for which the information is available, and the cost, if any, for retrieval.

Refer to Chapter 2: Identifying Community Conditions and the Appendices, Resources, and Contacts, for potential sources.

Use the "Data Agenda Planning Worksheet" on page 132 to identify gaps in information. List the information that is needed to understand an issue/problem fully as well as its root causes. For each data source, explore if information is available and in a useable format. For all the data sources marked "No," discuss ways to broaden the search, be creative, or gather your own information.

Information about Community Conditions

Discussion Worksheet

Discussion Question	Y	N	DK	What more can we do?
Have we decided on an overall approach for collecting information, i.e., do we want to collect quantitative data first, then get reactions from community members?				
Are we clear about the reasons we are collecting information?				
Have we developed a framework for our data collection that includes geographic boundaries, timeframes, and types of information needed?				
Do we have a plan for collecting quantitative data about, and related to, current community conditions?				
Have we developed a source list for collecting quantitative data?				

KEY: Y = Yes, N = No, DK = Don't Know

Information about Community Conditions (Continued)

Discussion Worksheet

Discussion Question	Y	N	DK	What more can we do?
Do gaps exist in the quantitative data that we need?				
Have we developed a data agenda and planned ways to fill in the gaps?				
Do we have a plan for reporting summaries of the information collected?				
Do we know ways to ensure that the reports in our plan are effective?				

KEY: Y = Yes, N = No, DK = Don't Know

Refer to the Appendix, Tools, for report samples from Vermont.

Data Collection Framework

Planning Worksheet

Issue/Problem or Topic Area		
Geographic Boundaries	**Timeframes**	**Type of Information**
POTENTIAL CHALLENGES	**POTENTIAL CHALLENGES**	**POTENTIAL CHALLENGES**
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS	**POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**	**POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

Data Source List

Planning Worksheet

Data Source	Contact Person	Type of Information Available	Time Period	Cost to Retrieve

A Data Agenda

Planning Worksheet

Information Needed to Fully Understand an Issue/Problem	Avail-able?		Useful?	
	Y	N	Y	N

Chapter 2
Identifying
Community
Conditions

Learn by Discussing

Dogwood County Scenario

Recognize the importance of understanding root causes and identify questions and steps for the research.

How would an LGP go about reaching root causes of an issue/problem? And what if there were resistance among partners in doing this? This activity allows you to practice solving these problems using a scenario for your discussion.

---

1. Review the scenario on the next page. Then simulate a typical LGP meeting that might take place in Dogwood County.

2. Assume the roles of the partners. One or more participants should take an opposing view on researching root causes. Other participants should be in favor of taking the time to research root causes. Role-play a typical discussion. Come to consensus about understanding root causes.

3. Plan the research. Organize participants into subcommittees. One committee should develop a list of questions to guide the research and another subcommittee should plan the steps of the research. Include: places, times, how to include members of the local community. Report back to the large group.

SCENARIO

In 1995, Dogwood County received funds from the Kirby Foundation to address the needs of children and families. "We didn't know what to do," admits a former collaborative coordinator.

A core group came together to discuss how to use the funds. Members of the core group represented the school system, mental health, the housing authority, public health, and the Department of Children and Family Services. The group decided to send a survey to parents of elementary school students, K-6, asking them what they thought were the key issues in the community.

The response to the survey was overwhelming. The top issues of concern to parents were high school dropouts, teenage pregnancy, and drug and alcohol abuse. The core group decided these were valid issues for the community's concern. "We didn't do a lot of homework on the underlying causes of the issues," the former coordinator admitted. "There was consensus among core group members that prevention was the best way to tackle the issues and to focus on children at an early age."

All the funds were channeled into prevention programs for middle school children, ages eleven to fourteen. Family involvement was an important component of the programs. "The intent was to catch the children and involve the families early on," said the coordinator.

The school superintendent and the school board were very supportive of the programs; however a mid-year survey indicated that teachers thought the programs fell short of reaching prevention goals. This proved to be true, as data gathered over the next four years indicated no significant difference in the dropout rate or the number of teen pregnancies. The number of alcohol or substance abuse-related incidents actually increased.

Chapter 2 Identifying Community Conditions

Learn by Doing

Root Causes

Identify questions and plan steps for gathering information about root causes.

