

COMMUNITY PLANNING:

Using a Community Decision-Making Approach

A Tool for Communities to
Assess Strengths and Needs

Characteristics,
Dimensions and Components
of Community Planning

Developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy on behalf of the Early Childhood Education Cabinet,
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How to Use the TOOL:

This tool is an index of characteristics, dimensions and components of collaborative community planning processes. It was designed as a strengths and needs assessment tool, allowing members of planning collaboratives to determine where their current effort is located on several continuums. The index is grouped to correspond to the Connecticut comprehensive community early childhood planning process.

The tool attempts to take a snapshot of the capacity of a community planning group and the planning process to develop locally-defined strategies and a plan that can contribute over time to better results for children. The index of characteristics examines, for example, the level of participation planned, the planning group's power to convene the community, focus on results and use of data in planning.

Many items on the assessment allow communities to identify strengths of the planning process and areas that need improvement. For example, inclusive participation of stakeholders contributes to more responsive plans with a broad sense of community ownership. Other characteristics, dimensions or components are descriptive and contribute to greater understanding of the community's planning process; they do not denote a strength or weakness in themselves. For example, scope of planning is a community choice based on community vision, analysis of local data, strengths, needs and existing resources.

The components are not sequential or discrete steps. Instead, many aspects of the planning process overlap and are inter-connected. Some require more attention initially in order to establish a strong planning process (e.g. planning structure and community vision), and some elements will be addressed primarily in the plan itself (e.g. financing).

PART A: Provides descriptions of the characteristics, dimensions and components, as well as examples to guide the user in identifying where the community planning process falls along the continuum of choices.

PART B: The left column lists structural and performance components with a corresponding continuum or span of dimensions and characteristics to the right. The user is asked to make a selection along the continuum on the right that best depicts the current capacity of the planning group and the status of the plan.

PART A

Components of the Planning Process

1. MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

This section examines how the community has organized a structure to design and manage the community planning process. The characteristics, dimensions and structural components may vary considerably from one community to another.

Role Definition:

Clear/Well Communicated. The group's role is clearly defined and has been well-articulated to the community. The planning role is clearly differentiated from implementation and ongoing management.

Actively Developing. The group is working to articulate its role and to communicate both the purpose of the plan and the group's role in the planning process. Although individual members of the planning group may see and communicate their roles very differently, they are working to reach consensus and clarify their role.

Not Clear. The group has not carefully considered its planning or ongoing role, or it may not be communicating well with the community. Stakeholders may be confused about the group, the plan, and the planning process.

Community Representation:

Broad/Participatory. The planning management group includes representation of parents, resident leaders, community organizations and service providers. The planning process is not designed solely by public agencies. Broad participation may be structured through working committees or other mechanisms that stakeholders view as meaningful and representative.

Limited Stakeholder Representation. Community voices on the planning management group may be limited to a few community/neighborhood organizations or stakeholder participants. Mechanisms for providing input into the way the planning is conducted are limited. Residents and community-based organizations may see their representation as tokenism.

Public Agencies Only. Public agencies are responsible for designing and managing the planning process and do not consult with stakeholders in a substantive way. Residents and community-based organizations may view the planning process as something imposed by government or from outside the community.

Government Representation:

Includes All Relevant Public Systems. All the public systems with a stake in positive outcomes for young children have a voice in the design of the community planning process. While all may not be involved in the day-to-day decisions, they have opportunities for full participation and see themselves as full partners.

Multiple Agencies/Programs/Systems. Several agencies and programs that cross public service systems are represented in a meaningful way. May be working to broaden ownership, expertise, and representation of the planning group.

Limited to One Agency/System. A single service system or agency is managing the planning process.

Power Over Resources: (Resources include funding, staff, volunteers, space, in-kind donations, and other assets that can help develop and implement a plan.)

Members Control Resources. In addition to the planning grant, the members of the planning management group represent organizations that control local resources or use of state/federal resources. Members may consider themselves or their organizations in control.

Influence Resources. In addition to control of the planning grant, the members of the planning management group can influence the use of local, state, and/or federal resources. Members see themselves as empowered to have great influence.

Advisory. Aside from the planning grant, members of the planning management group do not represent organizations that directly control use of resources, are not able to influence use of resources, or do not recognize their capacity to influence. They do not see themselves as empowered.

Credibility:

Widely Respected. The planning management group is well-respected within the community. It is viewed as a competent, responsible and trusted vehicle for managing the planning process.

Moderate Respect. The group may be viewed as a credible vehicle, but may not be well-known within the community. The credibility of a few individual members or the organizations they represent may need to be established or improved.

Not Respected/Not Widely Known. The group is not widely known or respected within the community. Some members of the group or the organizations they represent may have negative baggage from past planning efforts or established reputations within the community.

