

Johns Hopkins University Institute for Policy Studies

Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Process

Three Baltimore's Case Studies

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Introduction

Scholars, practitioners, and decision-makers in the public policy field recognize new characteristics of the problems and environment of the public domain. Problems are becoming complex, and the number of persistent public problems grows. New and perplexing qualities include scientific and technical uncertainty, multiple causality and resistance to unilateral solutions.¹ At the same time, the social environment has become turbulent, characterized by rapid and discontinuous change with more shared-power situations, where no one person, group, organization, institution, or sector has complete control over the issue. Instead, multiple actors share resources and responsibility for planning and decision making.

In this situation, traditional approaches to planning have proven ineffective to mobilize all stakeholders and available resources to address complex problems. Planning professionals are searching for holistic approaches with long-term perspectives involving diverse stakeholders to solve persistent problems.

The stakeholders from all three sectors increasingly recognize that their individual success depends on the vitality of the other sectors. No longer can the public and private sectors make highly independent decisions and operate in isolation from each other.² Civil society organizations have surfaced as strategically important participants in the search for a 'middle way' between sole reliance on the market and sole reliance on the state.³ Emerging are public-private partnerships, joint ventures, "collective strategies," and cooperative problem-solving programs that bring together representatives of diverse groups to reach and implement agreements. Creation of a shared vision may become an alternative to higher authority as a guiding force.

In this paper, I describe community visioning and strategic planning approaches increasingly popular among practitioners in United States. Using literature and three Baltimore case studies, I identify main concepts, principles, and key elements of community strategic planning, and create general 'model' applicable in various cultural contexts.

In first part of this paper I introduce fundamental concepts which I believe provide foundations, inspire, and shape community visioning and strategic planning approaches, and I provide the definition and describe general model of the planning process based on these concepts.

In the second part I provide description and analysis of three community visioning and strategic planning cases in Baltimore. For each case study I individually discern key elements of the process, based on the interviews with process participants.

This paper concludes with recognizing general principles and key elements of successful community visioning and strategic planning processes.

PART 1

Concepts Shaping Community Visioning and Strategic Planning

In this chapter I introduce fundamental concepts which I believe provide foundations, inspire, and shape community visioning and strategic planning approaches. By no means it is a complete presentation. The five concepts selected represent values and beliefs of community visioning and strategic planning efforts, or what is today known in the United States as community building. I have selected concepts that are *process* related; I have consciously excluded concepts dealing with the nature of problems addressed in community visioning and strategic planning processes. I have selected the following concepts: Barber's (1984) strong democracy concept, Putnam's (1993) social capital concept, the civic infrastructure concept of the National Civic League (1993), Gray's (1989) collaboration concept, and Bryson's (1984) strategic planning concept. I present them in order from most general to specific, from the broad toward the concrete.

Strong Democracy

Barber's (1984) concept of strong democracy represents main values -- participation, community, citizenship, and public deliberation -- on which community building efforts are explicitly or implicitly built.

According to Barber, a strong democracy rests on the idea of a self-governing community of citizens who are united less by homogeneous interests than by civic education and who are made capable of common purpose and mutual action by virtue of their civic attitudes and participatory institutions rather than their altruistic good nature.⁴

In a strong democracy, politics is something done by, not to, citizens. Politics in a participatory mode is the art of public seeing and of political judgment -- of envisioning a common world in which every member of the community can live. It is the realm of „we will“ rather than of „I want“, and every attempt to reduce its role to the adjudication of interests will not only demean it but will rob it of any possibility of genuine public seeing.⁵

Barber stresses the importance of transforming attitudes of self-interest toward public seeing through participation and creation of a self-governing community. He sees the two terms *participation* and *community* as aspects of one single mode of social being: citizenship. In a strong democracy, citizens participation, public deliberation, and civic education helps develop a politics that can transform conflict into cooperation.

At the heart of strong democracy Barber identifies talk, which fulfills nine functions: articulation of interests -- bargaining and exchange; persuasion; agenda-setting; exploring mutuality; affiliation and affection; maintaining autonomy; witnessing and self-expression; reformulation and reconceptualization; and community-building as the creation of public interests, common goods, and active citizens.

Let me conclude with Barber's definition of a strong democracy. A strong democracy is politics, in the participatory mode where conflict is resolved in the absence of an independent ground through a participatory process of ongoing, proximate self-legislation and the creation of a political community capable of

transforming dependent, private individuals into free citizens and partial and private interests into public goods.⁶

Social Capital

The theoretical work of Robert Putnam made the concept of social capital widespread and popular among scholars and practitioners working in the community field worldwide.

According to Putnam (1995), „social capital“ refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. He argues that networks of civic engagement foster sturdy norms of generalized reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust. Such networks facilitate coordination and communication, amplify reputations, and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved. When economic and political negotiation are embedded in dense networks of social interactions, incentives for opportunism are reduced. At the same time, networks of civic engagement embody past success at collaboration, which can serve as a cultural template for future collaboration. Finally, dense networks of interaction probably broaden the participants' sense of self, developing the „I“ into „we“ or enhancing participants' „taste“ for collective benefits.⁷

Based on empirical research of regional governments established in Italy in 1970, Putnam developed the concept of social capital, which originated in the work of Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman (1980). In his article *The Prosperous Community* (1993), he distinguishes „civic“ and „uncivic“ regions and communities. He provides the following main characteristics of „civic regions.“ Strong traditions of civil engagement -- voter turnout, newspaper readership, membership in choral societies and literary circles, Lions Clubs, and soccer clubs -- are the hallmarks of a civically successful region. Public issues engage citizens in these regions, not patronage. Citizens trust one another to act fairly and obey the law. Leaders in these communities are relatively honest and committed to equality. Social and political networks are organized horizontally, not hierarchically. These „civic communities“ value solidarity, civic participation, and integrity. And here democracy works. At the other pole are „uncivic“ regions. The very concept of citizenship is stunted there. Engagement in social and cultural association is meager. From the point of view of the inhabitants, public affairs is somebody else's business, but not theirs. Law, almost everyone agrees, are made to be broken, but fearing others' lawlessness, everyone demands sterner discipline. Trapped in these interlocking vicious circles, nearly everyone feels powerless, exploited, and unhappy.

