

# Action Plans

# Creating Objectives

"What are we trying to accomplish? Towards what ends are our efforts directed?"

How many times have we seen something in our community that we don't like, but aren't sure how to change it? We know people are dying of AIDS, or that inequality exists in our school system, or that the environment is endangered, but what should we do about it? What should our community efforts be pointed towards?

To obtain long-term results, we need to know, *specifically*, what more immediate goals will take us there. We need to have mid-term goals that will lead to the outcomes we desire. If a child wants to finish high school (his long-term goal), in the meantime, he will need to successfully complete the second, third, fourth (and so on) grades. Learning to develop these statements of goals is what this section is all about.

## What are objectives?

Once an organization has developed its mission statement, its next step is to develop the specific objectives that are focused on achieving that mission. **Objectives are the specific measurable results of the initiative.** An organization's objectives offer specifics of *how much* of *what* will be accomplished by *when*. For example, one of several objectives for a community initiative to promote care and caring for older adults might be: "By 2015 (*by when*), to increase by 20% (*how much*) those elders reporting that they are in daily contact with someone who cares about them (*of what*)."

There are three basic types of objectives. They are:

- **Behavioral objectives.** These objectives look at changing the behaviors of people (what they are doing and saying) and the products (or results) of their behaviors. For example, a neighborhood improvement group might develop an objective for having an increased amount of home repair taking place (the behavior) and of improved housing (the result).
- **Community-level outcome objectives.** These are often the product or result of behavior change in many people. They are more focused on a community level instead of an individual level. For example, the same neighborhood group might have an objective of increasing the percentage of people living in the community with adequate housing as a community-level outcome objective. (Notice this result would be a community -level outcome of behavior change in lots of people.)
- **Process objectives.** These are the objectives that provide the groundwork or implementation necessary to achieve your other objectives. For example, the group might adopt a comprehensive plan for improving neighborhood housing. In this case, adoption of the plan itself is the objective.

It's important to understand that these different types of objectives aren't mutually exclusive. Most groups will develop objectives in all three categories. And all of the different types of objectives should be used as intermediate markers of the organization's progress.

The best objectives have several characteristics in common, They are all **S.M.A.R.T. + C.**

- They are **specific**. That is, they tell *how much* (e.g., 40 %) of *what* is to be achieved (e.g., what behavior of whom or what outcome) by *when* (e.g., by 2010)?
- They are **measurable**. Information concerning the objective can be collected, detected, or obtained from records (at least potentially).
- They are **achievable**. Not only are the objectives themselves possible, it is likely that your organization will be able to pull them off.
- They are **relevant** to the mission. Your organization has a clear understanding of how these objectives fit in with the overall vision and mission of the group.
- They are **timed**. Your organization has developed a timeline (a portion of which is made clear in the objectives) by which they will be achieved.
- They are **challenging**. They stretch the group to set its aims on significant improvements that are important to members of the community.

### Why should you create objectives?

There are many good reasons to develop specific objectives for your organization. They include:

- Developing objectives helps your organization create specific and feasible ways in which to carry out your mission.
- Completed objectives can serve as a marker to show members of your organization, funders, and the greater community what your initiative has accomplished.
- Creating objectives helps your organization set priorities for its goals.
- It helps individuals and work groups set guidelines and develop the task list of things that need to be done.
- It reemphasizes your mission throughout the process of change, which helps keep members of the organization working towards the same long-term goals.
- Developing the list of objectives can serve as a completeness check, to make sure your organization is attacking the issue on all appropriate fronts.

### When should you create objectives?

Your community organization should create objectives when:

- Your organization has developed (or revamped) its vision and mission statements, and is ready to take the next step in the planning process.
- Your organization's focus has changed or expanded. For example, perhaps your organization's mission relates to care and caring at the end of life. You have recently been made aware of new resources, however, to positively affect the lives of those deeply affected by the death of a loved one. If your organization were to apply for this new grant, it would clearly expand upon your current work, and would require objectives as you developed your action plan.
- The organization wants to address a community issue or problem, create a service, or make a community change that requires:
  - Several years to complete. For example, your child health organization might hope to increase the percentage of students who finish high school - a task that may take several years to complete.
  - A change in behavior of large numbers of people. For example, your organization may be trying to reduce risks for cardiovascular diseases, and

one of your objectives may be to increase the number of adults who engage in physical activity in your community.

- A multi-faceted approach. For example, with a problem as complex as substance abuse, your organization may have to worry about tackling related issues, such as access to drugs, available drug rehabilitation services, legal consequences for drug use, etc., as well as reducing the prevalence (how often or how much) of drug use.

## **How do you create objectives?**

So once your organization has decided that it does wish to develop objectives, how do you go about doing so? Let's look at the process that will help you to define and refine objectives for your organization.

### **1. Define or reaffirm your vision and mission statements.**

The first thing you will need to do is review the vision and mission statements your organization has developed. Before you determine your objectives, you should have a "big picture" that they fit into.