In this activity the LGP selects a priority area and makes plans for understanding the root causes of issues/problems. The planning is continued for other priority areas.

Materials

Copies of the worksheet

1. Select one priority area. Focus on a specific issue/problem. Discuss and plan steps to understand root causes. Use the worksheet on the following page to guide your discussion.

2. Repeat for other priority areas.

3. Develop an overall timeline or calendar so LGP members and staff can see the big picture in regard to plans for understanding root causes.

Understanding Root Causes

Priority Area			
Issues/Problems			
Step	**How to do this**	**Who is responsible**	**Timeframe**
Develop questions to guide research.			
Identify sources to find answers and gather information about risk factors and protective factors.			
Summarize the information.			
Discuss root causes with members of the community. Find out which are most relevant.			
Summarize and analyze all the information.			
Develop charts, tables and/or other ways to report the findings.			

Chapter 2 Identifying Community Conditions

Learn by Doing

Existing Resources

Identify existing programs, activities, and resources.

In this activity the LGP begins the task of identifying and evaluating existing programs, activities, and resources.

Glossary

Formal resources — Services and supports that traditionally serve children, families, and communities, such as public agencies.

Informal supports — Nontraditional resources and supports, such as businesses, the faith community, civic organizations, citizen groups, and the natural helping system. These supports are not usually provided by government agencies and are not part of any formal service system.

Natural helping system — An informal network of extended family, friends, neighbors, and community leaders.

Materials

Copies of worksheets on the following pages

Use the worksheets on the following pages to plan for identifying existing resources. Select a priority area. Organize into subcommittees to carry out the following tasks:

Formal Resources

List formal resources in the "What We Have" column of "Inventory, Part 1." Contact key members of agencies and organizations to find out more about each resource. Organize the information gathered using the "Inventory, Part 2, What We Have, Resource Description."

Informal Supports

List informal supports**.** If more information is needed, survey or meet with family representatives to identify additional informal resources in the community. Find out where families turn in times of difficulty.

Interview individuals identified by family representatives in the target neighborhood who are part of the natural helping system. They may provide advice, food, clothing, shelter, advocacy. Find out the extent of their involvement, how they relate to the more formal resources, and how they think they could be more effective.

Summarize the information on the chart, "Inventory, Part 2, What We Have, Resource Description."

Inventory Part 1

Result **Issue/Problem**		
What Works	**What We Have**	**What Is Missing**
Promising Practices	**Existing Formal Programs and Resources**	
	Existing Informal Supports	

Inventory Part 2

What We Have **Resource Description**

(Circle one) Existing Formal Program or Informal Resource or Activity	
Description	
Critical components	
Evidence of effectiveness	
Implementing organization	Location
Population served	Capacity to serve
Months/days/hours of operation	Staff, volunteers involved
Necessary conditions	Program contact
Source of information	Other

Chapters 3 through 6

Learn by Doing

Planning Decisions for Setting a Community Agenda

Discuss and make planning decisions about setting a community agenda.

Has your LGP discussed and made planning decisions for setting a community agenda?

Materials

Copies of worksheets

Use the worksheets on the following pages to make planning decisions about:

- ✍✍Gathering information from community members.
- ✍✍Identifying community assets.
- ✍✍Using the agenda-setting process and the data collected to create a vision with results and indicators.
- ✍✍Bringing the community agenda to a wider circle of stakeholders.
- ✍✍Promoting the community agenda.

Individually, review the selected discussion worksheet. Respond to each question by checking YES, NO, or DON'T KNOW.

As a group, come to consensus on the affirmative responses and discuss what is needed to change the negative and uncertain responses to "Yes."

Community Perspectives

Discussion Worksheet

Discussion Question	Y	N	DK	What more can we do?
Have we targeted a broad range of community members, including voices not typically heard, for their perspectives?				
Have we considered why some community members do not get involved, and have we taken steps to remedy this?				
Have we taken steps to make meetings comfortable and welcoming for community members?				
Have we determined the combination of different methods to obtain information from the community?				
Do we understand the characteristics of, and what is involved with, conducting focus groups?				
Do we understand the characteristics of, and what is involved with, conducting key informant interviews?				
Do we understand the characteristics of, and what is involved with, conducting community surveys?				