Putnam (1993) also acknowledges that social inequalities may be embedded in social capital. Norms and networks that serve some groups may obstruct others, particularly if the norms are discriminatory or the networks socially segregated. Recognizing the importance of social capital in sustaining community life does not exempt us from the need to worry about how that community is defined -- who is inside and thus benefits from social capital, and who is outside and does not.⁸

Civic Infrastructure

Building further on Putnam's (1993) concept of localized and generalized social capital,⁹ the National Civic League (1993) developed the concept of „civic infrastructure.“ A community's „civic infrastructure“ includes formal and informal processes of decision making, public involvement, and civic engagement.¹⁰ Civic infrastructure encompasses more formalized patterns of relations among citizens and community institutions. It includes „public“ mechanisms such as elections, neighborhood councils, or community visioning and „private“ forums such as interfaith church dialogues, negotiations among business leaders, or meetings of concerned parents.

A healthy civic infrastructure is one that creates strong linkages between families, their neighborhoods, and whole communities and provides community members with ample avenues for participation in community life.¹¹

The National Civic League developed the Civic Index,¹² which identifies and provides the tool for testing eleven components of effective civic infrastructure. Organized under four areas, these components are: *community vision*; *new roles for governance in communities* -- citizens, government, business, non-profits; *community functioning* -- working together across diverse lines, reaching consensus, sharing information, crossing jurisdictional lines; and *building capacity on an ongoing basis* - citizen education and community leadership.

Collaboration

The fundamental concept on which community visioning and strategic planning are based is the concept of collaboration. Collaboration can be examined from two main perspectives: as a relationship and as an emerging process.

For collaboration from the relationship perspective, aspects of sharing and mutual benefit become most important. To establish a collaborative relationship, parties need to share values, responsibilities, resources, goals, or a vision. Then, according to Mattessich and Monsey (1992), the collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more parties to achieve common goals.¹³

Collaboration from the process perspective provides an approach for identifying what is and is not shared among parties brought together around an issue domain, for making “sharing” work for all involved, and for addressing the issue. Then, according to Gray (1989), collaboration is a process whereby parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible. The collaboration process involves joint decision making among key stakeholders of a problem domain about the future of that domain.

Crucial Characteristics of the Collaborative Process are:¹⁴

- The stakeholders are interdependent.
- During the process common understanding of problem is developed.
- Process is based on face-to-face dialogue.
- Rules about process and decision making procedures are created and agreed upon by stakeholders.
- Process involves mutual learning/educating of participants.
- Attention is paid to building and maintaining respectful relationships.
- Solutions emerge by dealing constructively with differences.
- Joint ownership of decisions is involved; decisions are made by consensus, when possible.
- Stakeholders assume collective responsibility for the future direction of the domain.
- Collaboration is an emergent process.