### **2. Determine the changes to be made.**

The crux of writing realistic objectives is learning what changes need to happen in order to fulfill your mission. There are many ways to do this, including:

- *Research what experts in your field believe to be the best ways to solve the problem.* For many community issues, researchers have developed useful ideas of what needs to occur to see real progress. This information may be available through local libraries, the Internet, state and national agencies, national nonprofit groups, and university research groups.
- *Discuss with local experts what needs to occur.* Some of the people with whom you may wish to talk include:
  - Other members of your organization
  - Local experts, such as members of other, similar organizations who have a great deal of experience with the issue you are trying to change
  - Your agents of change, or the people in a position to contribute to the solution. Agents of change might include teachers, business leaders, church leaders, local politicians, community members, and members of the media.
  - Your *targets of change*, the people who experience the problem or issue on a day-to-day basis and those people whose actions contribute to the problem. Changing their behavior will become the heart of your objectives.
- *Discuss the logistical requirements of your own organization to successfully address community needs.* At the same time your organization is looking at what needs to happen in the community to solve the issue important to you, you should also consider what your organization requires to get that done. Do you need an action plan? Additional funding? More staff, or more training for additional staff? This information is necessary to develop the *process objectives* we talked about earlier in this section.

At this point in the planning process, you don't need hard and fast answers to the above questions. What you should develop as part of this step is a general list of what needs to occur to make the changes you want to see.

For example, perhaps your group has decided upon the following mission: "To reduce risks for cardiovascular diseases through a community-wide initiative." At this point in your research (without getting into specifics!), your organization might have decided that your objectives will be based on the following general goals:

- Begin smoking cessation programs
- Begin smoking prevention programs
- Bring about an increase in aerobic exercise
- Decrease the amount of obesity
- Encourage healthier diets
- Increase preventative medicine (for example, more checkups for earlier detection of disease; better understanding of warning signs and symptoms)
- Increase the scientific understanding of your own organization regarding the causes and pathophysiology of cardiovascular disease
- Strengthen your organization's ties with national organizations committed to the same goals as your organization

### **3. Collect baseline data on the issues to be addressed.**

As soon as your organization has a general idea of what it wants to accomplish, the next step is to develop **baseline data** on the issue to be addressed. **Baseline data** are the facts and figures that tell you how big the problem is; it gives specific figures about the extent to which it exists in your community.

Baseline data can indicate the *incidence* (new cases) of a problem in the community. For example, "Malott County has an adolescent pregnancy rate of 12.3 pregnancies for every thousand teen-age girls." Such data can also reveal the *prevalence* (existing cases) of the problem. For example, "In Jefferson County, 35% of teens reported that they did not use contraceptives during the last time that they had sex." Baseline data may also measure *community attitudes* towards a problem. For example, "65% of the residents of Malott County do not consider teen pregnancy to be an important problem for the community."

**Why collect baseline data?** This information is important because baseline data provides your organization with the numbers; the starting points against which you can measure how much progress you have made. Not only is this information helpful when originally asking for financial (or other) assistance, it can help you show what your organization has done later in its lifetime.

So, early in your organization's life, you can prove to funders that there really is a very significant problem in your community that needs to be addressed ("Malott County's adolescent pregnancy rate is the highest in the state of Georgia.") Then, when asked later in the life of your community initiative, "What have you done?" you will be able to answer, "Since our coalition was formed, Malott County has seen pregnancy among teens drop by 35%." If you don't collect (or obtain) the baseline information, you can't prove how much you have done.

**How do you collect this information?** There are two basic ways to collect baseline data:

- You can collect your own baseline data for the information related to your specific issues. Ways to gather this information include the use of surveys, questionnaires, and personal interviews.
- You can use information that has already been collected. Public libraries, city government, social service agencies, local schools, or city health departments may already have the statistics that you want, especially if another organization has already done work on a similar issue in your community.

#### **4. Decide what is realistic for your organization to accomplish.**

Once you know what you want to do, as well as exactly how big the problem is, it's time to figure out how much you believe your organization can accomplish. Do you have the resources to affect all of the goals you looked at in Step Two? And to what extent will you be able to achieve them?

These questions are difficult ones to answer. It's hard for a new organization to know what it can reasonably expect to get done. For example, if you are trying to increase rates of childhood immunization, will your organization be able to increase it by 5% in three years, or by 20% in one year? How do you make these decisions?

Unfortunately, there are no easy answers. Your organization will need to take a good look at its resources, as well as talk to experts who have a sense of what is not only possible, but likely. For example, you might ask members of organizations who have done similar things, or researchers in your topic area what they believe makes sense.

Remember, you are attempting to set objectives that are both **achievable** and **challenging**. It's hard to hit just the right note of balance between these two qualities, and you may not always get it just right. Research and experience, however, should help you come closer and closer to this goal.

#### **5. Set the objectives for your organization or initiative.**

With all of this information in mind, your organization is ready to set some short-term goals or objectives that are feasible but demanding. Remember, objectives refer to *specific measurable results*. These changes in behavior, outcome, and process must be able to be tracked and measured in such a way to show that a change has occurred.

*A caution:* Oftentimes, the objectives of a community initiative or organization are set or influenced by the primary funding agency. Regardless of outside influences, each community initiative must decide what problems it is going to take on and what objectives would define success for their organization.