Do we understand the characteristics of, and what is involved with, conducting town hall meetings?				

KEY: Y = Yes, N = No, DK = Don’t Know

Gathering Community Perspectives

Planning Worksheet

Type of Meeting			
Date and Times			
Audience			
Facilitator(s) and Staff			
Source of Funding/Resources			
Preparation Tasks	Who is responsible?	What are the timeframes?	What is the budget?
Arranging for an accessible and comfortable site			
Communicating about the event/invitations			
Developing the meeting format and agenda			
Developing questions			
Arranging for facilitator and meeting materials			
Arranging for refreshments			

Arranging for transportation/childcare			

Community Assets

Discussion Worksheet

Discussion Question	Y	N	DK	What more can we do?
Do we understand the importance of community assets?				
Do we understand the rationale behind asset mapping?				
Have we researched whether asset mapping has already been conducted? Can we access the information?				
Do we understand the multiple purposes for asset mapping?				
Do we know how to conduct asset mapping with individuals?				
Do we know how to conduct asset mapping with associations?				
Do we know how to conduct asset mapping with institutions?				

KEY: Y = Yes, N = No, DK = Don't Know

Creating a Vision and Setting Priorities

Discussion Worksheet

Discussion Question	Y	N	DK	What more can we do?
Do we have a written vision statement that reflects a shared dream and the community's view?				
Do we have a list of results that relate to this shared vision?				
Do we have indicators for our set of results?				
Are we analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data in order to set community priorities?				
Do we have, or need to have, staff with data analysis expertise to do this work?				
In reviewing the information, are we or staff looking for connections, comparisons, and alignment?				
In analyzing the information, are we able to recognize community priorities?				

KEY: Y = Yes, N = No, DK = Don’t Know

Building Support for the Agenda

Discussion Worksheet

Discussion Question	Y	N	DK	What more can we do?
Do we thoroughly understand why engaging more stakeholders over time is important?				
Do we understand what is meant by a "critical mass?"				
Have we identified populations, or groups, to consider as we build "critical mass?"				
Do we understand why we need to communicate and promote the community agenda?				
Have we planned an approach for our "marketing" strategy?				

KEY: Y = Yes, N = No, DK = Don't Know

Promoting the Community Agenda

Planning Worksheet

Tasks	How will we do this?	Who is responsible for what?	What are our timeframes?
Identify groups that we need to reach.			
Identify and contact potential speakers who are knowledgeable.			
Identify events and opportunities for public speaking.			
Contact and arrange with coordinators for events and public speaking engagements.			
Identify opportunities for stories and print materials using data.			
Contact and arrange with potential storywriters and producers of print materials.			

Other tasks			

Tools

This appendix contains tools that LGPs have found useful:

- Report samples from Vermont
- Discussion questions for focus groups
- Hints for preparing for key informant interviews
- Questions to help LGPs get started in using a variety of methods to gather community perspectives
- Checklist for developing vision statements

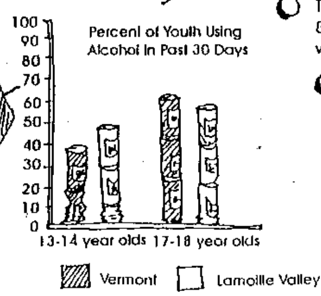
THE STATE OF OUR YOUTH ...

...in the Lamoille Valley

This month's topic!

ALCOHOL

WHAT WE KNOW



- Thirty-seven percent of Vermont students in grades 8-12 said that they had recently ridden in a car whose driver had been drinking
- In 1995, one out of every three students, grades 8-12, in the Lamoille Valley reported binging on alcohol (five or more drinks within a couple of hours) in the past thirty days
- Nearly half (42 percent) of all students grade 8-12 in the Lamoille Valley report that they had first consumed alcohol, other than a few sips, before 13 years of age

RISK FACTORS

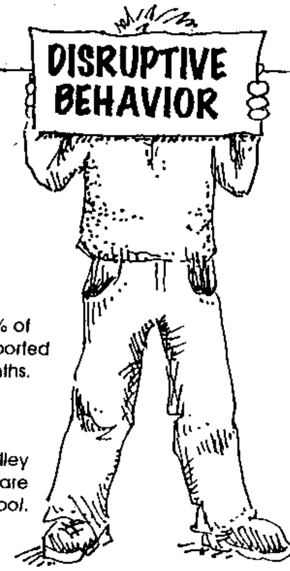
- perceived approval of drug-using behaviors in school, peer and community environments
- friends who participate in unhealthy behaviors
- failure in school performance
- lack of adult support

WHAT HELPS

- parents who monitor behavior, have clear rules, and are involved in the lives of their children
- strong, positive connections with family, school, or religious groups
- opportunities for meaningful participation in the community
- restricting access in home and community
- success in school performance
- Student Assistance Programs

THE STATE OF OUR YOUTH...

