Implementing Community Goals Successfully

Craig Wesley Carpenter and Rebekka Dudensing

Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist; and Associate Professor and Extension Economist

Communities often create outstanding economic and business development strategies only to lose momentum after the planning stage. In fact, many good plans end up sitting on a shelf because they are never implemented. How can your community avoid this problem? One step is to make sure that the goals you set are specific, measureable, attainable, realistic, and time-framed (SMART). Planning this way, however, is just the beginning. The guidance offered below, assumes that the community's goals are SMART*, and outlines steps to follow as you prepare, then implement your plan.

Building the action plan

The team should ensure that each of the plan's strategies and actions contribute to reaching the goal. Examine your plan in terms of the following questions.

- Does each step build on the previous one?
- Does the plan represent a logical sequence for moving from the current condition to the desired condition?
- Are any steps missing?

This type of consideration can help you identify tasks that should be added or modified. Careful planning and implementation can take longer than expected, so target dates may need to be reevaluated.

---

*For more information on SMART goals, see the Stronger Economies Together curriculum at http://srdc.msstate.edu/set/coaching-teams/curriculum.

Before implementation, be sure that the plan's metrics are reasonable and can accurately reflect the degree to which each step has been successful. It is important to note baseline measurements (e.g., employment levels at the beginning of the effort) as well as relevant data at each phase of plan implementation. These metrics will measure progress toward the goal. Of equal importance, they can indicate that progress has been insufficient, thus giving the team and the community an opportunity to adjust the plan.

Roles and responsibilities

Community and economic development plans should include a list of roles and responsibilities to specify the who, what, when, and how, as they relate to each step (see the template below). Similarly, a team should have established metrics and timetables for the steps related to each goal. Groups can be assigned to each action step, but these groups should each have a leader who accepts responsibility for ensuring continued progress toward completion of that step. Key questions regarding roles during the implementation phase include:

- Are these roles still in place?
- Do the roles need to be adapted?
  - If so, who will take on new responsibilities?
- Should any roles be added or refined?

Maintaining community engagement

Keeping participants engaged between meetings is essential—it is also central for goal implementation. During the planning phase, email and social media (Facebook, Twitter, blog posts, etc.) can be effective tools for maintaining participation and even increasing meeting attendance. During the implementation phase, effective communication can encourage continued participation, as well as unite the group and foster accountability. Updating the community helps sustain momentum from planning into the implementation phase.

Updates should include:
- Future meeting dates, times, and locations
- Changes in leadership positions
- Changes in other roles or responsibilities
- Changes to target dates

- Successful completion of an action step
- The extent to which efforts reach or surpass a chosen metric
- More general metrics related to each goal (e.g., the local unemployment rate)

Be sure to celebrate small wins! Community development is a long process. Celebrating accomplishments and showing appreciation to volunteers is key to sustaining momentum.

References

Some of this material is drawn from the United States Department of Agriculture Stronger Economies Together Phase VI coaches' manual (http://srdc.msstate.edu/set/coaching-teams/curriculum). We are grateful to the Southern Rural Development Center for their support of Texas A&M AgriLife's adaptation presented here.

New

Plan of Action Template

Strategy:

Steps to Accomplish	Metric (Metric to measure progress)	Data Source (Who/what has data)	Responsibility (Who responsible for step)	Key Contact (If team, key responsibility)	Goal Date (Anticipated completion)	Completion Date (Fill in once completed)	Final Measure (Using metric, extent of completion)

Plan of Action Example

Strategy: Create and implement a training on website development

Steps to Accomplish	Metric (Metric to measure progress)	Data Source (Who/what has data)	Responsibility (Who responsible for step)	Key Contact (If team, key responsibility)	Goal Date (Anticipated completion)	Completion Date (Fill in once completed)	Final Measure (Using metric, extent of completion)
Work with the Chamber of Commerce and SBDC to identify current Web use status and access	% of businesses with Web access; % that use Web	Small businesses; maybe chamber or SBDC	Jim, Shirley, & Bob	Bob	Nov. 2015		
Develop a survey for use with existing small businesses to identify current Web use status and access	Number of questions on survey	Sue	Ann, Sue, & Albert	Sue	Dec. 2015		
Identify potential curricula and trainers	Number of potential trainers	Alice	Robert, Alice, Sam	Alice	Dec. 2015		
Conduct survey - Each partner will conduct at least 10 one-on-one surveys with identified businesses	Number of survey respondents	All partners	All partners	Jim	Jan. 2016		
Analyze surveys	1-page summary report; number of needs identified	Jim	Jim, Shirley, & Bob	Jim	Feb. 2016		
Explore matches between identified needs and existing e-commerce curricula available through Extension Service	Number of matches	Alice	Robert, Alice, Sam	Alice	March 2016		
Finalize training series content	1-page outline of content	Robert	Robert	Robert	April 2016		
Recruit instructors	Number of instructors	Bob	Jim, Bob	Bob	May 2016		
Develop brochure outlining training content and dates	Publication status (yes/no)	Shirley	All	Shirley	June 2016		
Conduct training series	Number of small businesses attended; 1–5 usefulness measure	Post training series surveys	Bob, Jim, Trainers	Jim	Aug. 2016		