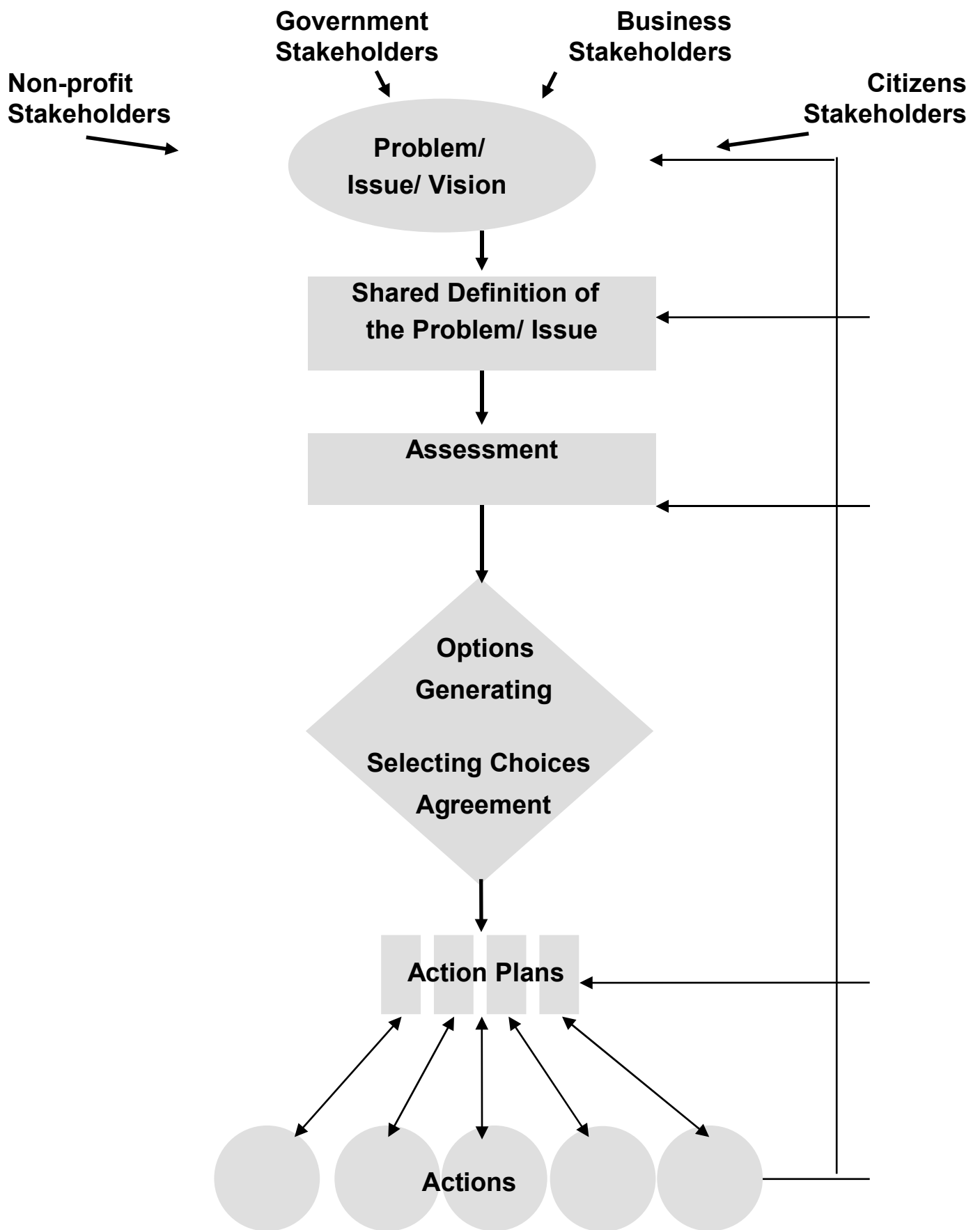


Figure 1: Collaborative planning process

There are three main opportunities for collaboration -- resolving conflicts, mutually beneficial problem solving, and advancing shared vision through planning for the future.

An outline of four main stages of collaborative process follows. Figure 1 provides a model of the collaborative process.

Collaborative process:¹⁵

1. Initiating

- agreeing on preliminary formulation of problem/issue
- identifying problem/ issue stakeholders and process participants (representatives of stakeholders, experts etc.) clarifying roles
- achieving agreement on goal and steps of process

2. Planning and decision making

- achieving shared definition of the problem/ issue
- assessing - exploring the problem/issue, shared understanding of the problem/issue (history, context, interests)
- generating options, alternatives and ideas for addressing the problem/issue
- exploring possibilities (discussing alternatives, advantages and disadvantages)
- narrowing and selecting choices (developing and agreeing on independent criteria); further developing a few possibilities
- circulating plan to constituency groups and public
- approving final version of plan

3. Implementing

- developing detailed implementation/ action plans
- assigning responsibilities
- establishing monitoring mechanism
- conducting actions

4. Monitoring, evaluating and feedback providing

- monitoring and evaluating progress of actions
- adjusting plan when necessary and handling disagreements and non-compliance

The collaborative process is often used interchangeably with the consensus building. Because building consensus is at the heart of both, let me clarify what I mean by consensus in this paper. Consensus is a decision whereby everyone can live with the final agreements without compromising issues of fundamental importance and individuals support the full agreement and not just the parts they like best.¹⁶

Strategic Planning

The final concept that I introduce in this chapter is Bryson's strategic planning concept. He defines strategic planning as a discipline effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization/ community is, what it does, and why it does it. Strategic planning is oriented around identifying and resolving issues, emphasizes assessment of the environment outside and inside the organization/community, often uses „vision of success,“ and is action oriented.¹⁷

Main characteristics of strategic planning are:

- Reliance on identifying and resolving strategic issues, rather than specifying goals and objectives.
- Emphasis on assessment of the environment inside and outside the organization/community.
- Use of „a vision of success.“
- Action orientation -- thinking in alternatives, proactively taking in consideration of political environment and players.

Bryson describes the strategic planning process through eight steps:

1. Initiating and agreeing on a strategic planning process.
2. Identifying organizational mandates.
3. Clarifying organizational mission and values.
4. Assessing the external environment: opportunities and threats.
5. Assessing the internal environment: strengths and weaknesses.
6. Identifying the strategic issues facing an organization.
7. Formulating strategies to manage the issues.
8. Establishing an effective organizational vision for the future.

Acting strategically means building on existing capacities while developing new ones. It assumes that plans are constantly evolving as capacities are discovered and new opportunities reveal themselves. It is the process of reflective learning. The vision embodies shared values and serves to identify strategic issues and direct strategic actions, which moves the community closer to its desired future. Implementing the vision involves identifying actions that are strategic yet achievable.

A shared vision, built collectively by citizens, local government, and other institutions can be the stitching that programmatically and politically links together disconnected initiatives and provides a sense of direction for all of them.¹⁸

Each concept described in this chapter contributed to the community visioning and strategic planning process described in the following chapter in its own way.

Barber's strong democracy provides ideology and values of direct citizen participation in the political life of communities, views the conflict from the perspective of its potentials for transformation toward collaboration and stresses public deliberation as a means for creating a common vision of the community.

Social capital together with civic infrastructure provides a new framework of community politics and governance, pointing out the social capacity of community as a crucial element. They draw attention toward informal and formal networks of civic life, opening it up for new exploration and development. They also provide new perspectives on community capacity and resources.

Concepts of collaboration and strategic planning contribute concrete principles and process structure that are possible to use directly or adapt for community conditions.

Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Process

In this chapter, I introduce the definition and describe the model of community visioning and the strategic planning process. The model is mainly based on the concept developed by John M. Bryson¹⁹ and on the process used by the National Civic League.²⁰

*Community Visioning and Strategic Planning is a process whereby community stakeholders collaboratively imagine a desired future for the community and set strategies to achieve that future. It is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what a community is, what it does, and why it does it.*²¹

The Process emphasizes:

- active citizen participation
- common ground, collaboration, and partnership
- long term planning
- imagination and a sense of possibility
- a vision of success
- assessment of the environment inside and outside the community
- identifying and resolving strategic issues
- an action oriented mode

The model is described through a set of ten steps in logical order. I would like to stress that strategic planning is not a linear, one-way process, but rather is a process built up from different directions at the same time. It is characterized by interconnected circles of planning, implementing and evaluation. The following steps represent key areas that should be addressed during the process and are organized in one possible way.