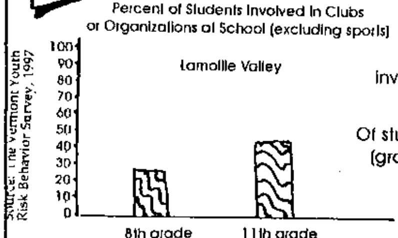
DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR



...in the Lamoille Valley

WHAT WE KNOW

The answer to last month's quiz is....in 1995, 50% of eighth grade students in the Lamoille Valley reported being in a physical fight in the past twelve months. In 1997, however, 42% of eighth graders said they had been in a physical fight.

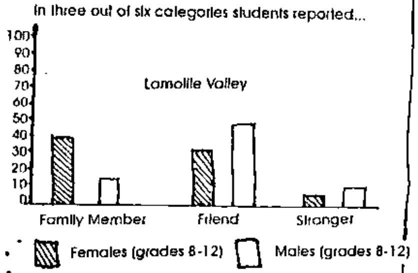


Of students surveyed in the the Lamoille Valley (grades 6-12), thirty-four percent said they are involved in clubs or organizations *outside of school.*

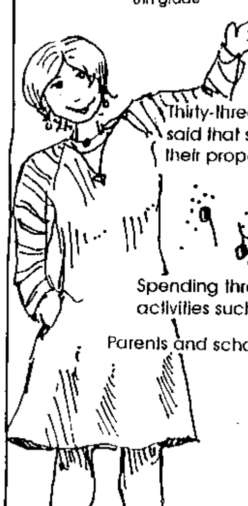
Of students surveyed in the Lamoille Valley (grades 6-12), fifty-four percent said they are involved in team sports.

The last time you were in a physical fight, with whom did you fight?

In three out of six categories students reported...



Source: The Search Institute, 1996



Thirty-three percent of all students in the Lamoille Valley reported having been in a physical fight in the past twelve months.

Thirty-three percent of Lamoille Valley students (grade 8-12) said that someone had stolen or deliberately damaged their property *on school property* in the past 12 months.

WHAT HELPS

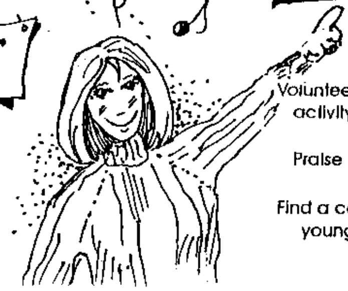
Spending three or more hours a week in extracurricular activities such as music, sports, clubs or church events.

Parents and schools with consistent rules and expectations.

Adults who model responsible behavior.

A safe environment at home, in school, and in the community.

ADULTS... THREE THINGS YOU CAN DO



Volunteer your time as a youth activity leader or assistant.

Praise more....criticize less.

Find a common interest with a young person and do it.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR SUPPORT

Family Support Services:

Hardwick Area Patch Office.. 472-3127
LINK at the Lamoille Family Center...................................888-5229
Lamoille County Mental Health..888-4914

Seek support from an adult or person you trust such as a teacher, family member, or school mental health professional.

Discussion Questions for Focus Groups

Each LGP will design questions, based on its needs, when gathering community members' perspectives on strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities. Following are some sample questions. Use them as a starting point to shape your questions.

Questions for Community Members Using Services

- How do you get the support you need in our community?
- What services do you and your children most need or use?
- What problems or barriers do you have when trying to obtain services?
- What works best for you in the services you currently receive?
- If you could change one aspect of the current services you receive, what would that be?