Your organization's list of objectives should do all of the following:

- Include all three types of objectives: objectives that measure behavior change, community outcomes, and those that measure important parts of the planning process.
- Include specific objectives that tell how much of what will occur by when. For example, "By 2010, rates of teen pregnancy among 12-17 year old girls will decrease by 30%."

- They should include all of the "SMART + C criteria." As we discussed earlier in this section, this means that they should be, **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, **T**imed, and **C**hallenging.

Let's look at one more example of some objectives; these goals come from an organization focusing on preventing adolescent substance abuse.

**Objectives developed by an adolescent substance abuse prevention initiative**

- By the year 2012, the use of tobacco among 12-17 year-olds will be reduced by 40%.
- By the year 2012, the use of alcohol among 12-17 year-olds will be reduced by 50%.
- By the year 2012, the use of marijuana among 12-17 year-olds will be reduced by 70%.
- By the year 2012, the use of cocaine among 12-17 year-olds will be reduced by 80%.

**6. Review the objectives your organization has created.**

Before you finalize your objectives, it makes sense for members of your organization to review them one more time, and possibly, to ask people outside of your organization to review them as well. You might ask members of your organization who were not involved in the development process to review your work. You may also wish to get the thoughts of local experts, targets and agents of change, and/or of people doing similar work in other communities to review what you have developed. You can ask reviewers to comment on:

- Do your objectives each meet the criteria of "SMART+C"?
- Is your list of objectives complete? That is, are there important objectives that are missing?
- Are your objectives appropriate? Are any of your objectives controversial? If so, your organization needs to decide if it is ready to handle the storm that may arise. For example, a program that is trying to reduce the spread of AIDS in its community may decide clean needles for drug addicts is an objective they wish to strive for; but it may very well cause difficulties for that organization. That's not to say the organization shouldn't make that an objective, but they should do so with as clear an understanding of the consequences as possible.

**7. Use your objectives to define your organization's strategies.**

Finally, once you have your general objectives, you are ready for the next step: developing the strategies that will make them possible.

**To sum it up**

Developing objectives is a critical step in your planning process. It can also be very exciting piece, because this is the time when your organization really starts to say what, exactly, you are going to get done in order to realize your dream. In the next section on strategies, we get even more detail oriented, as we discuss the broad ways to achieve (or even, to exceed) the objectives you have set.

# What is a strategy?

The word "strategy" comes from the Greek word for "generalship". Like a good general, strategies give overall direction for an initiative.

A strategy is a way of describing *how* you are going to get things done. It is less specific than an action plan (which tells the who-what-when); instead, it tries to broadly answer the question, "How do we get there from here?" (Do we want to take the train? Fly? Walk?)

A good strategy will take into account existing barriers and resources (people, money, power, materials, etc.). It will also be in keeping with the overall vision, mission, and objectives of the initiative. Often, an initiative will use many different strategies--providing information, enhancing support, removing barriers, providing resources, etc.--to achieve its goals.

Objectives outline the aims of an initiative--what success would look like in achieving the vision and mission. By contrast, strategies suggest paths to take (and how to move along) on the road to success. That is, strategies help you determine how you will realize your vision and objectives through the nitty-gritty world of action.

## What are the criteria for developing a good strategy?

Strategies for your community initiative should meet several criteria. Does the strategy:

- *Give overall direction?* A strategy, such as enhancing experience and skill or increasing resources and opportunities, should point out the overall path without dictating a particular narrow approach (e.g., using a specific skills training program).
- *Fit resources and opportunities?* A good strategy takes advantage of current resources and assets, such as people's willingness to act or a tradition of self-help and community pride. It also embraces new opportunities such as an emerging public concern for neighborhood safety or parallel economic development efforts in the business community.
- *Minimize resistance and barriers?* When initiatives set out to accomplish important things, resistance (even opposition) is inevitable. However, strategies need not provide a reason for opponents to attack the initiative. Good strategies attract allies and deter opponents.
- *Reach those affected?* To address the issue or problem, strategies must connect the intervention with those who should benefit. For example, if the mission of the initiative is to get people into decent jobs, do the strategies (providing education and skills training, creating job opportunities, etc.) reach those currently unemployed?
- *Advance the mission?* Taken together, are strategies likely to make a difference on the mission and objectives? If the aim is to reduce a problem such as unemployment, are the strategies enough to make a difference on rates of employment? If the aim is to prevent a problem, such as substance abuse, have factors contributing to risk (and protection) been changed sufficiently to reduce use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs?

## Why develop strategies?

Developing strategies is really a way to focus your efforts and figure out how you're going to get things done. By doing so, you can achieve the following advantages:

- Taking advantage of resources and emerging opportunities;
- Responding effectively to resistance and barriers;
- A more efficient use of time, energy, and resources.

## When should you develop strategies for your initiative?

Developing strategies is the essential step between figuring out your objectives and making the changes to reach them. Strategies should always be formed in advance of taking action, not deciding how to do something after you have done it. Without a clear idea of the how, your group's actions may waste time and effort and fail to take advantage of emerging opportunities. Strategies should also be updated periodically to meet the needs of a changing environment, including new opportunities and emerging opposition to the group's efforts.