Ten steps of community visioning and strategic planning are (Figure 2):

- 1. Initiating a process*
- 2. Forming a stakeholder group*
- 3. Assessing the community*
- 4. Public outreach and citizens involvement*
- 5. Creating a community vision*
- 6. Identifying strategic issues*
- 7. Forming strategic issues task forces*
- 8. Developing strategies*
- 9. Implementing plans and actions*
- 10. Monitoring, evaluating and tracking*

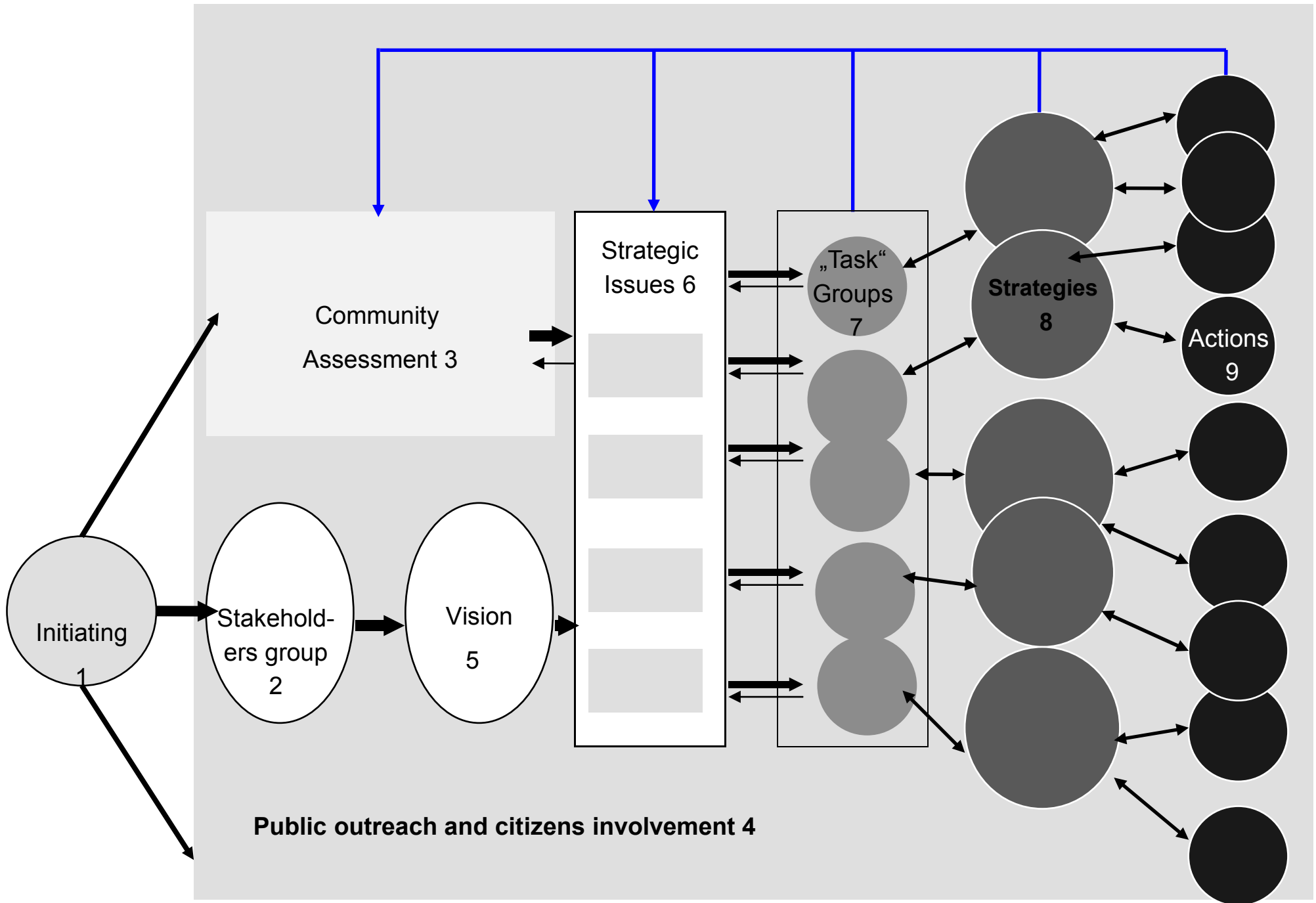


Figure 2: Community strategic planning process

Steps of Community Visioning and the Strategic Planning Process

Step 1: Process Initiating

Triggering of the visioning process depends on the individual situation of the community. In some communities, a respected community leader can start a discussion about community visioning; in others the initiative can come from local government or from an influential non-profit organization. To succeed in initiating a community wide visioning process, it is essential to attain credibility, legitimacy, and political will for conducting the process. In order to achieve this very delicate task a careful construction of the initiating group is very useful.

An initiating group brings together process champions and representatives of the broader community. Very early involvement of the individuals representing diverse interests in the initiating group contributes to the process's credibility, and helps to start community-wide participation. At the same time, individuals embraced by the initiating group need to have substantive knowledge about the community, personal credibility with the community, and the power to get things done. The initiating group requires people who are facilitative leaders, comfortable with collaborative decision making.²²

The initiating group should carry on an initiative in three parallel areas (see Figure 2).

Forming a stakeholder group. The initiating group should formulate the purpose/goal of the process, identify outreach objectives, recruit stakeholders, design and position the process, educate stakeholders about the process, and function as the central point of communication and „process catalysts.“

Starting community assessment. In this area, the initiating group should convene preliminary community and resource assessment.

Starting public outreach. The initiating group should start to disseminate information about the visioning process to the community institutions, leaders, and citizens.

After accomplishing preliminary tasks, the initiating group can transform itself to a coordinating or steering committee.

Step 2: Stakeholder Group Forming

This section deals with the definition of community stakeholders, stakeholders' representation in the process, and the role of the stakeholder group.

A community stakeholder is any group or individual who is affected by or who can affect the future of the community. According to this definition, community stakeholders are: local government, businesses, non-profit organizations, financial institutions and representatives of those institutions, and every citizen living in the area defined as a community.

A stakeholder group needs to include or represent the whole scale of diversity in the community -- race, age, gender, interest, attitudes, etc. Participating stakeholders should be respected by the community, but at the same time, including just the 'usual suspects' should be avoided. It is practical to include stakeholder affiliated with organizations or groups as well as individuals, 'just' citizens, without affiliation with any formal group. A stakeholder group should be empowered by the community, other leaders, and institutions to make decisions.