Questions for Service Providers

- Why do families need the services or supports you provide?
- What barriers do families encounter when they use your services?
- What services, activities, or policies work especially well for the families to whom you provide services?
- If you could change one aspect of the current services you provide, what would that be?

Questions for Community Residents

- What are some of the assets or resources that this community provides to you and your family?
- What is not available in this community that you would use, if available?
- As a family or individual, what are some of the challenges you face on a day-to-day basis?
- If you could wave a magic wand, what one change in our community would make it better for families?

Adapted, in part, from *Together We Can: A Guide for Crafting a Profamily System of Education and Human Services*, Atelia Melaville and Martin Blank, 1993.

Preparing for Key Informant Interviews

- Develop a list of questions. Design the interview to last one hour or less. Most individuals will *not* have the patience and/or time for an interview that is longer than one hour.

- Test the questions beforehand. Try asking the questions to a volunteer from the LGP or agency. Determine if the questions are clear and understandable. Determine if the questions produce the kind of information the LGP is seeking.

- Develop a list of potential interviewees. Determine if the list of individuals is balanced in their backgrounds and experience.

- Provide training to the interviewers so they understand how to ask the questions and when and how to probe for follow-up. Make sure each interviewer will be collecting information in a consistent fashion. Role-playing an interview is an effective technique for developing these skills.

- Schedule appointments for the interviews. When setting appointments, make sure that each interviewee understands the purpose of the interview and how long it will take. Provide the interview questions in advance.

- Let the informants know if their names will be attributed to the information they offer during the interview.

GETTING STARTED

Use the following sets of questions to plan for gathering community perspectives.

Focus Groups

- ✍✍ What groups should be targeted?
- ✍✍ In what settings or at what locations should focus group meetings be held?
- ✍✍ Who should host the meetings?
- ✍✍ What list of questions will be asked?

Key Informant Interviews

- ✍✍ What individuals should be targeted?
- ✍✍ Who will conduct the interviews?
- ✍✍ What questions will be asked?
- ✍✍ Has an interview script (for the interviewer) been created?
- ✍✍ What outreach efforts will be necessary to interview "hard-to-reach" individuals?

Community Surveys

- ✍✍ What groups or areas should be targeted?
- ✍✍ What process will be used to identify individuals for completing the survey?
- ✍✍ How many stakeholders will complete the survey?
- ✍✍ What questions should be asked?
- ✍✍ Will stakeholders understand why they are being asked to fill out the surveys and the effect of their responses?

Town Hall or Large Group Meetings

- ✍✍ Where and when will the meeting be held? Will there be more than one?
- ✍✍ How will stakeholders learn about the meeting?
- ✍✍ What format will be used to solicit opinions and ideas?

General Questions

- ✍✍ What techniques will be used to gather information?
- ✍✍ Are the questions used in the various methods of gathering information consistent?
- ✍✍ Should the information gathered be shared (when available) at town hall meetings, during interviews, etc., or would this influence public opinion?

Adapted in part from *Knowing Your Community, A Step-by-Step Guide to Community Needs and Resources Assessment,* The Family Resource Coalition of America, Chicago, 1995.

Checklist for Developing Vision Statements

- Establish a vision statement at the beginning of the planning process.
- Establish a timeline for developing the vision statement.
- Build a shared vision from the personal visions of members of your community.
- Identify costs associated with developing a shared vision and vision statements. Include these costs (such as personnel, meetings, consultants, materials) in your budget.
- Identify a process for assessing what the community believes is important.
- Obtain information from a representative sample of the entire community. Be inclusive. Forums, surveys, questionnaires, or interviews are effective tools for this task.
- Involve a diverse group of community stakeholders in the development process.
- Establish procedures for compiling and communicating information.
- Share the draft vision statement with key stakeholders.
- Present the vision statement to key stakeholders for adoption.
- Communicate the vision statement regularly to stakeholders as a reminder of what the community is seeking to achieve.

From *Planning for Change Workbook,* The Family Connection, Georgia Policy Council for Children and Families,
and Georgia Academy, 1998.

Resources

America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well Being, forum on Child and Family Statistics (Washington DC, 1999).

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *The Kids Count Data Book* (Baltimore, MD: 2000).

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *The Right Start: Conditions of Babies and their Families in America's Largest Cities* (Baltimore, MD: 2000).

