

Firelight Newsflash! 8 October 2007 - Focus on Action Planning

Dear partners,

As you all know, developing action plans is an important part of working in a community-based or non-governmental organization. Our day-to-day work with children and families is often determined by what we have set out to do in our strategic plan and action plans. In some ways, an action plan can be a "heroic" act: it helps us turn our dreams into a reality.

A well-developed action plan is a way to make sure your organization's vision is made concrete. It describes the way your group will use its strategies to meet its objectives. An action plan consists of a number of action steps or changes to be brought about in your community.

Why should you develop an action plan?

There is an inspirational saying, "People don't plan to fail. Instead they fail to plan." Because you certainly don't want to fail, it makes sense to take all of the steps necessary to ensure success of your programs, including developing an action plan with the communities you serve. There are lots of good reasons to work out the details of your organization's work in an action plan. They include:

To lend credibility to your organization. An action plan shows members of the community (and even donors) that your organization is well ordered and dedicated to getting things done.

To be sure you don't overlook any of the important details

To understand what is and isn't possible for your organization to do

For efficiency: to save time, energy, and resources in the long run

For accountability: To increase the chances that people will do what needs to be done

Also, and perhaps most importantly, the more that you engage communities in a process to determine activities to be carried out, the more genuine participation you will have. You might have seen a tool called the "participation ladder" (attached) that graphically demonstrates the various approaches used in working with communities. Communities can be masters of their own destinies if organizations facilitate sound planning and monitoring processes. Every organization working in community-based development should strive to facilitate **community-initiated, shared decisions**. Community members have the initial ideas, set up the program and come to the organization for advice, discussion and support. That is to say, the organization does not "direct" or "lead" but offers their support to the community. Developing and monitoring

action plans with community members is a vital part of this process.

When should you create an action plan?

Ideally, an action plan should be developed after you have determined the vision, mission, objectives, and strategies of your group. If you develop an action plan when you are ready to start getting things done, it will give you guidance for running your organization or initiative.

Remember, though, that an action plan is always a work in progress. It is not something you can write, put away in your notebook, lock in your file drawers, and forget about. Keep it visible. Display it prominently. As your organization changes and grows, you will want to continually (usually monthly) revise your action plan to fit the changing needs of your group and community.

How to write an action plan

1. Determine what people and sectors of the community should be involved in finding solutions to the problems at hand such as people directly involved or affected, influential leaders, members of the various groups within a community, etc. Try to be inclusive. Most children's and development issues are community-wide, and thus need a community-wide solution. Possible sectors include the media, the business community, religious organizations, schools, youth organizations, social service organizations, health organizations, and others.

2. Convene a planning group in your community to design your action plan. This might be the same group of people who worked with you to decide your group's strategies and objectives. If you are organizing a new group of people, try to make your planning committee as diverse and inclusive as possible. Your group should look like the people most affected by the problem or issue. Once everyone is present, remind them of your organization's vision/mission and objectives/strategies.

3. Develop an action plan composed of action steps that address all proposed changes. The plan should be complete, clear, and current. While a strategic plan might address general goals you want to see accomplished, the action plan will help you determine the specific actions you will take to help make your vision a reality. Here are some guidelines to follow to write action steps.

Members of the community initiative will want to determine for each step:

Why are we doing this activity? What problems will be addressed?

What actions or changes do we want to see occur? What results are we expecting?

Who do we want to benefit?

Where will the activities occur?

Who will carry out these changes? Who is responsible?

By when they will take place, and for how long?

What resources (i.e., money, staff) are needed to carry out these changes?
Where will they come from

Communication (who should know what?)

See attached four examples of action plans that you can adapt for your own use with communities.

4. Review your completed action plan carefully to check for completeness. Details are important to ensuring that people have the same expectations and responsibilities are clear. Also, be sure that the action plan taken as a whole will help you complete your mission; that is, make sure you aren't leaving anything out.

5. Now get started! Keep everyone informed about the final action plan and progress that is being made.

6. Follow through. Keep track of what (and how well) you've done. Always monitor what your organization or community has actually accomplished. Keep several questions in mind for both yourself and others:

Are we doing what we said we'd do?

Are we doing it well?

Is what we are doing advancing the mission?