## How do you develop strategies?

As with the process you went through to write your vision and mission statements and to set your objectives, developing strategies involves brainstorming and talking to community members.

1. *Organize a brainstorming meeting with members of your organization and members of the community.*

Remember, people will work best in a relaxed and welcoming environment. You can help achieve this by:

- making meetings a place where all members feel that their ideas are listened to and valued, and where constructive criticism may be openly voiced. To help meet these goals, you might post some "ground rules" so people feel free to express themselves. Sample ground rules might include:
  - One person speaks at a time;
  - No interrupting each other;
  - Everyone's ideas are respected.
- bringing fans or heaters (if needed) so people will be comfortable.
- asking members to escort each other home or to their cars, the subway, or the bus stop if the meeting runs late.
- providing refreshments. Never underestimate the power of homemade food, drinks, and other treats.

2. *Review (identify) the targets and agents of change for your initiative.*

Your **targets of change** include all of the people who experience (or are at risk for) this issue or problem addressed by your initiative. Remember to be inclusive; that is, include everyone who is affected by the problem or issue or whose action or inaction contributes to it. For example, a coalition such the RTR Coalition would want to include all teenagers as potential **targets of change**, not just adolescents who seem particularly at risk, and parents, peers, and teachers whose actions or inactions might make a difference.

Your **agents of change** include everyone who is in a position to help contribute to the solution. With the RTR Coalition, examples of **agents of change** might include teens, teachers, guidance counselors, parents of teens, lawmakers, and others.

3. *Review your vision, mission, and objectives to keep you on the right track.*

4. *Work together to brainstorm the best strategies for your initiative.*

The following list of questions can be a guide for deciding on the most beneficial strategies for your group:

- What resources and assets exist that can be used to help achieve the vision and mission? How can they be used best?
- What obstacles or resistance exist that could make it difficult to achieve your vision and mission? How can you minimize or get around them?
- What are potential agents of change willing to do to serve the mission?
- Do you want to reduce the existing problem, or does it make more sense to try to prevent (or reduce risk for) problems before they start? For example, if you are trying to reduce teen sexual activity, you might consider gearing some of your strategies to younger children, for whom sex is not yet a personal issue; or, to promote academic success, to work with younger children who still have full potential for learning and school success.
- How will your potential strategies decrease the risk for experiencing the problem (e.g., young girls getting pressure for sex from older men)? How will the strategies increase protective factors (e.g., support from peers; access to contraceptives)?
- What potential strategies will affect the whole population and problem? For example, connecting youth with caring adults might be good for virtually all youth, regardless of income or past experience with the problem. Also, just one strategy, affecting just one part of the community such as schools or youth organizations, often isn't enough to improve the situation. Make sure that your strategies affect the problem or issue as a whole.
- What potential strategies reach those at particular risk for the problem? For example, early screenings might help focus on those at higher risk for heart disease or cancer; past academic failure or history of drug use, for identifying with whom support and other intervention efforts might be focused.

Let's look at the strategies proposed by the members of the RTR Coalition to prevent teen pregnancy.

**Example: The strategies of the RTR Coalition**

We will pursue the following strategies to reach each of our objectives:

- Assist local churches in implementing parent-child awareness sessions (for example, a series of talks might be given discussing how to talk to your preteen about sex);
- Include comprehensive sex education in the curriculum of students from kindergarten through grade twelve, including information on abstinence, sexual decision-making skills, and family planning / contraception at age-appropriate times;
- Incorporate options for teacher-led and peer support programs in the

schools;

- Survey and report on student knowledge, attitudes, and behavior related to sexual issues;
- Increase access to contraception;
- Organize a school / community action group to create supervised after-school activities, mentor programs, etc.

Things to note about the RTR strategies:

- They give overall direction (without dictating specifics, such as the particular sexuality education curricula to be used);
- They fit local resources, including a variety of the available agents of change (in this case, peers, parents and guardians, clergy, and teachers);
- Some of the strategies try to change existing situations (such as increased access to contraception); others are geared to stop the problem of teen pregnancy before it starts (for example, assisting local churches to improve early parent-child communication);
- The strategies involve many different parts of the community, including churches and other groups from whom opposition to some strategies (such as access to contraceptives) might be expected;
- The strategies try to decrease some of the probable risk factors for teen pregnancy (lack of information, lack of access to contraceptives, peer pressure), and at the same time, they try to increase some of the possible protective factors (increased parent-child communication, church involvement, education, opportunities for a better future).

5. *Check your proposed strategies for completeness, accuracy, and whether they contribute to the vision, mission, and objectives.*

# What is an action plan?

In some ways, an action plan is a "heroic" act: it helps us turn our dreams into a reality.

An 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. Each action step or change to be sought should include the following information:

- **What** actions or changes will occur;
- **Who** will carry out these changes;
- **By when** they will take place, and for how long;
- **What resources** (i.e., money, staff) are needed to carry out these changes;
- **Communication** (who should know what?)