Bruner, et al., *Charting a Course: Assessing a Community's Strengths and Needs* (a resource brief by National Center for Service Integration, 1993).

Center for the Study of Social Policy, *Creating a Community Agenda: How Governance Partnerships can Improve Results for Children, Youth and Families (*Washington, DC: February, 1998).

Family Connection and Georgia Academy, *Planning for Change Workbook* (Atlanta, GA: 1998).

The Family Resource Coalition of America, *Know Your Community: A Step-by-Step Guide to Community Needs and Resources Assessment* (Chicago, IL: 1995) (312) 338-0900.

Friedman, Mark, *Results Accountability for Proposition 10 Commissions: A Planning Guide for Improving the Well-Being of Young Children and Their Families* (UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families, and Communities, 2000).

Kretzmann, John, McKnight, John L., *Building Communities from the Inside Out* (Evanston, IL: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, 1993).

Melaville, Atelia, Blank, M., *Together We Can: A Guide for Crafting a Profamily System of Education and Human Services* (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1993).

Resources (continued)

Mendonsa, Arthur, *Helping Children Become Successful Adults: A Planning Manual for Communities* (Atlanta, GA: Carl Vinson Institute of Government and Family Connection, 1998).

The Urban Institute, *Building and Operating Neighborhood Indicator Systems* (October 1998).

Websites

The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives website includes a collection of measures used to evaluate results. The data base includes a collection of survey instruments, interview guides, and measures in eight substantive areas, including education, neighborhood safety, youth development, and others. http://www.aspenroundtable.org

The Community Toolbox is a website promoting community health and development by connecting people, ideas, and resources. Tools include information about developing a strategic plan, recruiting members, organizing effective advocacy, and promoting institutionalization of the initiative. http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu/

Indicators of Child, Youth, and Family Well Being: A Selected Inventory of Existing Projects Child Trends, Inc., 4301 Connecticut Ave, NW, Ste. 100, Washington, DC 20008, February, 2000, (202) 362-5580. http://www.childtrends.org

The Search Institute, 700 S. Third Street, Suite 210, Minneapolis, MN 55415 (800) 888-7828. http://www.search-institute.org.

An on-line example of youth-driven community mapping. http://www.polkfun.org

Contacts

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) is a private, nonprofit research, policy analysis, and technical assistance organization. CSSP focuses on human services reform, particularly the establishment of neighborhood-based governance and service delivery systems that are developed through partnerships between the public and private sectors and community residents.

Center for the Study of Social Policy
1575 Eye Street NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20006
Tel: (202) 371-1565, Fax: (202) 371-1472
http://www.cssp.org

The Child and Family Policy Center was established in 1989 by former Iowa legislator Charles Bruner to link research and policy better with issues that are vital to children and families and to advocate for results-based policies to improve child well being. The Center provides technical assistance to many Iowa communities to develop effective services and supports for children and families. On a national level, the Center operates the publication clearinghouse and technical assistance resource network of the National Center for Service Integration (NCSI). The Center also provides technical assistance and support to construct comprehensive, community, and results-based systems of support for families and children.

Child and Family Policy Center
218 Sixth Avenue, Suite 1021, Des Moines, IA 50309-4006
Tel: (515) 280-9027, Fax: (515) 243-5941
http://www.cfpciowa.org

The Fiscal Policy Studies Institute (FPSI) was established in 1996
to provide assistance to states, counties, cities, and communities working to improve the well being of children, families, and communities, using a results-based accountability and budgeting approach. Since 1996, the FPSI has worked with state and local, public and private-sector partners from over 30 states, 12 countries, and the United Nations.

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http://www.resultsaccountability.com

Midwest Community Leadership Resource Center is a collaboration of Communities in Schools, the Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership at the University of Missouri—Kansas City, the Family Investment Trust, and the Local Investment Commission in Kansas City.

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Promising Practices Network is sponsored by the Foundation Consortium, the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children, the Missouri Family Investment Trust, and Georgia Academy. This website highlights information on programs and practices that are effective in helping children, families, and communities. The information included is organized around seven results associated with the well being of children and families and two new ways of doing business: healthy children, children ready for school, children succeeding in school, children safe at home, strong families, self-sufficient families, strong communities and neighborhoods, new forms of governance, and results-based accountability.
http://www.promisingpractices.net

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