2. COMMUNITY VISION

Setting the Stage:

Comprehensive/Integrated. Planning focuses on creating significant change at the community, service system, or cross-sector level. It focuses on a range of quality of life issues for an entire population of the community (e.g. all young children). Planning process taps into thinking across the community, agencies, service systems, and public-private sectors. Planning involves multiple actions, formal and informal resources, and a range of programs.

Targeted. Planning focuses on a few strategies that may not reflect the vision of all stakeholders. Planning process is not comprehensive across all levels and utilizes a limited range of resources. Targeted approach may be intended to be (and viewed as) laying the foundation for more comprehensive, integrated planning and strategies in the future.

Narrow. Planning process and activities are focused exclusively on one project, service, program or agency.

Common Framework:

Well Developed. Planning focuses on building consensus around a broad community vision. There is agreement regarding a common framework for planning. There is broad understanding and agreement regarding language, what it means to be a partner, and the components of the planning process.

In Development. Consensus among community and state partners is being developed. Stakeholders may be confused about the planning process or the purposes, but view themselves as potential partners. Progress is being made.

Lacking/Confused. Consensus for moving ahead is lacking. People are confused about the planning process and its purposes and may not view themselves as potential partners. People may use language differently and lack a common base of understanding to communicate effectively.

Parent Participation in the Planning Process:

Inclusive/Diverse. Participation truly reflects the parents of young children within the community. Planning continually expands parent participation and engages new parent stakeholders. Activities are designed to ensure parent access. The process uses diversity to develop the community vision.

Actively Seeking. Actively seeks greater, more active and more diverse participation.

Exclusive. Parents do not have opportunities to participate. Activities are not at times and places convenient to parents and other residents. Child care and translation services are not provided.

Neighborhood Participation:

Inclusive/Diverse. Participation truly reflects all neighborhoods of the community. Planning continually expands neighborhood participation and engages new stakeholders. The process uses neighborhoods' diversity to develop and strengthen plans.

Actively Seeking. Actively seeks greater, more active and more diverse participation from all neighborhoods.

Exclusive. Plans are developed in a closed process, usually by a powerful, small group of representatives from neighborhoods traditionally or regularly involved. Certain neighborhoods are excluded due to lack of translation services, scheduling and location of activities.

Community Participation:

Inclusive/Diverse. Participation truly reflects all sectors of the community. Planning continually expands community participation and engages new stakeholders. The process uses the community's diversity to develop and strengthen plans.

Actively Seeking. Actively seeks greater, more active and more diverse participation from the entire community. Plans are developed in an open consensus process.

Exclusive. Plans are developed in a closed process, usually by a powerful, small group of people traditionally or regularly involved.

Note: The following suggests stakeholders that are often overlooked in community planning processes.

- Local businesses and employers
- Community civic groups
- Local media
- Community foundations
- Community hospitals
- Local colleges and universities
- Senior citizens
- Neighborhood associations
- Service groups
- Faith based groups
- Transportation department
- Parks and recreation departments
- Job training and job placement agencies and services

Leadership Support:

High/Well-Developed. Key leaders (who may include community leaders, public officials, public or private agency leaders, opinion-makers, and others with authority and influence) visibly support the planning process. Backers are willing to use their community influence to help engage the community and support the planning process. Support is broad and adequate to sustain planning and implementation.

Moderate. Support of key leaders is increasing or developing; however, leadership support is concentrated in a few individuals or groups. May be vulnerable if individual leaders change or become disengaged.

Low/Undeveloped. Planners still seeking initial champions to bring leadership to the planning process. The support needed to convene the community is lacking.

Leadership Participation:

Active/Fully Engaged. Key leaders participate directly in the planning process. They are broadly representative of stakeholders and have authority to make planning decisions within their stakeholder groups.

Moderate. Key leaders' participation is inconsistent. They may rely on low or mid-level representatives.

Not Active. Key leaders do not participate at all and/or rely on low or mid-level representatives. Planning may be ignored or even discounted by leaders.

3. MEASURABLE RESULTS

To develop a shared community vision requires a focus on results that all residents view as important.

Results Driven:

Results Driven. The planning process is action oriented and uses plain language to express "end conditions" of well-being articulated by the community. Desired results for young children form the foundation and starting point for creating an action plan. Plans include strategies for ongoing monitoring of progress toward results.

Developing Results Focus. In the process of identifying population "end conditions" of well-being for young children. Process focuses on designing a plan to achieve the desired results.

Process Oriented. Planning focuses on process. Does not help to articulate measurable results that are important to the entire community.