## What are the criteria for a good action plan?

The action plan for your initiative should meet several criteria. Is the action plan:

- **Complete?** Does it list all the action steps or changes to be sought in all relevant parts of the community (e.g., schools, business, government, faith community)?
- **Clear?** Is it apparent who will do what by when?
- **Current?** Does the action plan reflect the current work? Does it anticipate newly emerging opportunities and barriers?

## Why should you develop an action plan?

There is an inspirational adage that says, "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, including developing an action plan. 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 (including grantmakers!) that your organization is well ordered and dedicated to getting things done.
- To be sure you don't overlook any of the 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.

## When should you create an action plan?

Ideally, an action plan should be developed within the first six months to one year of the start of an organization. It is 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 a blueprint 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, lock in your file drawers, and forget about. Keep it visible. Display it

- proposed changes for each sector of the community (e.g., schools, faith community, service organizations, health organizations, government)

**3. Develop an action plan composed of action steps that address all proposed changes.** The plan should be complete, clear, and current. Additionally, the action plan should include information and ideas you have already gathered while brainstorming about your objectives and your strategies. What are the steps you must take to carry out your objectives while still fulfilling your vision and mission? Now it's time for all of the VMOSA components to come together. While the plan might address general goals you want to see accomplished, the action steps 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:

- **What** action or change will occur;
- **Who** will carry it out;
- **When** it will take place, and for how long;
- **What** resources (i.e. money, staff) are needed to carry out the change;
- **Communication** (who should know what)

**Example: The RTR Coalition's Action Plan (a sample)**

One community change sought by this coalition to prevent teen pregnancy was to increase publicity about contraception and unwanted pregnancy at the local high school.

- **What** action or change will occur: Hanging posters, displays, and other information about contraception and the facts about unwanted pregnancy in the hallways of the local high school. The posters and other information will become a permanent part of the high school. Posters and information will be regularly changed as new materials become available.
- **Who** will carry it out: A sub-committee comprised of parents and guardians, teachers, students, and coalition members will be responsible for maintaining the displays. The coalition as a whole will work towards finding funding to purchase the materials. Maria and Alex of the schools action group will be responsible for researching and ordering the materials.
- **When** will it take place, and for how long: The coalition will try to have posters hanging and displays visible within six weeks of deciding on the action step (2/19/99).
- **What resources** are needed to carry out the step: The coalition will approach the school district to request funding for the project. Otherwise, the group will seek funding from other sources such as foundations and local businesses to finance the program.
- **Communication** about the action step. The school principal and leadership of the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) should be given information about this planned change.

*Things to note about this portion of the RTR action plan:*

- It *appears complete*. Although this step seems fully developed, we would need to review the entire action plan to see whether all community and systems changes that should be sought are included.
- It is *clear*. We know who will do what by when.

- It seems *current*. We would need to know more about other current work (and new opportunities and barriers) to judge whether this portion of the action plan is up-to-date.
- 4. Review your completed action plan carefully to check for completeness.** Make sure that each proposed change will help accomplish your group's mission. 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. Follow through!** One hard part (figuring out what to do) is finished. Now take your plan and run with it! Remember the 80-20 rule: successful efforts are 80% follow through on planned actions and 20% planning for success.
- 6. Keep everyone informed about what's going on.** Communicate to everyone involved how his or her input was incorporated. No one likes to feel like her wit and wisdom has been ignored.
- 7. Keep track of what (and how well) you've done.** Always keep track of what the group has actually done. If the community change (a new program or policy) took significant time or resources, it's also a good idea to evaluate what you have done, either formally or informally.

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 friends and other people), as well as formally, through surveys and other evaluation methods.

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

**After you've written your action plan: Getting members to do what they said they would**

Every community organization has undoubtedly had this happen: you plan and you assign tasks to get everything you've planned to do accomplished. Everyone agrees (maybe they even offer!) to do certain tasks, and you all leave with a great feeling of accomplishment. The problem? At the next meeting, nothing has been done. Besides tearing out your hair, what can you do?

Fortunately, there are several things you can try. It's particularly tricky in the case of volunteers, because you don't want to lean too hard on someone who is donating their time and energy to begin with. Still, you can make it easier for members to get things done (and harder to avoid work) without acting like the mean neighbor down the street. Some of these gentle reminders include:

- Regular phone calls from staff members or dedicated volunteers asking others how they are doing with their tasks. This should be a supportive call, not a "are you doing

what you're supposed to" call. The person calling can offer emotional support "how are you doing?" as well as see if the group member needs any other assistance. A friendly call such as this can be seen as helpful, give the member the sense that he is a very important part of the group, and serve as a great reminder to do what he said he would do.

- Distributing the action plan in writing to all members, with names attached to specific tasks. (Additionally, this can be a great time to ask for feedback before the plan becomes "official.") [See the example action plan below and the blank one at the end of this section].
- Making sure timelines (with due dates) are complete, clear and current.
- At regular group meetings, such as committee meetings or board meetings, ask members to report on accomplishing the tasks they have set out to do. Consider making this a regular part of the meeting.
- Celebrate the accomplishment of tasks. It's important that getting something done actually means something, and is recognized by the group as a whole.
- Follow up on the action plan regularly. You are asking members to be accountable, and to get things done on a regular basis. If they have agreed, you should help them fulfill their commitment as best you can!

