Community Development Toolkit

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Abstract

'Community development' is, first and foremost, neighbours helping neighbours. It is an endeavour that relies on groundswells; a process to be initiated by individuals or groups facing issues in their community and seeking to address those issues. Community development focuses on asset building to improve the quality of life among residents of low to moderate income communities. In 1966, Robert F Kennedy referred to 'three critical threads' in the fabric of community development programs: cooperation with private business in self-sustaining, economically viable enterprises; integration of education, employment and development programs under a coordinated overall plan; and momentum and direction from the community, in partnership with private foundations, labour unions and universities. Today, these critical threads remain unchanged. There are several steps and paths that an individual or group can take to solve the problems facing their community, however, for an effective, sustainable and equitable solution, the situation must be understood comprehensively and the plan created and carried out strategically.

This toolkit seeks to point the individual or group in the right direction and to showcase the resources that may be available. In partnership with residents, Public Service Electric and Gas Company (PSE&G), of New Jersey, undertook to transform the South Ward of Newark through community development. Successful implementation of that model convinced PSE&G of the importance of sharing with the communities it services the opportunities of community development and, to that end, PSE&G in partnership with NJPPRI, funded the production of this toolkit. This series provides a roadmap to such a model, and the starting point on the journey is facing the issues and discovering the assets of the community. The topics covered include: first steps to community development; starting and formalising your organisation; building organisational leadership; mobilising communities; and keeping the momentum.

The first steps to community development

'Community development' is, first and foremost, neighbours helping neighbours. It is an endeavour that relies on groundswells; a process to be initiated by individuals or groups facing issues in their community and seeking to address those issues. Community development focuses on asset building to improve the quality of life among residents of low to moderate income communities. In 1966, Robert F Kennedy referred to 'three critical threads' in the fabric of community development programs: cooperation with private business in self-sustaining, economically viable enterprises; integration of education, employment and development programs under a coordinated overall plan; and momentum and direction from the community, in partnership with private foundations, labour unions and universities.[1] Today, these critical threads remain unchanged. There are several steps and paths that an individual or group can take to solve the problems facing their community. However, for an effective, sustainable and equitable solution, the situation must be understood comprehensively and the plan created and carried out strategically.

The Community Development Toolkit is a five-part 'How to' series that seeks to aid the individual or group in approaching community-based change in an effective and sustainable way. The genesis of this series was the experience of PSEG, the major utility company of New Jersey, in participating in the renaissance of a highly distressed area of Newark, New Jersey. In partnership with residents, PSE&G undertook to transform the South Ward of Newark through community development. Successful implementation of that model convinced PSE&G of the importance of sharing with the communities it services the opportunities of community development. Organised in five stages — (1) Facing Issues and Discovering Assets; (2) Starting and Formalising Your Organisation; (3) Building Organisational Leadership; (4) Mobilising Communities; and (5) Keeping the Momentum — this series provides a roadmap to such a model. The starting point on the journey is facing the issues and discovering the assets of the community.

I. Facing issues and discovering assets

Facing Issues

To address the issues challenging a community, the individual or group must first define the particular issues as clearly as possible. Community development models can be used to solve a broad range of problems affecting a particular neighbourhood or region, including:

- unemployment
- crime
- blight and distressed housing
- vacant offices, houses or lots
- lack of resources for children.

When facing the issues that affect a community, important details to consider about each particular issue are: what populations does it affect; how long has it existed; was there some event or underlying problem that led to its existence; and what, if anything, has already been done or attempted in order to address it. Several tools exist that can be used to gain these answers.

[1] From 'Statement by Senator Robert F Kennedy' at the One Day Conference on Community Development in Bedford Stuyvesant held at Public School 305, sponsored by the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council

Government offices, universities and private corporations are valuable sources of data already collected around certain issues, including statistics on the affected populations and duration of the problem, policy papers on possible solutions and existing projects. Government offices and universities are also possible sources of assistance to collect, organise and understand the data through interested professors and students.

In order to understand community sentiment and priorities, surveys and interviews or focus groups conducted around such surveys work well. A local neighbourhood organisation, faith institution or school can serve as a place to host focus groups. Although, especially where there is contention around an issue, it is important to select a forum that is viewed as neutral to differing perspectives so that in this initial stage all community voices are given the opportunity to share their concerns regarding the issue(s).

Another valuable tool to access information is the Internet. Many government agencies and public interest groups maintain websites with statistical and other reported information on particular topics and links to publications and other sources for educating yourself on various topics. The Internet can be used as a tool both to research data regarding the issue and any attempts to address it and to communicate with interested parties in the community through internet surveys, flyers and comment sections.

In order to define the problems, it is also necessary to define the 'community' geographically. Setting the geographic definition of the community allows for the creation of a comprehensive map of the issues and problem spots. Simultaneously, it sets the stage for the second part of this first step — discovering the community's assets.

Discovering assets

Community 'assets' refers to the internal strengths of a particular area and should be viewed broadly in this first stage. There are five basic asset types: physical; intellectual and human; financial; social; and political. Through the process of asset mapping, an individual or group can use a map to lay out the visible assets of a community, including:

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and the Pratt Center for Community Improvement (now known as the Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development) Brooklyn, New York, 9 December 1966.

Business centres • Corporate headquarters • Large and small retail • Commercial • Industrial	Infrastructure systems • Sewage • Transportation hubs (mass and other) • Utilities (electric, gas, water, telephone, cable) • Highways • Seaports and waterways • Airports
Schools • Higher education • Public system • Private schools	Historical sites
Parks and open space	Areas with unique housing styles

Non-physical assets should be recorded on the map and in a separate document that includes essential information such as name, key contact persons, location, interest in the community, resources that the asset might offer to the community and any information regarding past or current community development involvement. This document is essentially an internal resource guide, specific to the neighbourhood and the issue of concern.