You can address these questions informally (ask yourself, chat with other people, discuss with colleagues/volunteers), as well as formally, through surveys and other evaluation methods. Most importantly is to ask members to report on accomplishing the tasks they have set out to do. Consider making a review of your action plan a regular part of your regular meetings with Board members, staff, and community members..

7. Celebrate a job well done! Celebrate your accomplishments; you and the community members you work with deserve it. Celebration helps keep everyone excited and interested in the work they are doing.

Adapted from: The Community Tool

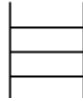
Box http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub_section_main_1089.htm

As always, Firelight staff are here [to support you!](#) [Good luck with your action planning with communities!](#)

The Participation Ladder

The “Participation Ladder” graphically outlines the various approaches used in working with communities. Communities must be masters of their own destinies. It is our privilege to facilitate this process through planning and M&E at the community-level.

Community-initiated, shared decisions: Community members have the initial ideas, set up the program and come to the NGO/CBO for advice, discussion and support. The NGO/CBO does not direct but offers their expertise for the community to consider.



NGO/CBO-initiated, shared decision with community: NGO/CBO has the initial idea for the program but the community is involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered, but the community is also involved in decision-making.



Consulted and informed: The program is designed and run by NGO/CBO but community is consulted. They have full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously.



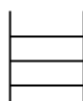
Assigned but informed: The NGO/CBO decides on the program and community members volunteer for it. They understand the program and decide they should be involved.



Tokenism: Community members are asked to say what they think about a project but have little or no influence about how the program is run.



Decoration: Community members take part in an event, e.g. by signing, dancing or wearing T-shirts with logos, but they do not really understand the program.



Manipulation: Community members do or say what NGO/CBO suggests they do but they have no real understanding of the program or activities.

Basic Activities Planning with Community Members
Key Questions

Purpose of Questions	English	Shona	Ndebele
Description of activity	What do we want to do?	Chii chirikuda kuitwa?	Yikuyini elifuna ukukwenza?
Type of participants	Who will participate?	Ndiani achazviita?	Ngubani ozancedakala?
Number of beneficiaries	How many will benefit?	Vangani vachabatsirwa?	Bangaki abazancendwa?
Location of activity	Where will it happen?	Zvichaitirwa kupi?	Kuzayenzelwa ngaphi?
Timeframe	When will it happen?	Zvichaitwa rinhi?	Kuzayenzwa nini?
Implementation	How will it happen?	Zvichaitwa nenzira nemutoo upi?	Lizakwenza nqandlelabani?
Inputs	What do we need?	Ndezvipi zvatinoda kushandisa kuti zviitikite?	Ngubani oza?
Key Responsible Person(s)	Who is responsible?	Ndevapi vachatungamira?	Ngubani ozakhokhela umsebenzi?
Output/Impact	What will this activity achieve?	Chiitiko ichi chichabudisa chii? Budiriro yacho ndeyeyi?	Ekuphetheni komsebenzi lizathola mvuzo bani?
Monitoring	How do we show what we have achieved?	Tinoratidzira sei budiriro?	Lizakwazi njani ukuthi umvuzo liwutholile?
	How do we measure our achievements?	Tinoyera sei budiriro yedu?	Lizawulinganisa ngandlela bani?
Constraints	What challenges might we face?	Zvigozhero kana zvipingaidzo zvatinogona kusangana nazvo zvingave zvipi?	Ngokubona kwenu ligahlangana lobunzima obunjani?
	How might we be able to adapt?	Ndedzipi nzira dzatinogona kushandura zvatininge taronga kuti tive tinokwanisa kufambirana nehurongwa hutsva?	Ngawaphi amacebo elingawasebenzisa ukunqoba ubunzima?

PEER GROUP ACTION PLAN

ACTIVITY: ORGANISING ADOLESCENT PEER GROUP MEETINGS.

WHY?	To discuss problems in more depth and solve them. To learn more.
WHO?	Adolescent boys and girls 10-14 years, 15-19 years. Single sex and mixed
WHEN?	Sundays at 15.00 hours for 2 hours. More in dry season
WHERE?	School buildings
COLLABORATION?	Headteacher, PTA, Parents, NMC.
HOW?	Use drama, role-play songs and stories
RESOURCES?	CBG agent to bring pictures condoms, flipchart. Community to provide drinks.
RESULTS?	Adolescents more knowledgeable about sexual and reproductive health; able to protect themselves from STIs

