Young
People
Creating
Community
Change

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Assessing Community Strengths and Needs

What are the strengths and needs of your community? You may already have answers to this question, but what if the information is incomplete or people have different perspectives?

You can gather your own information! Young people often get information from adults who tell them what they need without involving them in the process. By assessing the needs of young people in this way, adults often emphasize their deficits rather than their strengths, and youth accept these negative definitions of themselves. However, when young people assess themselves, they can raise their consciousness and provide a basis for change.

Assessing Your Community
Bring people together to discuss the following questions:
1. How would you describe your community?
2. What are its major strengths?
3. What needs to be changed?

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Taking Another Look

1. How many squares do you see?
   Write your answer here:
2. Compare your answer with other people.
3. Is there a single correct answer?
   Or do different people see the same thing in different ways?
4. What are the lessons of this puzzle for assessing the community? If people differ in their views of the same community, isn't it time for them to take another look?

From: Lida E. Atkinson, The Winning Team:
Ways of Assessing

Here are some ways of assessing community strengths and needs. Check the ones that are best for you, and discuss your answers with others in your group.

☐ Observations – in places where people meet, such as school cafeterias and community centers.
☐ Interviews – with key individuals who have information and ideas.
☐ Group meetings – that bring people together to discuss their interests and issues.
☐ Surveys – with questions for people to answer in writing or in person.
☐ Written materials – from local agencies, newspaper articles, or other publications.
☐ Others – (please specify)
What Do You Want To Accomplish?

What, in the long haul, do you want to accomplish? What are the ultimate ends you seek?

"Goals" are broad statements of purpose, and describe what you want to accomplish over time. They express your values, show what you really care about, and provide direction for the actions you will take.

Young people - more than many other groups - benefit greatly from a discussion of their goals. Often the goals expressed by youth are the ones given to them by their parents, teachers, or adult authorities. These goals may be a form of adult caring, but they do not come from young people themselves. When young people set their own goals, it can awaken their spirit, strengthen their solidarity, and move them into action.

Here are some examples of goals expressed by young people:

- "We believe that young people should have more power in the community."
- "The youth coalition wants all young people to live in a safe environment."
- "Our goal is to rebuild the neighborhood and help people who are homeless."
- "We are trying to fight discrimination in the schools."

Clear Goals are Vital

"Unity, commitment, and energy all grow strikingly in a group when there is a clear goal that all believe in."


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What Do You Want To Accomplish?

In a few words, write your goal:


Goals – are broad statements of purpose.

Objectives – are statements of purpose that are specific and achievable in a period of time.

Tasks – are particular activities that can be put in order and scheduled on a timetable.

These three concepts – goals, objectives, and tasks – can be conceived as a “family” with relationships among them. Here are some examples:

**Goal:** We believe that young people should participate in the educational decisions of the community.

**Objective:** Three young people should annually serve as full voting members of the school board starting January.

**Tasks:**

Task 1: Make contact with John and Mrs. Smith.
Task 2: Schedule a small group meeting in February.
Task 3: Research the legal issues.
Task 4: Identify who has authority to make change.
Task 5: Speak with key people to get their support.
Task 6: Write a letter to the editor of the newspaper.
Task 7: Go to the school board and present a specific proposal.

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Statements of Purpose

Write your goal, two objectives for the goal, and some tasks for each objective:

Goal:

Objective:

Task:
Task:
Task:
Objective:

Task:
Task:
Task:
Brainstorming - encourages a group of people to generate as many ideas as possible without pausing for elaboration or evaluation that could frustrate the process. The theory is that one idea will flow from another, especially when people put their heads together and defer judgments until later.

**Rules of Brainstorming**

1. Clearly state the purpose or problem to be solved.
2. Generate as many ideas as possible, each person giving one at a time or building on the ideas of others. Go for quantity. Anything goes.
3. Save your judgments until a later time. Accept all ideas.
4. Write down every idea.
5. Following brainstorming, categorize or prioritize the ideas as a separate stage of the process.