The physical map and this internal resource guide can be further informed by focus groups that include neighbourhood residents and other stakeholders. Using the physical map as a discussion point, focus groups are also valuable to identifying and recording the less visible assets, including:

- anchor institutions, such as universities, utilities, hospitals
- faith-based institutions
- government agencies
- non-profit social/quality of life agencies
- skilled individuals
- political offices/elected officials
- health system.

After the focus group, further research can be done on these non-physical assets at the library, on the Internet and through direct informational interviews arranged with key contact persons or the non-physical asset's public relations office. Prior research on both the issue and the entity or individual being approached can make an initial interview be more productive and set the stage for an effective relationship. The process of issue definition and asset mapping is essential to laying the foundation for a strategic community development plan.

II. Starting and formalising your organisation

Creating mission, goals and objectives

Creating a not-for-profit corporation is complicated. So, before embarking on this path it is essential that the individual or group focus specifically on the issue or issues they wish to address and decide *whether or not an appropriate agency already exists* as a venue for addressing such issue(s). This question may have been answered during the process of Facing Issues and Discovering Assets, but, if not, then the best places to look for already existing organisations that are concerned with your issue are the internet, local neighbourhood housing or community groups, local universities and government agencies. Many communities have organised citizen groups that may already be involved in similar activities to the ones you wish to undertake. If you conclude that you must start a new organisation, then begin by defining your mission, goals and objectives.

Setting your mission, goals and objectives is the process of organising required to accomplish things. Many groups are organised informally and operate successfully. Leaders 'rise to the occasion' to propose ideas and carry out tasks. However, as the workload expands, many groups choose a more formal structure for their organisation. Some groups incorporate as a separate not-for-profit in order to pursue funding opportunities not always available to government agencies, to limit personal liability or to obtain an exemption from paying certain taxes. However, it is important to understand that while creating and operating a not-for-profit corporation may have many advantages, acquiring these benefits requires a great deal of work. A structured program is a means to an end. With effort, a system can be created where each person can participate fully and the group can perform effectively, with leadership being responsive to the members. A solid structure will help make an organisation sustainable; by promoting accountability, it will help your group grow and create new opportunities for leaders to develop. To find the appropriate structure for an organisation, the group or individual must first understand what they hope to accomplish.

Drafting a mission statement and bylaws will set forth the purpose and principles that will govern your organisation. The first step is to define your goals and objectives, which can be done through a series of planning meetings to discuss your program and organisation. It is important to identify the issue you are focussed on and to clearly define the variables that contribute to the issue. The following general organisational considerations should be addressed:

- What is your purpose? What are your short and long-term objectives?
- How are decisions to be made? Who chooses leaders and how?
- How will work be shared? Who does what?

- How will you raise money? Membership dues, fund raising, grants, sponsors?
- Are you open to change? Flexibility is important when goals and members change.
- Do you want to be incorporated or act as a club?

Drafting bylaws

The above considerations will lead to more specific questions for group discussion, such as: Are you organising to tackle a single project (such as abandoned commercial centre) or do you intend to generate ongoing activities in the community? Do you simply want to limit your personal liability should an accident occur at an event, or are you primarily interested in obtaining tax exempt status in order to attract funding from the many private foundations which fund only tax-exempt, nonprofit organisations? Do you know who will serve on your board of directors (you must have at least three directors), and do you know who will have the right to control and direct the activities of your nonprofit corporation? How will you raise funds to support your activities? The answers to these and similar questions will determine the form and structure of your organisation. Suggestions raised at these meetings can be discussed or put into practice on a trial basis and after a few months of informal operation, the group will be in a better position to finalise a mission statement and bylaws.

Bylaws are the rules governing the internal affairs of an organisation. For non-profit incorporations they are required, however they are useful even if the group is a club or a group of neighbours. If the group intends to incorporate, it is helpful to review the bylaws of other similar organisations. Bylaws set forth the mission, goals and objectives of the organisation and are the first place an organisation will turn to inform or make future decisions.

Formal bylaws set forth:

1. The full official name of organisation and legal address
2. The purpose, goals and philosophy of the organisation
3. Membership categories and eligibility requirements
4. Membership dues, if any, how much and when paid
5. When and how often regular or special meetings of the membership are to be held, as well as regular and annual meetings of the board of directors
6. What officers are necessary, how they are chosen, length of term, their duties and how vacancies are filled
7. Special committees, their purpose and how they operate
8. A system so that bylaws can be rescinded or amended, maybe by a simple majority
9. Any official policies or practices.

Creating a non-profit

Non-profits are creatures of federal and state law, based in large part on what they do not, or cannot do. On the state level, ‘non-profit’ describes corporations organised to advance a public or community interest rather than for individual personal or financial gain. Non-profits may not distribute earnings or pay dividends and any surplus must be used to further the corporation's organisational purpose. Non-profits are permitted to hire paid staff to conduct their organisation's activities. In New Jersey, non-profit status exempts a corporation from state corporate income taxes. Many non-profits, depending upon their purposes, can qualify for exemption from federal corporate income taxes. The US Internal Revenue Code includes over 25 classifications of tax-exempt groups. These groups are entitled to certain privileges and subject to certain reporting and disclosure requirements and limitations on their activities, depending on the category of their exemption. In certain instances, contributions to non-profit organisations are deductible from federal income taxes.

Due to the complexity of the statutes governing non-profit and tax exempt status, any organisation that decides to incorporate as a nonprofit should seek the professional advice of a lawyer and an accountant at that stage. The organisation, if possible, should seek the advice of persons who are either experienced with such actions or willing to spend a considerable amount of time learning how to correctly compile and file the necessary state and federal forms.

To incorporate as a non-profit in New Jersey, you must file a Certificate of Incorporation with the New Jersey Department of the Treasury, Division of Revenue. The typical cost is $115, which includes the filing fee ($75), expedited service (to speed up the turnaround time for your filing) and the return of a certified, stamped copy of your certificate for your files. These forms can be obtained from the New Jersey Department of the Treasury, Division of Revenue. The IRS, however, to approve tax-exempt status, will want more information in your organisational documents than is required by the state of New Jersey for state-level non-profit status. Therefore, the state forms alone are not sufficient if you want to pursue federal tax-exemption from the IRS.