### **Example**

Here's one more example of breaking down the individual steps in your action plan. An action step from an action plan to prevent adolescent pregnancy (from the Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development's Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: An Action Planning Guide for Building a Caring Community) follows.

*The action step or change to be accomplished:* Recognize and honor parents and guardians who contribute to the initiative.

**Community Initiative:** Parent-to-Parent Initiative Date:2/14/99

**Action step or change to be accomplished:** Recognizing and honoring parents and guardians who contribute to the initiative.

**What actions or changes will occur:** Parents and guardians who contribute (e.g., by helping lead parenting workshops) will be presented with some small token of appreciation (e.g., a gift certificate). Those who contribute significantly over a longer period will be publicly recognized at a community party with a certificate of appreciation and another, larger token of appreciation (e.g., a book or a free family dinner donated by local businesses). The recognition efforts should continue for the duration of the initiative.

**Who will carry it out:** The finance or business committee will solicit donations to give to the parents. The sub-committee that works on presenting the workshops should appoint someone to be in charge of making appreciation certificates and coming up with a way to present them at the end of the workshop. If a community celebration is called for, a sub-committee will likely be needed.

**By when (for how long):** Recognition should be a part of honoring contributors for the entire length of the initiative.

**What resources are needed:** Donations will have to be solicited from area businesses so that you'll have items to give to parents and guardians who contribute. The cost of the certificates should be minimal.

**Communication (who should know what):** We should contact the finances committee about who we should (and should not) approach for donations.

## What is an action step?

An action step refers to the specific efforts that are made to reach the goals your agency has set. Action steps are the exact details of your action plan. They should be concrete and comprehensive, and each action step should explain:

- What will occur
- How much, or to what extent, these actions will occur
- Who will carry out these actions
- When these actions will take place, and for how long
- What resources (such as money and staff) are needed to carry out the proposed actions

Taken together, your defined action steps comprise your group's action plan.

## Why should you identify action steps?

Anticipating the future makes us feel in control, right? That's the major reason why identifying action steps is important. You can get prepared for what your next step should be. Other reasons are:

- To concentrate on the details that must occur to succeed in your mission
- To decide on workable ways to reach your goals
- To allow a large number of people to think in a structured way about the future of your coalition
- To save time, energy, and resources in the long run: a well structured, thought-out action plan will make things much easier for you

## When should you determine action steps?

You should determine your action steps after you have decided what changes you want to occur. You probably do this anyway, at least on a casual level; you decide what changes you want to see occur, and then you decide how to go about making them. These "hows" are your action steps.

Ideally, they will be thoughtfully, officially decided upon early in the life of your organization, and then updated every year or two as your group grows and changes.

Even if your organization has been around for a while, though, and doesn't have defined action steps yet, it's never too late to decide on them, since we hope you're going to be around for a long time!

## How do you identify action steps?

1. *Determine what your group, as a whole and individually, is really good at. Are you great at fund raising? Do you have a member who happens to write for the local paper? Brainstorm all the possible strengths of your group, no matter how off the wall they might seem. (You never know when an award-winning tuba player will be just what you need!)*

2. *Next, brainstorm different, specific ways that these strengths can be used to carry out the changes that you have decided upon.*

**Example:**

Your organization is trying to bring about increased access to contraceptives for area youth. You might send your best politician to area drug stores to ask to pharmacists to provide contraception in a confidential way. Then, ask the graphic artist in your group to design a card with the names of the pharmacies that will do so.

3. Consider the possible barriers to *implementing your proposed changes, but don't stop there, then consider possible ways to remove these barriers*. Some questions you might ask yourselves include:

- Do we have enough money to carry out your proposed action steps? (Are there any grants we can apply for?)
- Do we have enough manpower? (Can we recruit more volunteers?)
- Do we have enough time to carry out these changes?
- Are these action steps things people can get excited about?
- What kind of opposition can we expect if we put our plan into effect? Are there ways to get around it?

**Example:**

In the example given above dealing with contraceptives, pharmacists might be worried that their name next to the slogan, "Get your condoms here!" might hurt their business. A card that just had the names and phone numbers of your agency and of their establishments, however, might calm these fears and give the pharmacies some free, welcome publicity.

4. *With all of the above information in mind, brainstorm different ways (your action steps) to go about implementing the proposed changes in each sector that you have chosen*. Be sure to have someone take good notes! Again, make sure each action step includes:

- What will occur
- How much, or to what extent, these actions will occur
- Who will carry out these changes
- When these changes will take place, and for how long
- What resources (such as money and staff) are needed to carry out these changes

**Example: The RTR Coalition**

One action step might include increasing publicity about contraception and unwanted pregnancy at the local high school.