Level of Focus: *(The planning process may focus on one or more levels. Indicate all that apply.)*

Young Children Population Results. The plan is intended to improve the well-being of the entire population of young children in the community. The plan may identify a specific age range of young children.

Service System Performance. The plan is intended to improve the performance of a particular service system or multiple systems, e.g. coordination of health, early care and education.

Agency/Program Performance. The plan is intended to improve the performance of a particular agency or program, e.g. access to pre-kindergarten.

4. DATA COLLECTION

Data Driven:

Data Driven. Appropriate population level results indicators are identified and are used to define success. Data are systematically collected and analyzed to establish the community baseline and identify possible strategies for improvement. Plans include monitoring of indicators and continuous improvement strategies. Planning process seeks personal experiences to complement the story told by data.

Lacking Data Focus. Indicators are not used systematically for planning. May be working to identify indicators that will allow measurement of desired results.

Anecdotal. Planning process does not use data in a disciplined way. Relies only on stories or anecdotes to develop strategies and action plans.

Data Collection and Analysis Capacity:

Highly Developed. Planning utilizes data in an effective and useful way; appropriate data for specific purposes are collected and analyzed. Planners compile and analyze existing data, identify gaps, and develop a data agenda for future development.

Developing Capacity. While capacity to collect and analyze data may be limited, the importance of sound data and effective indicators is recognized. Working to increase data capacity.

Lacking/Undeveloped: Data are not systematically collected and/or analyzed.

5. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Strengths/Needs Assessment Capacity:

Highly Developed. Assessment is thorough; it utilizes existing data as well as tapping residents' and stakeholders' experiences, views, and opinions. Assessment identifies root causes and forces at work. Assessment process is highly participatory, is owned by residents and stakeholders, and helps to mobilize the community and sharpen its vision.

Developing Capacity. Capacity to conduct a comprehensive and effective assessment is limited, but being developed. Assessment may focus on community needs without adequately examining or measuring existing strengths and resources. Assessment may give inadequate attention to root causes or critical forces.

Lacking/Undeveloped. Assessment is not planned or is not conducted effectively. Root causes are not examined. Participation may be limited. Residents/stakeholders do not believe their views or experiences are considered.

6. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Strategy Selection:

Based on Research. Promising practices are examined, and fit with community is considered. Specific objectives and strategies are based on the community's desired results, analysis of measurable indicators, and carefully assessed community strengths and needs. Planning does not jump to assumed strategies without community input, examination of data, and analysis.

Working to Consider Research. Working to select sound strategies, but research, data and community input are lacking. As plans develop, it may become clear that certain steps in strategy selection have been skipped, but corrections are being made to try to keep the planning process on track to produce results.

Based on Existing Interests. Strategies are identified and planned without the steps necessary for success, including community input, identification and examination of indicators, examination of promising practices. Jumping to strategies indicates that existing agendas may be taking precedence over evidence.

Use of Resources and Assistance:

Effective/Broad Use. Planning grant is used to leverage other resources. Technical assistance and other planning needs are identified and met. Existing expertise within the community and in other communities (peer learning) is utilized. Planners are taking initiative to obtain the assistance and resources needed.

Moderate. Working to identify existing expertise within or outside the community. Developing a plan for obtaining assistance and resources needed for planning.

Not Effective/Limited. Assistance and resources needed beyond the planning grant have not been considered, or no plans have been developed for obtaining them.

Action Oriented, Continuous Improvement:

Active/Learning Process. Planning continuously seeks to improve community understanding of the population, conditions of well-being, the story behind the curve, and knowledge of what might work to improve conditions. New knowledge is used to develop the plan.

Developing Capacity. Planning is headed in the right direction, but struggles to keep pace with stakeholders' ambitions. Planners may be facing significant challenges, but see that as part of the learning process.

Stalled. Planners are unable to move from talk to action. Planning may be stalled, temporarily dormant, or inactive – with unclear scope, poorly articulated goals or little capacity.

7. FINANCING STRATEGY

Financing Plan:

Highly Developed. A financing plan is developed that utilizes and leverages existing federal, state and local funding and resources to achieve desired results. Funding needs beyond existing resources are identified.

In Development. In the process of identifying existing funding and resources and how they can be used to achieve desired results.

Lacking/Undeveloped. Funding and other resources are not identified. A financing plan is lacking.

8. ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability Capacity:

Highly Developed. Planning decisions are made in an open consensus process. Planning is transparent, and scrutiny is actively sought. Partners and stakeholders have a highly developed sense of shared accountability. Plans consist of strategies for ongoing monitoring and accountability, including formal agreements and use of data.

Developing Capacity. Consensus and transparency are articulated goals of the planning process. Strategies for building accountability both in the planning process and in the final community plan are being considered.