If tax-exempt status is essential to the operation of your nonprofit, plan accordingly. The filing fee alone for applying for tax-exempt status can be as much as $500 (if your organisation's gross receipts have been or are likely to be more than $10,000 a year). The Application for Recognition of Exemption requires you to provide detailed information, such as:

- a detailed narrative description of your organisation's activities — past, present and planned
- the name, address and title of each officer and director
- the Federal Employer Tax Identification Number of the organisation
- a copy of your organisation's Articles of Incorporation and bylaws
- financial statements (including a detailed breakdown of revenue and expenses) for the current year and for each of the prior three years, or if organised less than one year, proposed budgets for the next two years.

Also keep in mind that once you have filed your application, it is not uncommon for the IRS to contact you to request more specific or additional information.

If you are interested in pursuing federal tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3), you should call the IRS at 1(800)829–3676 or go to the IRS website and request the following documents (all are free):

- SS-4 — Employer Identification Number
- Form 1023 — Application for Recognition of Exemption
- Form 8718 — User Fee for Exempt Organization Ruling Request
- Publication 557 — Tax-exempt Status for Your Organization.

Form 1023 is the application that an entity would file to request recognition from the IRS as a tax-exempt organisation. The filing fee depends on the organisation's gross receipts for the next four years, and will either be $150 (if the average will not be more than $10,000) or $500 (if the average gross receipts will exceed $10,000). Typically, the IRS will take at least three to four months to process an application once the form is submitted.

Still, even if an organisation’s planned activities would meet the requirements for tax exemption under Section 501(c)(3), it is not always necessary or appropriate to form an independent organisation. Although non-profits enjoy certain privileges, there are also numerous responsibilities, laws and regulations that must be adhered to (including a number of reporting requirements that must be adhered to after the organisation has begun to operate). As stated before, your goals may be achievable without creating a new organisation.

III. Building organisational leadership

Effective organisational leadership

Leadership is critical to building a strong community development organisation. It increases the chance that the structure of the organisation can improve the socio-economic conditions of the community. Good leadership builds organisations that maintain and achieve their mission while surviving the inevitable changes in the environment, the board and executive and staff leadership.

Leadership is more of an art than a science, however, good leadership skills and styles can be learned and developed. Leadership styles vary both in number, character and effectiveness. Some common leadership styles are:

- autocratic — leader is totally in control and makes all decisions alone
- managerial — leader is concerned with operation rather than goals and effectiveness
- democratic — leader consults others, but makes final decisions alone
- collaborative — leadership is shared, several leaders are involved in all major decisions.

Different styles may be appropriate for different contexts. Most leaders employ several styles even while anchoring their behavior in a clearly defined style. To become an effective leader, one should consciously choose and develop leadership styles and skills by assessing your own talents, understanding the needs of the organisation or initiative, observing other leaders and finding good mentors.

Vision

While leadership skills can be learned, it is difficult to learn how to chart a vision. Good leaders start with a vision of what could be, but they also communicate the vision to others for the purpose of improving their initial conception and also persuading others to follow. The important thing to remember is that the vision by itself is not enough; *communicating* your vision to stakeholders is often the key component in seeing a vision realised.

Best practices

A new or developing organisation can review the leadership styles and habits of other organisations for good examples. The following are three best practices of such organisations:

A. Plan for a leadership team

Community development is a complex proposition requiring several individuals who are willing and able to use their professional and people skills to bring about constructive change. Whether job creation, housing or transportation is your community development goal, leaders will have to work together. The traditional model of one leader and many followers does not work as well as creating a team of leaders with a variety of skills and real input.

Creating a simple leadership plan by adding a timeline to a list of leadership development goals will give you an indication of the ideal makeup of your leadership team and what you will need to do to get there. To further understand who to seek out and how these potential leaders will function together it is a useful exercise to take some time with the existing group to answer these questions:

1. How many leaders do you want on your team?
2. What professional skills are required to tackle your issue(s)?
3. Is it important that your leadership team reflect the makeup of the community that your organisation serves or works in?
4. Is it important that at least some or all of the leadership team be from the community?
5. How will your leadership team support each other and you?
6. How will your leaders be committed to the goals of your organisation?

With the answers to these questions in mind, consider the group you have right now and compare it to what you envision your ideal leadership team to be. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your group, and how do they fit in with your vision? Are there areas for which your group needs leadership development (for example, do people communicate well? Are there any diversity issues?). People should be matched to the needed skills (e.g. fundraising, administration or outreach) as best as possible, but you will probably find that there are gaps. A comparison of the ideal to the reality will allow you to set specific goals to address those areas, whether you wish to seek additional persons for the positions or to train existing members who would be interested in the challenge. Determine which goals are the priority and plan for hiring or schedule trainings or other workshops to help you achieve those goals.

Sample leadership plan		
Goal	**Leadership development activities**	**Timeline**
1. All staff will learn e-mail and Internet skills (communication skills)	Internal training by Operations Manager	This month
2. Community outreach staff will learn how to lead effective meetings (motivation skills)	Internal training given by Director	Next month
3. Increase communication between program leaders and their support staff (communication skills)	Schedule monthly workshop lunches by program to discuss status and other issues	Monthly, begin immediately
4. Increase diversity awareness of all (interaction skills)	Training by outside facilitator	In three months

With a plan and an understanding of the present leadership reality of your group, you are ready to seek out the additional leaders or sources of training, whether internal or external, necessary to move your group forward to its goal of building a solid foundation.