- **What** action or change will occur: Hanging posters, displays, and other information about contraception and the facts about unwanted pregnancy in the hallways of the local high school.
- **How much**, or to what extent, this action will occur: The posters and other information will become a permanent part of the high school. Posters and information will be regularly changed as new materials become available.
- **Who** will carry it out: A sub-committee comprised of parents, teachers, students, and coalition members will be responsible for maintaining the displays. The coalition as a whole will work towards finding funding to purchase the materials. Several coalition members will be responsible for

researching and ordering the materials.

- **When** will it take place, and for how long: The coalition will try to have posters hanging and displays visible within six months of implementing the action step.
- **What** resources are needed to carry out the step: The coalition will try to approach the school district to request funding for the project. Otherwise, the coalition will seek funding from other sources such as foundations to finance the program. To make the process as clear as possible, members of the coalition should account for each point of each action step. Then, with written goals in hand, you will have the concrete steps you need to take in order to implement your plan.

5. Determine a final list of action steps for each community sector from the ideas that came from your brainstorming. Try to determine lists that are feasible, effective, and comprehensive.

**Example:**

Some strategies for preventing child abuse and neglect (from the Work Group on Health Promotion and Community Development's Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: An Action Planning Guide for Building a Caring Community), listed by community sector:

*Changes in the schools:*

- Provide training on anger management and stress reduction techniques for parents.
- Require classes in prevention of child abuse and neglect for renewal of teacher certification and for school nurses.
- Provide space and supervision on school facilities for weekend, after-school, and vacation activities for children.

*Changes in health organizations:*

- Provide health care credits for parents who participate in child abuse and neglect workshops.
- Provide training for health professionals on screening for abuse and neglect.
- Develop specific and comprehensive policies regarding mandatory reporting.

*Changes in businesses and work sites:*

- Offer workshops on stress relief and anger management to employees.
- Offer training on parenting skills, including prenatal and infant care.
- Provide flexible work schedule to accommodate parents' schedules.

*Changes in government and social services:*

- Provide tax incentives to parents who participate in child abuse prevention activities, such as classes on parenting skills
- Develop comprehensive laws regarding perpetrators of child abuse and neglect
- Increase protection for all victims of domestic violence through specific policies and access to shelters.

*Changes in community organizations:*

- Provide a community board that lists job openings, daycare, and important community dates and events.
- Provide help in obtaining public or legal assistance for families in need.
- Increase the number of agencies and organizations that conduct parenting classes.

*Changes in religious organizations:*

- Create a network among ministers to discuss strategies for preventing abuse and neglect.
- Provide counseling and follow-up with people who feel at risk for abusing a loved one.
- Distribute inserts for church bulletins on the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

6. *Pat yourself on the back for getting all your planning done, take a deep breath, and go do what you've said you are going to!*

## Your Road Map To Success

Before you start a trip, you may need a road map to tell you how to get to your destination. A coalition also should have a plan for how they want to meet their goals. This fact sheet will help develop your plan as a coalition to be successful.

This fact sheet will:

- Provide a process for coalitions to develop a course of action for establishing realistic goals/objectives.
- Provide a method to accomplish realistic goals set by the coalition.

## Characteristics of Goals

It is important that members of the coalition keep certain characteristics in mind as they develop goals. As each is developed, put it to the test. Does it include the following characteristics?

Goals must be:

- **Believable** - They should describe situations or conditions that the coalition believes can be achieved. Avoid the "pie- in-the-sky" goals that members do not believe nor find possible to do.
- **Attainable** - It should be possible to do the goals in the designated time.
- **Tangible** - The goals should be capable of being understood or realized.
- **On a Timetable** - A completion date should be included in the goal statement.
- **Win-Win** - The goals must allow all members of the coalition to be successful.

After the goals have been established, allow the members to review them before they are written in final form. Input and acceptance is a vital ingredient to successfully accomplishing the group's goals.

## Establishing Coalition Goals

By the time goal setting takes place, members or organizations should have already participated in a needs assessment. From this, the group:

- Develops a list of priorities (worksheet on brainstorming).
- Shares what problems or needs are being addressed by their agency/organization (individual goals).

- Identifies group goals. Finds new problems to address and enhances present work on problems.

Group goals need to be a blend of individual goals. It is vital that all members of the coalition participate in goal development. This will:

- Help meet members' needs and interests.
- Show how individual action can lead to group goals.
- Stimulate cooperation and commitment.

It is important for all coalition members to:

- Allow each group member to keep their identity and specialties. Draw on each other's strengths.
- Not allow hidden agendas to jeopardize the work of the coalition. Members should be honest, up-front and willing to modify their ideas for the goals of the coalition.
- Recognize everyone for their involvement. A coalition is a cooperative effort to address a problem and the same is true the recognition.

### **Turning Goals into Action**

It is vital for the coalition members to write the group's goals. Goals that are in one's head are merely dreams, but written goals are a commitment.

Goals are turned into action by working from the long term to the short term. Decide what must be done and in what order. Next decide what will be done during a specific period. Design small, specific "bite-size" programs and activities that support the short-term goals. If order is important, decide a sequence for your activities. These questions will help:

- Where does the group want to be in one year? Six months?
- What "bite-size" programs or activities will move the coalition toward this position?
- What program or activity should be done at the next meeting?