The main role of the stakeholder group is to serve as a core planning group and promoter of the process in community. To attain stakeholders' commitment to the whole process an initial agreement acknowledged by every stakeholder helps. An initial agreement might include purpose of the effort, definition of community, steps of the planning process, obligations and commitment of stakeholders, preferred decision making procedures, and agreement on the method by which the group will handle power inequalities among stakeholders (it is recommended that there will be no power differences at the table).

It is important that participants are aware that desirable behavior for a successful process is to act as citizens with a stake in the quality of life in the whole community, not simply as representatives of a particular organization or group interest.

The visioning process should encourage the building of new relationships and trust among stakeholders, and between the stakeholder group and community. At this stage, the initiating group should create an environment for open discussion, stimulating diverse perspectives about community issues without ducking the hardest, more controversial issues at this point.

To achieve political will for later implementation, it is important to establish communication channels with diverse stakeholders not participating directly in stakeholder group. Early communication could prevent unnecessary suspicions often resulting from insufficient information. Different methods as well as information are needed for communication with institutions, community groups, community leaders, and citizens.

To form a representative and credible group of stakeholders is one of the most important assignments and milestones during the process.

Step 3: The Community Assessing

Some communities start the visioning and strategic planning process directly with creating of the vision, others prefer to begin with community assessment. Community assessment should give stakeholders answers to two questions: Where are we as a community; and where are we as a community going?

The primary reason for the assessment process is to develop a shared understanding of the community situation. The assessment should be used as a vehicle that builds collaborative relationships among community stakeholders, and between stakeholders and citizens. It is valuable opportunity for learning from each other.

To understand the situation of the community, different levels of information are needed. We can divide community assessment into two main areas: internal and external environment assessment.

External environment assessment provides stakeholders with information about external opportunities and threats that the community is facing and will have to deal with in next years. This includes trends, forces, policies, and national and global realities that have significant impacts on the community. This should also include mapping of external stakeholder and community responsibilities and obligations to them.

Through internal community assessment, stakeholders should understand what are strengths and weaknesses of the community; what kinds of assets and sources are at

the community disposal, and how the community is using them, and what policies, strategies and programs are in operations and with what results.

There are different tools for conducting community assessment; for example, community profile with community indicators,²³ assessment of community assets,²⁴ the civic index,²⁵ or SWOT analysis. The stakeholder group should also decide what kind of process they will use for conducting assessment (appointed task force, search conference with broad public participation, combination, etc.). There are many possibilities to choose from, and stakeholders should take into account what sources and how much time is available, what kind of information is needed, and what process is best suited to the community's current situation as well as to expected next steps in process.

Results of the assessment should be presented to the community in a way that helps generate agreement for change.

Step 4: Public Outreach and Involvement of Citizens

This step includes citizens in the process from very beginning, and keeps them not just informed but involved during whole process. Broad participation will create visibility, political will, and community ownership of the process.

In every community, citizens have experienced decisions made „behind their backs“. And there are many situations and decisions in which it is simply not feasible to incorporate public participation process. Involving citizens into the visioning process helps build participatory political culture and trust in community decision-making processes, and it opens space for participation of citizens willing to contribute to the future of the community. Those listening in from the beginning of the process will support implementation. The method of involving community leaders and citizens will change during the process. In every step, it should mirror its character. It's important to realize different natures and different possibilities for citizens' involvement in divergent (collecting of information, generating ideas and possibilities -- broadening) and convergent (agreeing on definition, choosing solution -- narrowing) stages of the process. It can't be stressed enough that citizens should be involved from the very beginning, long before narrowing possibilities down to choices. For the process's credibility and representativeness, it is important to establish specific communication channels with community groups that don't participate spontaneously in the process.

Step 5: Creating a Community Vision

This step should lead toward a shared vision of success – the desired future of the community.

Vision clarifies what a community should look like and how it should behave as it fulfills its purpose. Vision embodies the tension between what a community wants and what it can have. A vision that motivates people will be challenging enough to spur action, yet not so impossible to achieve that it demotivates and demoralizes people.²⁶

The community vision should be shared and owned by the whole community; so that it is „our“ vision in the inclusive sense. To accomplish this difficult task, it is useful to build on credibility and collaboration established in previous steps. To succeed in this step, the group of stakeholders shall proceed, closely followed by community. The

vision could be created and formulated either by the stakeholder group, with open two-way communication with citizens or through a search conference²⁷ attended by both stakeholders and interested citizens.

Through the visioning process, participants express the values that are important to them. The process translates the individual and collective values into purposes of the community, directions in which it should move, and common interests, which build common ground for actions. Clearly defined vision helps to ensure focus and hope for the future. The vision provides the basis from which the community determines priorities and identifies strategic issues. It sets the stage for what is desirable in the broadest sense. Successful formulation and agreement on vision can serve as a first achievement of the stakeholder group. It is the first possibility to reach crucial consensus and because the task is typically not controversial, it could start to build the hope in the community and inside the stakeholder group that consensus is possible.

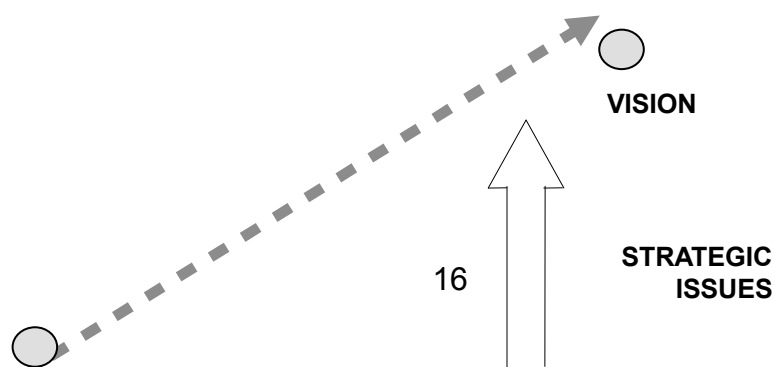
Step 6: Identifying of Strategic Issues

In this stage of the process, the task for the stakeholder group is to recognize issues and areas that should be addressed in order to achieve the desired future of the community.