B. Develop your leaders

Leadership training should not wait until someone is selected as a leader. To help an organisation survive beyond the initial leader or leadership team, others must have the capacity to step into their shoes. There are many tools that can be employed to develop leaders, including:

- teaching as you lead — One of the easiest ways to develop leaders is by bringing someone who is ready to learn along with you to critical negotiation sessions or public speaking opportunities and then taking moment after the event to discuss what occurred with them and why.
- mentoring — Similar to teaching as you lead, but requiring a greater time investment, mentoring involves making a commitment to encouraging and teaching someone on an ongoing basis.
- orientations — An orientation is an opportunity to help new volunteers, staff people or board members understand the organisation and their expected role by laying out the mission and history of the organisation, giving them the training necessary to begin their job, explaining the policies, what assistance is available and from who and introducing them to the rest of the organisation.
- workshops and trainings — Workshops or group trainings give individuals within the group a focussed opportunity to work on key skills or issues facing the group.
- retreats — As the organisation develops, retreats are a chance to revitalise commitment to the group's mission or determine new strategies. At retreats, different people can take responsibility for different areas, encouraging broad leadership growth.
- investing in each person — Another tool to develop leaders is simply by paying attention to whether people in the organisation are well matched to their roles and how well they are adjusting to the group personally. Each person needs encouragement and support to feel enthusiastic about the organisation and their role within it.

C. Focus on group dynamics

By focussing on group dynamics, successful community development organisations are able to institute and maintain the group characteristics generally necessary to be successful. Generally, effective organisations are ones where all participants share a vision and that vision is revisited over time to ensure continued commitment. They are also organisations where everyone shares a sense of responsibility and the leaders ensure that the staff is able to see the relationship between their work and outcomes that the group achieves. These characteristics will rarely be the state of the initial group dynamics and must be worked on continuously by the leadership. Open communication; listening skills; cultural sensitivity and tolerance; systems for evaluation, dealing with conflicts and hiring; and collaboration are important to such group dynamics. Developing organisations should not hesitate to have trainings around these concepts where outside facilitators or leaders from other groups are engaged to lead the events. To build good organisational leadership, leaders must focus on the group dynamics that exist and strive to institute the ideal characteristics.

Effective boards

To develop an effective board of trustees (often referred to as the board of directors), it is important to understand the significance of the board and what makeup and structure would best fit your purpose. The ideal makeup and structure may change later as your organisation evolves, however, in order to establish a solid foundation for organisational leadership of a non-profit, the group should make these initial decisions consciously.

The importance of the board

The board of a nonprofit is legally responsible for governing the corporation. This includes ensuring that the organisation remains true to its mission, safeguards its assets and operates in the public interest. While a for-profit's board of directors is responsible to the stockholders, a non-profit's board of trustees/directors reports to the community stakeholders. Establishing an uninterested board or one that is beholden to a top leader will create an organisation that has little chance of survival in the event of the departure of key staff or the top leader. Community development organisations, by their nature, should be focussed on particular community issues, and it is in the community's best interest that the survival of such organisations not be dependent on any one person. The board is the key body that can guide the organisation as a whole to fulfill its mission.

Responsibilities of the board of trustees

Legal and fiduciary. The board is responsible for ensuring that the organisation meets legal requirements and operates in accordance with its mission and for the purpose for which it was granted tax-exemption. Individual board members must exercise the duty of care by attending meetings, being prepared to make informed decisions by reading the information provided and requesting additional information if necessary, and carrying out their duties in a reasonable manner. As safeguards of a public trust, board members are responsible for protecting the organisation's assets and as such must be involved in developing the annual budget and ensuring that proper financial controls are in place.

Oversight. The board is responsible for ensuring that the organisation is well run. This includes supporting and evaluating the chief executive and the programs of the organisation. The board of trustees moderates the power of management, and has the power to hire and remove the chief executive, usually called the executive director or president.

Resources. Board members are responsible for ensuring that the organisation has adequate resources to meet its goals. Board members are often actively involved in making sure that the organisation has the money it needs through personal contributions; serving as an advocate with a foundation, corporation, or government entity; organising fund-raising events; or face-to-face solicitation of other individuals.

Community representation. Board members are often chosen so that they can bring to the board the experience or perspective of a particular group or segment of the organisation's constituency. Although it is not an inherently democratic institution, the board does provide an opportunity for the groups and communities that a nonprofit serves to have a voice in its governance. However, representing a constituency or viewpoint takes a back seat when voting — all board members are expected to vote with the non-profit's best interest in mind.

In addition to the board, some organisations have found it beneficial to convene ‘advisory groups’ of skilled individuals whose particular knowledge might complement and inform the board of trustees and the organisation. Advisory groups can be sources of valuable information and possible partnerships, and their participants should be selected with this in mind.

The board of trustees is distinguished by the real legal responsibilities of its members. In New Jersey, the members of a nonprofit’s board of trustees must meet certain standards of conduct and attention in carrying out their responsibilities to the organisation, usually described as the ‘duty of care’ and the ‘duty of loyalty’. The duty of care describes the level of competence that is expected of a board member, and can be described as the ‘care that an ordinarily prudent person would exercise in a comparable position and under similar circumstances’. The duty of loyalty is a standard of faithfulness; no trustee can undertake an act or omission that the trustee knows or believes to be against the best interests of the organisation.

The board of trustees is charged with great responsibilities in connection with the external control and accountability of a nonprofit. Therefore, the selection of the people to carry out this function and the setting of the structure of how they will do so is a process that should be undertaken with utmost care as it can be the difference between organisational success and failure.

Tips for board selection and structure

Although the board is responsible for self-management that supports good governance, there are many steps that the group organisers or leaders can take to encourage an effective board.

1. Plan for board and committees

- Prepare a written job description for individual board members.
- Develop an annual schedule of meetings, determined a year in advance.
- Circulate clear and thorough information materials, including an agenda, to all members two to three weeks before each meeting.
- Maintain complete and accurate minutes of all meetings.
- Keep meetings brief and well focussed. Stimulate the broadest possible participation by members.
- Ask each board member to serve on at least one board committee or task force.
- Acknowledge members' accomplishments and contributions in a variety of ways in the organisation's newsletter, at meetings or in minutes.

2. Encourage efficient committee work

- Prepare written statements of committee and task force responsibilities, guidelines and goals. Review these organisational documents every one to two years and revise if necessary.
- Make work assignments according to the background, expertise and schedule of each member.
- Distribute tasks among members to encourage full participation without anyone being overloaded.
- Create a system of checks and balances to monitor committee members' work and assure that tasks are completed on schedule.
- Assign an appropriate staff member to work with each committee.