### **Summary**

The general goal of a coalition is the positive change in people and programs. By developing sound goals, the coalition will have a road map that will enable you to address issues of today and tomorrow.

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

### *Preparing your plan*

**1. Determine what people and sectors of the community should be changed and involved in finding solutions.** If you have been using the VMOSA (Vision, Mission, Objectives, Strategies, Action Plans) model, you might have already done this, when you were deciding upon your group's objectives. Again, try to be inclusive. Most of the health and development issues that community partnerships deal with 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.

Some members of the community you might consider asking to join the action planning group include:

- Influential people from all the parts of the community affected by your initiative (e.g., from churches and synagogues, the school system, law enforcement, etc.);
- People who are directly involved in the problem (e.g., local high school students and their parents might be involved in planning a coalition trying to reduce teen substance abuse);
- Members of grassroots organizations;
- Members of the various ethnic and cultural groups in your community;
- People you know who are interested in the problem or issue;
- Newcomers or young people in the community who are not yet involved.

Let's consider some of the people who were involved with the planning group for the fictional Reducing the Risks (RTR) Coalition that hopes to reduce the rate of teen pregnancy. Some of the members of this planning group included teachers at the local high school, local teenagers and their parents, members of the clergy, counselors and school nurses, staff of the county health department, and members of youth organizations, service agencies, and other organizations that focus on youth issues.

**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, go over your organization's:

- vision;
- mission;
- objectives;
- strategies;
- targets and agents of change (e.g., youth, parents and guardians, clergy);

## Definitions

These terms are important to understand as you work with coalition members to develop goals.

- **Goal/Objective** - A specific result desired in a certain amount of time.
- **Short-Term Goal** - Component to do over a short period. It also may lead to accomplishment of a long-term goal of the coalitions. Short-term goals may include the individual goals of the different organizations.
- **Long-Term Goal** - Component to do over a long period. The long-term goal should include the complete goals decided by the coalition.
- **Group Goal** - A goal determined by members of the coalition that will further the cause of the group. It is a blend of individual goals.
- **Individual Goal** - A goal determined by an individual coalition member that will be his or her contribution to the complete goal of the coalition.

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This series on Coalition Building was developed by The Ohio Center For Action on Coalition Development for Family and High Risk Youth, Richard Clark, Ph.D., Director. It has been adapted for County Extension Faculty in Florida to facilitate work with local and regional organizations and groups such as non-profits, cooperatives, county extension associations, and others that might benefit from a plan for working together to achieve support for mutual goals.

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Building Coalitions  
Part 4, Handout 4-C  
FY496-P4, H4-C

## **Example 1: The Reducing the Risks Coalition's development of objectives to reduce teen pregnancy in their community.**

The RTR Coalition decided that its main targets of change would be young people (girls and boys), parents and guardians, and members of the community at large. Some of the *agents of change* who could assist with the project included:

- Peers
- Teachers at the local junior high and high schools
- Church leaders and youth group directors
- The mayor
- The directors of local youth groups, such as the Boys and Girls Club and the city youth center

Members of the RTR Coalition reviewed their vision and mission statements, discussed changes they wanted to see made, baseline data, and what they felt was realistic for their group to achieve. After working through all of these steps, they sat down to write a list of objectives. A partial listing of their ideas included:

- By the year 2010, 90% of our community will agree with the statement, "It is very important that our community effectively address the problem of teen pregnancy."
- By the year 2012, the reported level of sexual abstinence and postponement of initial sexual intercourse among 12-17 year olds will be increased by 20%.
- By the year 2012, the reported use of contraceptives among adolescents 12-17 years old who choose to be sexually active will increase by 33%.
- By the year 2014, the estimated rate of sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) among 12-17 year olds will be reduced by 40%.
- By the year 2015, the estimated pregnancy rate among 12-17 year olds will be reduced by 25%.

*Things to note about the RTR objectives:*

- They include *what* specific changes in *whose* behavior (and which community-level outcomes) should occur.
- They include *by when* the objective should be met.
- They include *how much* of the desired change should occur.
- They are *relevant* to the mission; that is, they refer to the issues that are directly related to teen pregnancy (contraceptive use, STD rate, etc.).
- They are *challenging*; they will stretch the community to go beyond what it is doing.



# Worksheet

## Writing Your Goals

**Write two proposed coalition goals:**

1.

2.

- Do your goals support the vision and mission statements?
- Are they achievable?
- Are your goals focused and easy to comprehend?
- Are they challenging?

# Worksheet

## Writing Your Objectives

**Based on your funded application and your coalition goals, write two proposed objectives for each goal:**

1a.

2a.

1b.

2b.

- Are the objectives specific?
- Are they measurable?
- Are they achievable?
- Are they challenging?

# Worksheet

## Checking Your Activities: The Action Plan

**Based on the objectives on the previous tearsheet, develop a simple action plan with appropriate activities and a timeline.**

Goals	Objectives	Activities	Timeline	Who's Responsible	Measures

- Do the strategies meet the criteria?
- Do they give overall direction?
- Do they fit available resources and opportunities?
- Is there a minimum of resistance and barriers?
- Do they reach those affected?
- Do they advance the mission?