Identifying strategic issues is different from setting goals. Strategic issue identification is a fundamental policy choice affecting future of the community. Because issues play a central role in political decision making, framing of strategic issues is very important.²⁸ The way in which the issues are framed usually strongly influences their resolution and whether the decision is politically acceptable and technically workable. Typically, because participants are conscious about the importance of the strategic issues, they are fully involved in this stage of the process. Heightened concern and emotion also mean that conflict is inevitable part of this stage. Among stakeholders who represent different views and interests in community, conflict is entirely appropriate and necessary. Creative solutions to problems come only through the acknowledgment of differences and through learning to work through those differences.²⁹ It is through confrontation and advocacy that needs gain currency and legitimacy; in many situations it is confrontation alone that forces the recognition of interdependence.³⁰ Enhanced deliberation about the issues helps to build a basis for collaboration and later acceptance of the group's solution.

To prevent unnecessary conflicts in this stage, discussion should be focused on issues, not solutions. All too often, serious conflicts arise over the solution to problems without any clarity about what the problems are.³¹

Useful tool for identifying strategic issues include Trend Benders (term used by NCL), through which stakeholders can better understand that strategic issues are areas in which it is critical to capture current trends and through strategic actions bend them into the direction of the desired outcomes.



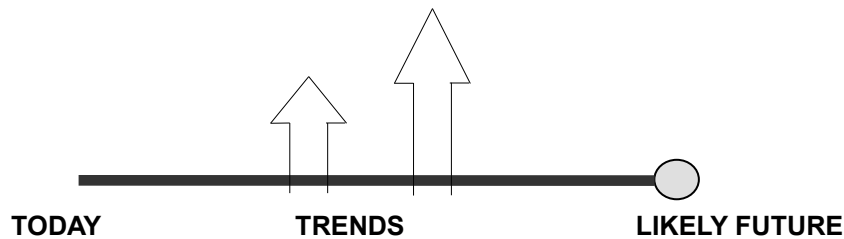


Figure 3 – Trend Benders

A statement of strategic issue should contain three elements.

The issue should be described succinctly, preferably in a single paragraph. The issue itself should be framed as a question that the community can do something about.

- A discussion of the factors that make the issue strategic. The strategic issue identification step is aimed at focusing community attention on what is truly important for the survival, prosperity, and effectiveness of community.
- A brief discussion of the consequences of failure to address the issue.

Framing strategic issues same as creating a vision, decisions should be reached through consensus, not majority rule voting. The goal is to reach agreements that everyone can live with and implement. Collaborative initiatives rely on consensus-based decision making because people participate effectively only when they feel they have real voice in the outcomes.³²

In a manner similar to the visioning process, community residents should closely follow formulation of strategies. There are many available methods (surveys, opinion pools, town meetings, etc.) to enable residents' opinions about strategic issues to be expressed.

Step 7: Forming of Strategic Issues' Task Forces

In this step I propose forming task forces that deal separately with strategic issues. Different issues will follow different paths, depending on individual task force agreements. The stakeholder group should establish a coordinating body (committee) for maintaining communication and coordination between task forces, but responsibility for addressing the issues should be delegated to the independent group.

What are the advantages of using task forces for developing strategies?

- Typically, members of the stakeholder group are interested more in some of the strategic issues than others; they might easily become impatient if they are expected to deal with all of them.
- It's not very likely to reach consensus of the whole stakeholder group in reasonable time about all of the strategies. At the same time, support of the whole group for implementation of the strategies is needed. It's important to address this conflict before creating task forces, for example through agreement about arrangements, relationships and communication among task forces and between task forces and the stakeholder group.

- Usually the community confronts more strategic issues, which should be addressed at the same time. Task forces enable „fighting on different fronts,“ at the same time using broader community capacity. This polycentric strategy increases the probability of success.

- Task forces open the possibility for new ‘issue stakeholders’ and experts to participate and deal in depth with issues.

- Task forces increase flexibility and the possibility for action, as well as experimentation.

A few principles of conducting task forces include:

- To ensure continuity of the process, members of stakeholder group should serve in task forces as well.

- It is useful to have overlapping participants in the task force; they can help to coordinate and cooperate across issues if needed.

- The task force will need time at the beginning to identify with the issue.

- To maintain stakeholders’ and community ownership of the process, meetings for exchange of information, perpetuating broad stakeholders’ approval and support, and celebrating should bring all groups together to appreciate each other work.

Appointing task forces is another crucial milestone during the process.

Step 8: Strategies Developing

Strategies are developed to deal with strategic issues; they outline the community’s response to fundamental policy choices. Strategy is defined as a pattern of purposes, policies, programs, actions, decisions, or resource allocations that specify what a community is, what it does, and why it does it. Effective strategy builds on the strengths and takes advantage of opportunities while it minimizes or overcomes weaknesses and threats.³³

Developing strategies builds further on agreements about community vision and strategic issues. The purpose of this step is not an agreement on one solution or response to the issue; rather it is a process of achieving shared understanding of the issue and building common ground, providing direction for actions. Common ground is not the ground of total agreement or compromise. It is an arena of policies, programs, actions, and decisions -- perhaps diverse programs and actions -- that stakeholders and the community are willing to support.

Also useful for conducting strategic issue is the collaborative process described in the previous chapter. During the process of developing strategies, the task force identifies multiple ways to address issues and solve problems. Some of the proposed solutions will be effective in achieving expected results and getting needed support and resources, but often it’s not possible to distinguish this in the early stages; prior to implementing. Strategies should provide directions for programs and actions, and at the same time ensure enough space for experimenting with new approaches and solutions.