3. Establish a board of appropriate size

The organisation's structure and needs will ultimately determine board size as every board needs a sufficient range of expertise to accomplish the organisation's mission. However, it is important to keep in mind that if a board is too small, its members may be overworked and unproductive, while if a board is too large, every member may not have the opportunity to participate actively.

4. Limit length of board member terms

Although it is not required that there be term limits, many organisations limit members to two consecutive terms and require a hiatus of one year before a board member may be reappointed. To avoid a situation where every two years the entire board makeup changes, an organisation can stagger terms of service so that one half or one third of the board are elected every one or two years for terms of two to four years. Such policies encourage a continuous inflow of fresh perspectives that can help an organisation maintain and, when necessary, adjust its mission, while still allowing the board to profit from the experience of veteran board members.

5. Establish committees and task forces

Boards generally accomplish a great portion of their work through committees and task forces. With the exception of an executive committee, which acts on the board's behalf, committees recommend action to the full board for discussion and action. Most boards need only a few standing committees as the rest of the work can be accomplished by task forces created for a specific purpose. Typical standing committees are governance, audit, finance and executive committees. Each board member should serve on at least one but preferably no more than two committees or task forces. Members are appointed by the chairperson (in consultation with the governance committee, if any). Committee size depends on the needs of the board and the organisation and a common sense assessment of how many people are needed to carry out the committee's work. The chairperson should make committee assignments based on the experience, skills, interests and available time of the various board members. Each member must make a serious commitment to participate actively in the work of the committee. As they are only recommending actions, board committees may include staff people who are not board members.

6. Decide whether chief executive should be board member

Some non-profits decide to make the chief staff executive a member of the board, sometimes voting and sometimes nonvoting. This decision should be made carefully. Board membership may be a good idea if it enhances the executive's position of authority within the organisation and strengthens the working partnership between the board and the executive. On the other hand, board membership may blur the distinction between the board's responsibilities and the executive's responsibilities and makes it difficult for the board to assess the executive's performance objectively. Whatever the executive's official status, his or her insights into the daily operations of the organisation are essential to decision-making by the board.

7. Clarify individual responsibilities

- Attend all board and committee meetings and functions, such as special events.
- Be informed about the organisation's mission, services, policies, and programs.
- Review agenda and supporting materials prior to board and committee meetings.
- Serve on committees or task forces and offer to take on special assignments.
- Make a personal financial contribution to the organisation.
- Inform others about the organisation.
- Suggest possible nominees to the board who can make significant contributions to the work of the board and the organisation.
- Keep up-to-date on developments in the organisation's field.
- Follow conflict of interest and confidentiality policies.

- Refrain from making special requests of the staff.
- Assist the board in carrying out its fiduciary responsibilities, such as reviewing the organisation's annual financial statements.

8. Consider professional and personal backgrounds

Board members should be selected based on professional skills and personal characteristics. Depending on the issue that your organisation seeks to address, it will be helpful to have board members with a variety of expertise (e.g. planners and bankers for an organisation focussing on community redevelopment or doctors and educators for an organisation focussing on child health care programs). Another important consideration for community development organisations is the location and background of potential board members. Will the person be available for in person meetings? Are they familiar with the characteristics and stakeholders of the community? Some formal designations that organisations can seek such as HUD’s Community Development Housing Organizations require a certain percentage of the board of directors be from the community.

Finally, personal interaction characteristics are important. Organisations should seek board members with the ability to think clearly and creatively and work well with people individually and in a group. Good board members are willing to prepare for and attend meetings, participate actively, take responsibility and follow through on a given assignment. Depending on their circumstances, they are willing to contribute personal and financial resources and open doors in the community, and they are willing to develop knowledge or skills that they are lacking (e.g. knowledge about a substantive program area of the organisation or fundraising skills). The above translate into characteristics that may seem ‘fuzzy’ (honesty, sensitivity to differing views, community-building skills, personal integrity, concern for your nonprofit's development, a sense of humor), but are important considering that this group of people will have the ability to set the tone and control the direction of the organisation.

9. Board manual

Before accepting a commitment from someone to become a board member, be sure that they understand what their responsibilities will be. A board manual is an indispensable tool to orient new members and to provide an ongoing resource guide for veteran members. An easy to use but comprehensive manual should be developed by the staff in consultation with board members to ensure that it is both informative and useful and updated frequently. This manual should not overwhelm new board members with too much information (each item should be brief), and it should be used as a ‘textbook’ during board orientation. In addition, board members should periodically evaluate the usefulness of the manual.

Suggested board manual contents
Mission and vision statement
Brief written history and/or fact sheet
Strategic framework or plan
Current annual operating plan
Board members, biographies and terms
Statement of responsibilities
Committee and task force descriptions
Minutes from recent board meetings
Articles of Incorporation and bylaws
IRS determination letter
Listing of past board members
Board policies (conflicts of interest, insurance, expenses, etc.)
Reports (Prior-year annual, most recent audit, special)
Current annual budget
Banking resolutions
Investment policy
Current donor list
Organisation chart/staff list
Annual calendar
Web site information
Promotional material (membership brochure, advertisements, etc.)

IV. Mobilising communities

Plan into action (reaching consensus)

Mobilising your community to action requires a sustained effort at: a) building on the lessons learned in facing your community's issues; b) reaching agreement on the best way to resolve those issues; c) using the organisation that you have structured to form those goals into an action plan; and d) garnering the necessary resources to implement the plan. Then begins implementation. Since people often want to take actions towards solving their problem immediately, it can be difficult to convince them of the necessity of discussion, planning and reaching consensus, however it is only after consensus on goals has been reached that it makes sense to identify the actions necessary to achieve those goals. And creating an agenda for those actions, an 'action agenda' or 'action plan', is critical to moving forward. Such an agenda functions as a schedule, a reminder of past decisions and an identifier of roles all at once. Reaching consensus and putting that into an action plan for moving forward is no small task. However, the more attention that your group has paid to the details of the first three stages, the easier this fourth stage will be.