**Brainstorming List**

Write your goal:

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Write your program ideas for this goal:

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3. Round Robin - brings people together to take turns and offer one idea at a time without discussion until all the ideas are posted on large pieces of paper. This process is more formal than brainstorming, but usually generates a large number of ideas.

Round Robin Rules

1. Assemble your group in a circle.
2. Clearly state the purpose or problem to be solved.
3. Ask each person to list as many ideas as possible, individually and silently, on paper for a few minutes.
4. Go around the group for each person to briefly give one idea at a time from his or her list, without discussion.
5. Post all the ideas on large newsprint paper.
6. After posting all ideas, discuss or clarify them as appropriate.
7. Categorize or prioritize the ideas.

Round Robin List

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<th>Write your goal:</th>
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<th>Write your program ideas here:</th>
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Establishing Relationships

How can you establish relationships with influentials?
Who can make personal contact and sensitize them to the issues?

Which person in your community has strong support from others?
What does he or she do to build support?

Force-Field Analysis

"Force-field analysis" provides a summary of which forces will facilitate or limit your progress toward the goal, and what can be done to address them.

1. Write your goal at the top of a piece of paper, like that on the following page.
2. Under the minus (-) column, list the forces that will limit your progress toward the goal.
3. Under the plus (+) column, list the forces that will facilitate your progress toward the goal.
4. Underline the 2 or 3 limiting and facilitating forces that you think are most important and that you can do something about.
5. For each underlined limiting force, list some specific steps you could take to reduce or eliminate it.
6. For each underlined facilitating force, list some specific steps you could take to increase it.
7. Compile your list of steps, put them in priority order, and use them to plan for implementation.
Getting the Resources You Need

Which resources do you have available, and which ones do you need?

Community change takes resources – including people, time and money. Even the smallest project may begin with people who freely contribute their time, but who later need money for equipment, photocopies, transportation, and telephone calls.

One source of money is inside your group, as when people make donations, pay dues, or hold “grassroots fund raisers,” such as raffles, car washes, or yard sales. These types of fund raisers can give people a sense of ownership and independence to spend their own money in their own way.

Another source of money is outside the group, as when people write proposals to private foundations, public agencies, and other funders. These funding sources are available, but risky for groups that want to remain independent and sustain themselves over time.

Proposal writing is a way to present your ideas so that others will understand what you want to accomplish. There is no single format for proposals, but personal contact with a potential funder will help you learn if special information is required.
Materials and Money

Which resources are available, and which ones are needed?
Materials available


Materials needed


Money available


Money needed


How much total money will you need?
Evaluation

Evaluation is a way of learning from experience. It enables you to step back, take stock, and reflect on your progress.

Evaluation can occur during a project, at the end of a project, or as an ongoing process that provides a continuous source of information on questions like the following:

What are you trying to accomplish?
How well are you doing?
How could you improve the process?

Evaluation has formal and informal methods from which to choose, including (1) individual interviews, (2) group discussions, and (3) written questionnaires. It can be as simple as recalling your group’s purpose and then asking them to assess your progress.

Young people are evaluated extensively by adults, but they rarely are the evaluators of their own projects. Yet democracy says that the people are the best judge of their own ends and means, and young people are no exception.

Evaluation is a way of learning from experience, but the learning process benefits from group discussion and other types of reflection. When experience and reflection are combined, the learning itself becomes a form of community change.

“One way forward, is to take one step back.”

African Proverb

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Evaluation Report

1. What did you want to accomplish?

2. What did you actually do?

3. What were your major accomplishments?

4. What would you do differently next time?

5. What did you learn from the experience?

“Even though we need to have some outline, we make the road by walking. In order to start, it should be necessary to start.”
- Paulo Freire

“I’ve never figured out any other way to start.”
- Myles Horton

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”
- Lao Tzu

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