Crucial at this stage is strategy, or better mechanism, of implementation. There are many possible arrangements; the most common one is to establish a non-profit organization or appoint an existing one to carry overall responsibility for implementation of strategies. At the same time retaining the cross-sector, broad-based citizens’ forum is

the most successful approach, as it avoids controversy and keeps the focus on community wide participation.³⁴ I would like to stress that appointing an organization to be responsible for overlooking implementation doesn't necessarily provide a sufficient implementation mechanism. Individual programs and projects can be implemented through diverse avenues; as an improved or new program through existing organization, or through joined effort (e.g. a partnership, or joint venture) of more organizations. To institute a clear governance structure, coordination and a monitoring and tracking mechanism among diverse implementers seems to be more important. This is especially true for efforts in communities with a pre-existing organization with capacity or ambition to carry out specific implementation programs. Strengthening the existing capacity within a community is a useful principle for implementation.

While politics as usually practiced is aimed at establishing new programs and organizations, the objective of a community-wide visioning process is to set in motion a wide array of ongoing civic enterprises. „Enterprises“ refers to a variety of community initiatives and joint ventures that, while diverse, are nonetheless mutually reinforcing because they proceed from a comprehensive vision of the community and its interests.³⁵

Establishing strategies concludes the planning phase of the process. Stakeholders should acknowledge the last milestone of the planning process through convening at a community meeting to summarize what was already done, celebrate and appreciate participants' work as well as outline the continuation of the implementation phase of the process.

Step 9: Implementation of Plans and Actions

In this step, task forces and/or implementation entities prepare implementation plans, design programs, and identify decisions and actions that should be taken to overcome barriers for implementation of individual strategy. Implementation plans should describe individual actions and steps, set timelines, assign responsibilities, estimate cost, allocate resource, and design monitoring and evaluating mechanisms to make plans happen. Implementation of strategic plans is a long-term process. To achieve the desired outcomes in community and retain participation and motivation of involved participants, it helps to know tactics for attaining change. Main principles are summarized in a strategy of indirect approach.

Strategy of the indirect approach³⁶ -- for influencing maximum of territory with minimum of resistance.

1. Always solve at least two problems at once, and do not “put all your eggs in one basket.”
2. Direct effort toward paths of least resistance with the most potential for the future (multiplier effect). ‘Convert’ the undecided and build coalitions with allies.
3. When resistance is too strong, pull out. Learning doesn't disappear - acknowledge the change in phases and adjust accordingly.
4. Go around or encapsulate sources of resistance - work from the top down, bottom up.
5. Encircle from within - work from the middle outward.

6. Victory and failure are relative, depending upon the context. A field needs constant reevaluation while one moves within it. You may have to shift or sacrifice some efforts and reassess priorities. Encourage monitoring and evaluation to learn about how you are doing.

Step 10: Monitoring, Evaluating and Tracking

Visioning and strategic planning is a process for long term implementation. Strategies are often design to achieve results after years. A well-designed monitoring and evaluation mechanism should provide feedback for the implementers to identify successes and failures as well as changes in environment. A tracking mechanism should enable implementer to respond to the changes through adjusting of plans.

These are three primary levels for active, ongoing monitoring and tracking:

1. Level of strategies and implementation programs. Ensuring follow-through on implementation of programs, plans and policy recommendations, monitoring whether programs and projects are reaching desired outcomes, and evaluating how these are fulfilling the primary strategy.
2. Level of strategic issues. Assuring that developed strategies are successfully addressing the original strategic issues.
3. Level of vision; revisiting vision -- strategic issue relationships, monitor whether issues are still strategic.

Summary of Baltimore Case Studies

In Baltimore I studied three cases of community visioning and strategic planning processes: the Operation ReachOut-SouthWest, the Greater Homewood Renaissance, and the Howard County - A United Vision. This chapter describes the methodology of the research, provides summary and comparison of case studies, and abstracts key elements of community visioning and strategic planning process.

Methodology

Because studied processes are in the early stages of development, this research is primarily a process assessment that describes steps and methods applied in individual processes and accuracy of these methods for achieving explicitly stated or implicit goals of the planning and early implementation stages. It reviews the underlying logic and initiators' ambitions behind the process design; describes the structures, methods and activities of the process; and compares the actual planning process and implementation with process goals. Individual case studies also introduce main factors affecting process development such as community context, main stakeholders in the process and participants reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983) on the process and its implication for future of the process. This process assessment seeks to contribute to the understanding of the dynamic of community visioning and strategic planning process and tentatively abstracts key elements of the process applicable in diverse community contexts.

This study draws upon Drucker's (1990) recommendations for measuring project performance and impact. He suggests four principles for impact evaluation that respond to the limitation of traditional quantitative approach:

1. Performance must be determined and interpreted contextually
2. Questions rather than hypothesis should form the base of the assessment approach
3. Assessment criteria should be drawn from the various project stakeholders
4. The process of project assessment should be inclusive and participatory

Study provides an interpretive analysis of how the processes are viewed and experienced by various participants -- initiators, community stakeholders, facilitators and residents. Structure and effectiveness of processes were assessed mainly through analysis of different participants' self-reports from written materials and from the interviews, and through researcher observations of process meetings. It seeks to create a mosaic image of the process based on the assessments of various participants and the researcher.

Working within the qualitative paradigm, this study is holistic in seeking to understand the process in its entirety; inductive that it begins with observations and moves toward the development of general patterns that emerge; and naturalistic that it investigates each individual process rooted in its unique, real world environment. I was interested in the meanings that the various stakeholders have constructed about their efforts. This study looks at their characterizations, understandings, evaluations, and expectations from the process and attempts to inductively discover, and tentatively describe key elements of community visioning and strategic planning process.

Baltimore Case Studies

All three cases, which I have studied in Baltimore, differ in many ways. Main differences are outlined in the Table 1. They are placed in different community context, they vary in the size of the community and accordingly in the size of the process, in initiating motivations, process structure and emphasis, and in stage of the process. Despite these differences there are also overlaps. All processes created (or intend to create) vision of their community, developed strategies and individual projects leading to actions. All processes involved residents to participate directly in identifying and prioritizing issues, and all, although in different ways, involved community stakeholders.