During the process of facing issues and identifying community assets, you will probably discover that different stakeholders, whether individuals or otherwise, have differing views on the threat posed by the problems and how those problems might be best resolved. Part of community development is understanding the various views that exist on issues that a community is facing, and using an open process in which all community stakeholders can voice their perspective to develop a response that reflects these complexities as much as possible. This takes time, but the outcome is one where people feel ownership of the process and are committed to seeing a successful completion of work planned. Consensus building is a decision-making process that is vital to such an effort.

Reaching consensus requires a longer time-frame than many other forms of decision-making, and is therefore not the method of choice if one is facing an emergency situation. It requires constructive participation and therefore research on issues and perspectives. Reaching consensus does not mean that the goals decided upon will be everyone's ideal, however, it does mean that the resulting goals will be ones that everyone can live with. In an arena such as community development where the community is ultimately responsible for implementation and ongoing management decisions, reaching consensus can mean that stakeholders will be less likely to block implementation, as they will understand that the plan reflects their input.

Consensus building gatherings

With the assistance of an unbiased facilitator or mediator, groups can use various gathering tools to bring people together to express their ideas, clarify areas of agreement and disagreement and to develop shared solutions. If the expected turnout is large enough, groups should consider breaking out into smaller groups with several facilitators present.

Workshops — Workshops are a combination of presentations and interactive sessions. Whether they last for a few hours or several days, workshops imply real work. They should begin with instruction or training on what is to be accomplished and how information will be generated and recorded. Research and background information on the topic should be shared at this point, along with the rationale behind the workshop. Breakout groups should be no larger than 15 persons and each should have a facilitator. A successful workshop requires preparation. It is an excellent tool to develop consensus at the beginning of a project or to disseminate information and determine next steps accordingly during the course of a project.

Meetings — Meetings are structured gatherings where a defined group of people come together with a specific agenda. The participants should understand from the beginning whether a final decision is to be made and if so how (by consensus, vote or otherwise). Meetings should not last longer than 90 minutes without breaks and should always have a facilitator and a wrap up.

Open space — A participant-driven technique without agendas, scheduled speakers or limitations on discussion, this tool for gatherings can stimulate energy around an issue and is useful for getting participants to drop pretenses and express what matters to them most. It is not suggested if you face a critical deadline or if the participants would be made up mostly of two opposing groups.

Charrettes — A charrette is an intensive brainstorming session during which participants sketch and illustrate their ideas for planning and design solutions and present them for repeated review and comment to the community. Generally, a charrette occurs over several days and takes place at the locale of the issue. It is an opportunity to bring together experts in a particular field to develop a consensus on how to address a particular natural or cultural resource. Because of the tremendous planning and design entailed, the participation of committed volunteers and skilled professionals is critical to a successful charrette. This is a great tool for energising the community and building commitment to a resource and can be used to launch your project.

When planning a gathering to generate consensus, it is important to reach out to the different community stakeholders and interest groups to convince them to participate. The various local sectors should be considered, including:

- business
- health
- education
- faith-based institutions
- residents
- existing nonprofit social/quality of life agencies
- recreational block associations
- police department
- fire department
- city administration
- city council.

In some cases, particularly with key stakeholders and anchor institutions, this may require a one-on-one meeting. In others, you may wish to ask to speak on your issues at a particular forum, such as a church. Use this as an opportunity to research and set an agenda that will allow for all concerns around the issue to be discussed and that makes it clear that the objective is to come to a group decision on common goals in resolving the issue. If the issue involves technical details, do not hesitate to reach out to people who are experts and include time in the agenda for them to share their particular knowledge.

Since the actual gathering can be of any size, the expected size will be a major factor in selecting the meeting place. However, it is also important to hold the gathering at a neutral space (i.e. not in the space of an agency that represents one strong view) and at convenient times, such as non-holiday weekends. Be sure to give adequate notice of the meeting, whether by phone, email invitations or simply public notices.

Decision-making tools for consensus building

Defining issues — Gather information systematically regarding opportunities, threats and challenges that currently face a resource. Bring together a group of people with diverse interests for brainstorming and focus groups, use key informant interviews, send out surveys and collect articles. Try to capture the issues into statements and do further research to thoroughly understand the possibilities. Then prioritise the issues based on potential impact and feasibility of resolution.

Goal setting — With a set group of people and a facilitator, brainstorm and document participants' needs, desires and concerns. Work on turning the negative statements to positive ones and on refining themes. For each theme, generate statements that express realistic hopes for achievement, in other words, short-term and long-term goals. Review the goals with the group as a whole until everyone is comfortable with what is being stated and how.

Vision creating — When there are many issues to be addressed in a particular area, this is a process that can be used to articulate and define a desired future for the area. Ask group of key stakeholders to develop common statement of what they value most and what they would like to see improved in their community based on actual knowledge of resources. To improve the likelihood of broad support among the community at large, the group of stakeholders should represent diverse interests.

Once the meeting is underway, follow the agreed upon agenda. It can be helpful to post the agenda and the meeting's objectives on a wall so that the facilitator can refer back to these when people appear to move off track. Since a key to consensus building is that everyone be heard, it is important to keep track of key statements. Using flip charts or overhead projectors that all can see are a great way to do this, and will assist you in preparing and distributing the notes from the meeting to all participants. At the end of the meeting and in these notes, it is important to summarise what happened and to agree upon next steps. Reaching consensus can often require more than one meeting and additional research on particular issues in between, so to keep the process moving to that end it is important to clearly and firmly state when the next meeting will be, what is to be accomplished before then and what will be its objectives.

