
UW-Extension
Community Vitality & Place-making Team
Community Capacity Building In-service

The Role of Systems Planning & Networks in Community Capacity Building

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Key Principles of Systems Planning

Uniqueness

Every issue or problem manifests itself in an environment in unique ways. For example, heroin use may be a problem across the state of Wisconsin, but the problem is different in Marinette County than Jefferson County for reasons unique to each environment. The problem may also be different in Lake Mills than Watertown or Fort Atkinson. *Any viable solution needs to take into consideration these unique qualities or it won't work;*

Purposeful Information

Too often groups rely on empirical evidence to solve complex problems. The groups engage in data gathering in an attempt to "know everything" about the problem. The underlying assumption is that once you know everything, the solution will be obvious. Most of the time this doesn't work with complex problems because data is always incomplete and time bound. It is more effective to spend time gathering data that will help create solutions, not analyze problems. *The goal is to search out purposeful information that contributes to the knowledge about and understanding of the solutions;* and

Systems Approach

Complex problems are more often successfully solved when the solutions involve each part of the systems involved. Heroin use isn't going to be reduced by just having law enforcement arrest more people without a similar response from the legal system and the human services system. *The problem is too complex and the interdependencies of the systems require multiple actors be involved from their sector to address it.*

Holistic vs. Reductionist Approach to Planning

Holistic Solution Creation	Reductionist Problem -Solving
Employs many mental models; intuitive, analytical, creative	Employs rational, empirical thought processes
Future oriented; focuses on creating solutions	Past oriented; focuses on solving each problem
People centered	Fact centered
Seeks out broad context in which to understand a problem and its potential solutions	Limits context to the problem itself
Aims to find unique ideas that can create a solution that endures over time	Aims to find a single, immediate solution that "fixes" the problem
Recognizes that information is soft	Emphasizes hard data
Initially treats each problem situation as unique	Seeks similarities with other problems
Puts solutions in a systems framework, recognizing interdependencies with other systems	Specifies changes only in terms of the parts of the problem

Key Phases of Systems Planning

Key People Involvement

Who is involved or affected by the issue, opportunity or challenge; who is best qualified to be part of the solution design and decision-making process; and who has the talents and resources needed to implement and maintain the possible solutions

Identify a Focused Purpose

It's important to identify a purpose that reflects the ultimate needs, desires, intentions of the issue and its larger context

Identifying the Ideal Solution

Focuses on identifying the longer term solutions rather than "quick fixes". Seek out the solutions that need to be achieved in the future rather than just focused on the immediate issue

Identifying the Living Solution

What ideas can we come up with today that will move us further down the road to our ideal solution in a way that is modifiable as our community environment continues to change? What are the functional components of such a system?

The Effect of Technology on Networks

Lower Transactional Costs

Social media builds social capital quickly because social media lower transactional costs

People are easy to find online and on many channels

Talk is cheap

Serendipity is enhanced online

Reciprocity is incredibly easy

Cost of failure is lower

Open System Infrastructure

Social media break down additional transactional costs because organizations are no longer necessary to build community capacity – social media allows individuals to build amazing amounts of social capital without formal structures and to generate crowdsourcing

Arab Spring was started in Egypt by a Twitter user

Crowd Sourcing: crowd wisdom; crowd creation; crowd voting; crowd funding.

Social media create a “publish-then-filter” system pattern

Open system infrastructure uses the “power law of distribution” to increase the durability of successful community engagement strategies

Key Components of a Network

Nodes

Individuals/Organizations comprising the network

Ties

Connections or links between Nodes that form communication/information pathways. Can be weak or strong.

Clusters

Groups of Nodes held together with very strong Ties.

Hubs

Nodes with multiple Ties to Clusters. Sometimes indicate a "network weaver"

Periphery

Nodes on the edge of the network. Most often loosely tied or linked to the rest of the network. May function as links to other networks.

Network Weaver

Key Node responsible for building and maintaining the network. Functions include mentoring others on network building.

Network Mapping Exercise

Individually

Begin by thinking about either a formal or informal network you are currently working with or have worked with in the past. On a piece of paper, draw out the network noting the components (nodes, hubs, clusters, etc). Draw in the connections between each member of the network. Consider the following as you examine your drawing:

1. Are the right connections in place? Are key connections missing?
2. Who are the key community leaders? How are they represented in the network?
3. Who are the experts in process, planning and practice?
4. Who are the mentors others seek out for advice?
5. Who are the innovators? How are ideas shared and acted upon?
6. What are the networks strengths? How could the network improve?
7. How well is the network working together now? How could it be more effective in the future?

As a Dyad

Share your reflections with your partner. What insights did you glean from mapping the network? How could you use a similar exercise in your work?

Large Group

Share your reflections with the larger group? When would network mapping work well? When wouldn't it work? What prerequisites might need to be in place?

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