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Project Steps

What We've Found

Every planning project is different. Each area has its own unique resources, special people, distinct opportunities and obstacles, and other qualifying characteristics. Yet we have found that all projects are stronger if they follow a common course and emphasize public involvement. Whether a project is a multi-year venture or a single, focused action, the time and effort to follow these steps will more likely yield success.

Just the Facts

A "project" can be many things. It may be a specific action such as building a waterfront park or restoring a historic theater. It may be a large, comprehensive effort like writing a greenway management plan or creating a 233-mile statewide trail system. The work may begin with an individual who has an idea for improving his or her community. Very often projects are initiated by grassroots organizations or government agencies based on a group's mission, long-range plans, or a legislative action.

Regardless of its scope or its origination, virtually every project affects people: people who use the resource, live by the resource, have feelings about the resource, and have ideas about the resource. Because these are the same people who will make the project a success or failure, it is helpful to establish an open process whereby the community has opportunities for input and is kept informed on decisions and progress. If the initiator or project leader is, or is perceived to be, an outsider, it is even more valuable to find out what those who live in a community know and think.

Want to know more? Look in the Community Tool Box for additional tools to help with each project step.

How To Do It



Definition

A series of activities that rely on community involvement to accomplish an objective.

Use It If...

- You want to build consensus among people who have different viewpoints because the community will be ultimately responsible for implementation and ongoing management decisions.
- You are trying to draw a lot of attention to a resource and its value in the community.
- You would like to show accomplishments and results.

Forget It If...

1. Get the community involved

Include the public throughout the course of a project by making them part of the information gathering and decision making process. Form a task force to act as a governing body; recruit volunteers to help in outreach or for special events; and plan and host gatherings such as workshops or meetings. Raise awareness about the planning effort through presentations, press releases and other written and verbal communication tools.

Each of the following steps relies upon bringing together a broad cross-section of individuals and organizations. This is important for making sure diverse interests are represented; it is also crucial for building support and developing a strong constituency.

- You cannot find anyone who has an invested interest in the resource or the process.
- You need immediate action because the resource is under a single, direct threat.
- You are using the process only to create the appearance of openness and have no intention of using the outcomes.

Timing is Everything

Depending on a project's scope and objectives, these steps can be done in one extensive workshop or over the course of several months or even years, in the sequence given here or another order. If the project changes, or new threats or opportunities emerge, consider redoing some or all of the steps.

2. Understand the resource

Document the natural, historical, cultural, archeological, recreational and scenic resources; public services; population and socioeconomic characteristics; facilities and transportation patterns or other information that affects the intrinsic value or negatively impacts a resource. Organize and document the findings in reports, posters, brochures, guidebooks, or maps that highlight key information and can be easily distributed throughout the community.

3. Define goals

Goals are based on both issues and the characteristics of the resource and should reflect the attitudes of the people who live by and/or use the resource. Brainstorm a large list, even if they are not all realistic. Try to rephrase negative concerns and issues into brief, positive statements. Group similar goals together and write summary statements. Be careful about getting bogged down in finding the perfect words; yet make sure that everyone in the room agrees with the phrasing.

4. Identify issues and obstacles

Determine what threats and challenges are currently facing a resource or making it difficult to accomplish the projects goals. Options for collecting this information include hosting a community-wide meeting or an intensive workshop for a group of stakeholders, holding focus groups, and conducting surveys. Understand the common issues and develop summary statements that can be realistically addressed.

5. Create an action agenda

Working with a task force or other gathering of stakeholders, begin to consider alternative ways to achieve the identified goals. Brainstorm ideas and be open to new ways of doing things. After collecting a broad range of ideas, begin to determine what actions best suit the

resource and its needs and goals. Select a few high priority actions that seem the most likely to succeed and reserve the rest for consideration at a future date. For each action, identify who is responsible, how the work will be accomplished, and when it will be done.

When it is complete, review it with all of those who participated in defining the issues, goals, and actions. Also consider publishing highlights in a brochure, writing a press release, making a poster, or other means to share it with the community at large.

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