Moving forward

Once you have a consensus as to the goals that the community wishes to achieve and you have people in place who are ready to act in the form of your organisation, it is time for the action plan and moving forward. An action plan is a summary document that breaks down into steps what will be accomplished, by whom, how and when. If you are still engaged in a comprehensive planning process or in establishing your organisation and activity cannot realistically be accomplished for several months, then it is not time for action plan. An action plan should be thorough, concise and targeted to generate understanding and enthusiasm in the people who will be taking the actions.

> **Action planning**
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> The purpose of an action plan is to provide a comprehensive view of scheduled proposed actions that reminds participants of past decisions and agreed upon goals. Usually presented in a table or chart format, it should give just enough information and guidance to start people working. Although you can organise an action plan in different ways (e.g., around dates, geography, priorities, personnel or topics), each step of the plan should clearly define:
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> - What — Name or short description of the action to be taken
> - Who — Names of individual responsible for action and anyone else involved
> - When — Deadline or projected completion date for action to be taken by
> - How — Identifies incremental tasks and resources necessary for completing the action.

The 'how' of the action plan is the launch pad for actual mobilisation. This is where the people of your organisation and/or volunteers will find the direction they need to begin working. It requires identifying the needs of the action whether they are additional funds, additional volunteers and/or expert assistance. For example, the action may require application for grants or other assistance from foundations, government agencies or other anchor institutions. Once the action plan has been generated, the identified people can now break out to begin implementation, using the plan as their guide. The individuals or smaller groups should report back to the larger group at future meetings, at which times they can review their accomplishments in light of the overall goals and deadlines.

When motivating people, it is important to provide continuous reminders of the agreed upon goals that were decided upon by the consensus and of the actions necessary to achieve those. To that end, it can be inspiring to include a short background of the organisation, its mission or vision and the goal statements in the actual written action plan. Going back to these at future meetings and giving people the opportunity to reflect periodically upon the starting point will help them see the progress that their actions have contributed to.

V. Keeping the momentum

Organisational sustainability

One common problem in community development is maintaining momentum through the completion of the organisation's objectives. This is the problem of organisational sustainability. Whether due to the departure of an initial leader or a falling apart of key partnerships, many groups lose traction and find themselves dissolving before successfully reaching their goals. There are several actions or processes that a group can implement to help avoid or confront this problem. These actions can be broken into two general categories: nurturing relationships and employing administrative systems.

Nurturing relationships with and leveraging resources

If you have successfully started your organisation and the organisation is already working towards its objectives, chances are you already know how to nurture relationships with potential resources. An important key to keeping the momentum of your organisation and its work going is building on those existing relationships and continuing to develop new ones.

Where you have existing relationships with resource providers, whether they are financial, advisory, technical assistance or in kind service providers, it is critical to keep these ‘partners’ informed and up to date on your activities, your accomplishments and your needs. Continuing the organisational relationships with the government agencies, foundations and anchor institutions that helped the organisation come into being will go a long way to keeping the organisation on track to its objectives. One way to do this is to invite participation on your board of trustees. This is the most direct form of involvement and is ideal if the partner has employees who have the time and the focus to participate actively on your board. Whether or not this is possible, you should also seek to have periodic one-on-one meetings with these resource providers, to be sure that they continue to understand that they are important to the organisation. These one-on-one meetings are a great opportunity to voice newly identified needs that your organisation may have. Even if your existing partner cannot meet such a need, they may be able to point you in the direction of other potential resources. Another method is to send out a newsletter, whether by email or regular mail, that gives the highlights of current accomplishments and planned activities. This newsletter should provide an up to date list of your board of trustees and times and locations of any future public speaking that your organisation will be participating in. This newsletter should be sent to all partners and potential partners, including all the anchor institutions in your community; interested government agencies, individuals and businesses; and targeted foundations, technical assistance providers and community development intermediaries.

With respect to leveraging the existing resources and developing relationships with new ones, it is important to manage the organisation’s external image in a way that builds on its credibility, advertises its strengths (particularly key staff, partners and political support), reflects a continued focus on its goals and shares its successes. While a targeted newsletter can do some of these things, newsworthy announcements that indicate the participation of strong partners or the support of particular politicians are also good tools. These should be tied to significant milestones. In addition, maintaining a website that is informative, easily navigable and shows off the organisation’s work can bring your organisation to the attention of potential partners.

Resources and important partners are not only anchor institutions, foundations, etc.; networking with similar organisations will continue to develop the staff and volunteers' knowledge of the issue(s) they face and the current work of others facing similar issues. Connecting with a national network will give you insight into how your issue is handled in other regions. Many networks are developed around topic areas. Access and exposure to topical networks can be gained by attendance at conferences that are often organised by foundations, nonprofits or higher education institutions. Other networks are arranged around locales, where a government agency or nonprofit may formally or informally track and provide information on interested groups. There are also networks organised by community development intermediaries, technical assistance providers or a particular financial resource. Involvement in these last networks, where the intermediary, technical assistance provider and/or foundation actually provides your organisation with services or funds, generally requires a more formal relationship and possibly reporting requirements.

Identifying neighbourhood resources

In community development, the community resources are obviously of special significance, whether they are local businesses, skilled individuals, philanthropists, higher education institutions or other anchor institutions. The following are some tips for identifying neighbourhood resources that will enrich and sustain the organisation:

Know local events — Even if they do not seem significant to your issue(s), it is important to keep up to date on significant area events as these may provide opportunities for new partnerships or other synergies.

Contact local leaders — Make sure local leaders are invited to and involved in the organisation's critical planning processes and significant milestone events.

Reach out to key stakeholders — Regardless of whether they are current partners, the organisation should continue to periodically approach the key stakeholders and community assets identified in the first steps of the community development process.

Diversify input — Whether through participation on the board of trustees, other volunteer activities or in the organisation itself, to the extent possible the organisation should be informed by diverse (economic, social and/or political) viewpoints.

Publicise activities and achievements — After the initial fanfare around the organisation's beginning, the community should continue to be informed about the organisation's activities and achievements, for example, through articles in local newspapers.