Based on interviews with participants of three Baltimore's processes and on literature, similar studies, programs evaluations and published case studies I have identified following key elements, which I believe can be applied in diverse cultural and community contexts.

Key elements

Participation

In a visioning and strategic planning process authority for decisions and actions comes from the ability of participants to successfully build consensus among individual residents, organizations, and institutions in the community as well as from their capacity to sponsor actions. For that reason participants in the process should include individuals with an access to diverse resources, with interests cutting across a variety of areas, and representing the diversity of the community in all possible ways. In practice it means involving representatives of organizations and institutions from all sectors as well as individual residents.

To enable community acceptance of the process, community-wide consensus, and assure subsequent actions, following principles of participation should be applied:

- *Broad, inclusive, and open participation in the process* -- active participation open to a broad range and large number of ordinary persons, citizens (Brian, 1998; Chrislip, 1995).
- *Early involvement and support from local stakeholders* enabling legitimization of the visioning process in the community.
- *Representative participation* (Mattessich, Monsey, Roy, 1997) -- representing the diversity of the community in all possible ways.
- *Continuous participation* (Mattessich, Monsey, Roy, 1997) -- building constituency committed to a long-term effort, and constant recruitment of new participants to sustain representativeness of participants. Effective way to achieve representative and continuous participation in the process is to build the stakeholder group committed a long-term participation.
- *Permanent effort to reach out to the missing parts of the community* -- establishing strong communication channels for groups in the community, which for whatever reason, won't participate directly in the planning process.

The Process	Community Size Number of residents	Main Characteristic of the Community	The Motivation at the Beginning of the Process	The Size of the Stakeholder Group	Length of the Planning Process
The Operation ReachOut-SouthWest	26,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • without significant differences between neighborhoods • deep problems -- persistent and urgent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to address persistent and urgent problems • to improve quality of life of process participants and whole community 	50 - 60 residents	15 months
The Greater Homewood Renaissance	77,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very diverse neighborhoods • some neighborhoods are with, others without, deep urgent and persistent problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to create meaningful program for the community corporation • to design activities which will improve quality of life of particular neighborhoods 	without stakeholder group	4 years
Howard County - A United Vision	220,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wealthy community, without significant differences among villages • without urgent problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to influence the future of the County • to prevent problems, proactive effort 	130 - 180 stakeholders	planned for 12 months

Table 1

Control over the Process

Success of the community building, a visioning and strategic planning efforts depends on the control over the decision making in the process. The basic rule formulated by practitioners and scholars is that the process should be controlled or driven (Mattessich, Monsey, Roy, 1997; Kingsley, McNeely, Gibson, 1997) by community. Community control over the process helps to build community ownership and the commitment to the planning as well as to the implementing of plans. From Baltimore's cases it seems that an effective decision making structure, especially for large processes, separates the control over decisions about content (vision, strategies, programs, etc.), and process (structure of the process and individual meetings, creating of committees etc.). Both need to be controlled by community members, but process decisions seem to work also if they are made by the leadership group -- a steering or a coordinating committee. (Process leadership as a key element of the process follows.) There are particular situations when the approval of process decisions by the whole stakeholder group is feasible (small stakeholder group - up to 50 stakeholders) and necessary (not sufficient authority of leadership group). On the other hand, in all situations content decisions need to be made or approved by a large forum of participants; e. g. the stakeholder group.

Leadership of the Process

To attain trust and cooperation in the community and sustain of the visioning and strategic planning efforts till achieving concrete results, leadership of the process is another key element. I have identified following principles of effective process leadership:

- *Local process leadership, involving local leaders.* Local leadership committed to the long-term participation contributes to the authority and stability of the effort.
- *A leadership group involving leaders with different points of view and constituency, rather than THE leader.* Representative leadership group helps building process credibility in the community.
- *Facilitative leadership* (Schwars, 1994). A facilitative leadership of the process shares information, control and power over the process as well as credit for success with all stakeholders. It empowers stakeholders to make free and informed decisions and choices during the process. Sharing of the control leads to an internal commitment of participants, increases responsibility and ownership, and creates conditions for mutual learning. Facilitative leadership reflects and clearly communicates to the community core values of the process: collaboration, commitment, and partnership.
- *The leadership capable of reflection-in-action* (Schön, 1983) The leadership capable of „learning by doing,“ can reflect on an action while being in the action. It enables leadership to grow and learn during the process and adapt applied approaches to specific conditions of the community.

Process Assistance

In most of the cases of community strategic planning process the outside expertise in designing, facilitating and tracking of the process is necessary. Process assistance can have different forms e. g. consultation, facilitation, and community organizing.

The role of the process assistant is to propose steps of the process based on theories, experiences from other communities and reflecting community situation. The design of the process should reflect community's circumstances and needs of

participants - residents. It is critical to emphasize those aspect in the process which are building on community assets and strengths and are overcoming weaknesses. Sometimes emphasis needs to be on empowering local people and community organizing, in other situation it should be on strengthening the trust among community members and on building cooperation among organizations and institution in the community. The assistant should provide process leadership with options, make them aware of risks, and accept their decisions.

Process assistant should avoid substituting the role of process leadership or unhealthy dependence of the leadership on him/her. Instead s/he should educate participants in the process and skills needed for facilitating community effort and support their autonomous decisions.

Implementation and Tracking Mechanism

Many community activists have learnt from own experience that vain implementation of plans after visioning process devastates the whole community effort. To assure meaningful results of the effort, it is critical to establish appropriate implementation and tracking mechanism providing the means for plans to become reality.

Considering implementation mechanism early in the process fosters testing of feasibility of goals, strategies, plans and projects along with stakeholders capacity for implementation. Some of the stakeholders fall to developing of detailed long term plans instead of designing effective mechanism for tracking implementation enabling implementers to reflect on changes in internal and external environment, and involve experience gained during first phases of implementation.

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