Lacking/Undeveloped. Plans are developed in a closed process, usually by a powerful, small group of people traditionally or regularly involved. Accountability is not considered in the planning process or in the plan being developed.

PART B

Self-Assessment of Community Planning

1. Planning/ Management Structure	Continuum of Characteristics and Dimensions		
Role Definition	<input type="checkbox"/> Clear/Well Communicated	<input type="checkbox"/> Actively Developing	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Clear
Community Representation	<input type="checkbox"/> Broad/Participatory	<input type="checkbox"/> Limited Stakeholder Representation	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Agencies Only
Government Representation	<input type="checkbox"/> Includes All Relevant Public Systems	<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Agencies, Programs, Systems	<input type="checkbox"/> Limited to 1 Agency/System
Power Over Resources	<input type="checkbox"/> Members Control Resources	<input type="checkbox"/> Influence Resources	<input type="checkbox"/> Advisory
Credibility	<input type="checkbox"/> Widely Respected	<input type="checkbox"/> Moderate Respect	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Respected / Not Widely Known
2. Community Vision	Continuum of Characteristics and Dimensions		
Setting the Stage	<input type="checkbox"/> Comprehensive/Integrated	<input type="checkbox"/> Targeted	<input type="checkbox"/> Narrow
Common Framework	<input type="checkbox"/> Well-Developed	<input type="checkbox"/> In Development	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack/Confused
Parent Participation	<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive/Diverse	<input type="checkbox"/> Actively Seeking	<input type="checkbox"/> Exclusive
Neighborhood Participation	<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive/Diverse	<input type="checkbox"/> Actively Seeking	<input type="checkbox"/> Exclusive
Community Participation	<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive/Diverse	<input type="checkbox"/> Actively Seeking	<input type="checkbox"/> Exclusive
Leadership Support	<input type="checkbox"/> High/Well- Developed	<input type="checkbox"/> Moderate	<input type="checkbox"/> Low/Undeveloped
Leadership Participation	<input type="checkbox"/> Actively/Fully Engaged	<input type="checkbox"/> Moderate	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Active
3. Measurable Results	Continuum of Characteristics and Dimensions		
Results Driven	<input type="checkbox"/> Results Driven	<input type="checkbox"/> Developing Results Focus	<input type="checkbox"/> Process Oriented
Level of Focus	<input type="checkbox"/> Young Children Population Results	<input type="checkbox"/> Service System Performance	<input type="checkbox"/> Agency/Program Performance
4. Data Collection	Continuum of Characteristics and Dimensions		
Data Driven	<input type="checkbox"/> Data Driven	<input type="checkbox"/> Lacking Data Focus	<input type="checkbox"/> Anecdotal Planning
Data Collection/Analysis Capacity	<input type="checkbox"/> Highly Developed	<input type="checkbox"/> Developing Capacity	<input type="checkbox"/> Lacking/Undeveloped
5. Needs Assessment	Continuum of Characteristics and Dimensions		
Strengths/Needs Assessment Capacity	<input type="checkbox"/> Highly Developed	<input type="checkbox"/> Developing Capacity	<input type="checkbox"/> Lacking/Undeveloped
6. Goals & Objectives	Continuum of Characteristics and Dimensions		
Strategy Selection	<input type="checkbox"/> Based on Research	<input type="checkbox"/> Working to Consider Research	<input type="checkbox"/> Based on Existing Interests
Use of Resources and Assistance	<input type="checkbox"/> Effective/Broad Use	<input type="checkbox"/> Moderate	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Effective/Limited
Action-Oriented, Continuous Improvement	<input type="checkbox"/> Active/Learning Process	<input type="checkbox"/> Developing Capacity	<input type="checkbox"/> Stalled/Dormant
7. Financing Strategy	Continuum of Characteristics and Dimensions		
Financing Plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Highly Developed	<input type="checkbox"/> In Development	<input type="checkbox"/> Lacking/Undeveloped
8. Accountability	Continuum of Characteristics and Dimensions		
Accountability Capacity	<input type="checkbox"/> Highly Developed	<input type="checkbox"/> Developing Capacity	<input type="checkbox"/> Lacking/Undeveloped

USER NOTES

Role Definition	
Community Representation	
Government Representation	
Power Over Resources	
Credibility	
Setting the Stage	
Common Framework	
Parent Participation	
Neighborhood Participation	
Community Participation	
Leadership Support	
Leadership Participation	
Results Driven	
Level of Focus	
Data Driven	
Data Collection/Analysis Capacity	
Strengths/Needs Assessment Capacity	
Strategy Selection	
Use of Resources and Assistance	
Action-Oriented, Continuous Improvement	
Financing Plan	
Accountability Capacity	

What do you think about this tools?

Send your comments.

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