Administrative systems

The difference between a loose affiliation of likeminded individuals held together for a moment by a particular leader or event but ultimately unable to achieve its objectives and a sustainable organisation that is able to reach its objectives through several leaders and events is often the implementation of administrative systems. Community development projects take time, generally more time than projects in the private sector, and it must be expected that people will come and go for various reasons during the course of the organisation's lifespan. Similarly, no one should expect that the support of any one external partner will continue indefinitely. Many organisations do not have succession plans and are then devastated when a particular person, often the executive director, leaves their post. They are sometimes even more surprised when a particular foundation ceases to fund. Although they may seem boring, administrative systems should be implemented and honored. The employment of various administrative systems can give an organisation the internal structure necessary to survive these transitions.

Administrative systems in any organisation should include systems for: (1) management of human resources; (2) business and finance; and (3) information. Implementation of systems in these three areas can produce an organisational structure with reduced costs, increased productivity and enhanced internal and external accountability. While the sophistication of the systems used for each organisation should depend on the organisation's needs and capacity, the actual use of such systems should be considered critical. Depending on the size of the organisation, such systems can be managed by teams or be the responsibility of one individual. However, it is important that there be one staff person responsible for reporting on the functioning of each system and a corresponding board committee to report to. As your organisation strengthens this policy and process should be documented in a personnel procedures and office policy manual.

An administrative system for human resources management should include a formal process for hiring employees, an explanation of the hierarchy of the flow of decision-making power and a detailed policy of the process in the event of a leadership change. Utilising such a system from the start decreases the amount of organisational energy that must be expended each time a staff person or leader departs while increasing transparency and accountability with respect to roles and decision-making.

Changing leaders

Although losing a leader can be disruptive to a group, it does not have to be destructive. The organisation's board and key staff must work together to smooth this transition. These are some provisions that can ease the transition from one executive director to the next:

- Assess interim executive management needs and priorities.
- Select an interim executive director who has good working knowledge and existing relationship with organisation.
- Provide support system for both the interim executive director and the board throughout the interim period.
- Work with board to plan and develop executive job description, search strategies, hiring processes and selection criteria.
- Develop and implement staff and board strategies to support the transition to new permanent leadership.
- Hold a staff retreat to reiterate mission and to communicate any future changes.

A system for organising and managing the business and finance activities of the organisation is important for reporting purposes, both with regard to taxes and supporters. Foundations, banks and other sources of financial (or other) support will all require some degree of financial reporting. Further, accounting for funds received and expended is necessary both for maintaining nonprofit status and for good project management. Projects can fail easily due to mismanaged funds, whether intentional or unintentional. A business and finance administrative system will allow the organisation to keep track of its financial state. This will help to ensure that its funding stream is adequate and diverse or, if it is not, that the organisation's leaders have a chance to try to correct the situation.

Finally, with respect to information management, investment in an information technology based administrative system may seem expensive, but it will increase efficiency and reduce costs in the long run. When considering the creation and management of mailing and other distribution lists; the maintenance of databases of partners, potential partners, key stakeholders, local leaders and staff contacts; and the production of a newsletter or other informational material, a well researched information management system will reduce staff time considerably. Further, this system can be tied into the development of an external website and an intranet for internal communication. Often, in the informal stage of a group, such a system is not necessary and many of these tasks are accomplished by volunteers. As an organisation develops and looks to developing organisational sustainability independent of any one individual's knowledge, it is then that it becomes important to develop the organisation's own information warehouse. This way, even as staff members or leaders move on, the knowledge related to their role remains.

Even where existing resources are so limited that implementing such systems is not feasible, an organisation should strive to work as if preparing for their eventual implementation. There are simple things that can be done manually to help. Staff should be organised, keep copies of correspondence and documents in labeled files and maintain an office calendar of key deadlines, meetings, speaking events and staff availability.

Resources

Initially, this paper contained a section on resources specific to New Jersey. For this conference on Engaging Communities, we have summarised this information into some general suggestions as to organisation and institution types that an individual or a group interested in community change can reach out to, in any region. If you know of a community development issue in your neighbourhood, then there are a number of resources that you can go to for assistance in understanding the issue and assessing the existing strengths of your community that can be marshalled to address it.

- *Non-profits/non-governmental organisation* — Independent, non-partisan organisations devoted to research, analysis and/or education around public policy issues. These organisations generally focus on specific topic areas, for example, environment, economics, health, foreign policy or governance.
- *Government agencies/politicians* — Many government agencies (federal, state or local) administer or sponsor economic development, affordable housing or other programs that can bring resources and expertise to your neighbourhood.
- *Foundations* — Private, grant-making institutions that generally have a special interest in particular topics or areas. Many foundations conduct an annual grant application review, and some may do this on an invitation only basis.
- *Universities and other educational institutions* — Through professor or student interest, educational institutions can and have played a critical part in helping neighbourhoods identify, analyse and address the issues they face.
- *Networks or associations* — Non-profit agencies or NGOs working collaboratively; these groups often have existing model programs and/or provide assistance to develop local programs.
- *Topic-specific informational websites* — In the United States, these are great sources of information on best practices, online discussions, research results and more on affordable housing and community development topics.
- *Intermediaries/thinktanks* — These entities are funded by the government, foundations and/or financial institutions, and may provide program-based technical assistance, grants, loans and/or equity investments for economic development, affordable housing and neighbourhood redevelopment, among other things.
- *Legal services/pro bono projects* — With varying sources of support, these organisations/projects can offer assistance in formalising the structure of one's organisation as well as connect neighbourhood groups to legal experts and other attorneys interested in working on certain public interest issues.
- *Community development financial institutions/regional development banks or loan funds* — These are often non-profit financial institutions or loan funds administered by non-profits targeting a specific development need in a particular region. These financing sources are often experienced with working with non-profits and may provide more flexible terms than traditional banks.
- *For-profit corporations/financial institutions* — Privately or publicly owned, businesses and banks are often interested in improving the areas in which they are located and increasing good will and visibility in the markets that they sell to. They are a potential source of volunteers and/or financial resources, and, in the United States, often have departments devoted to 'public affairs' or 'community outreach'.