**FCS9227**

# UF UNIVERSITY *of* FLORIDA
## IFAS Extension

# IFAS Community Development: Empowering Your Community, Stage 2, Organization of Sponsorship[1]

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*This paper is part of a series of discussions on community development. This series includes specialized papers on civic engagement, community action, and other topics important to the development of community.*

## Introduction

Community action is an active and dynamic process, not simply a static occurrence. The first action stage, *initiation*(Marcus and Brennan, 2005), spreads interest in and increases awareness of issues and lays the foundation for the second stage, *organization of sponsorship*. This second stage continues the process of increasing awareness and focuses on establishing group structure and the organizing of resources needed for grassroots organizations, non-profits, or other groups to achieve their goals (Wilkinson, 1991). Such factors are important in relation to assessing community assets and needs, and to the formation of action efforts to address perceived problems (Wilkinson, 1970; Wilkinson, 1991). *Organization of sponsorship* is characterized by the development of formal and informal partnerships among diverse social groups

and organizations that cut across social and economic lines. These partnerships and channels of communication set the stage for action efforts that meet the general needs of the entire community (Wilkinson, 1991; Luloff and Bridger, 2003, Theodori, 2004). Partnerships can give formal group structure to a focused community action, while simultaneously allowing for maximization of resources.

## Organization of Sponsorship for Community Action

The organization of sponsorship in the community action process often involves the creation of a new group or the adaptation of an existing group to deal with some local problem or issue (Wilkinson, 1970). This process involves coordination and integration of actions within and across various segments of a local society. This is accomplished through the formation of diverse networks and associations among individuals within different organizations. These linkages assure continued contact across social groups or interest lines that go beyond the lifespan of any one single action issue (Wilkinson, 1991; Luloff and Bridger, 2003).

Establishing a group structure and identifying community resources are the keys to the organization of sponsorship stage. These can take many forms including:

- calling a meeting of interested parties to plan for action,

- asking local governmental officials to take responsibility for common needs, and

- forming a committee of concerned citizens to address the issue.

In forming a new action group, the members should be both reflective of the diverse residents of the community and united under an agenda of common needs and interests. This allows for individuals and organizations with distinct, but interrelated pursuits, to come together for community action.

Equally important is the identification of community resources (financial, human, and physical), which possibly can be used in achieving community goals. For example, resources can include:

- identifying fund raising opportunities and other financial resources,

- finding legal help,

- developing an inventory of skills and capabilities of community members,

- asset mapping,

- assessing local human and financial resources, and

- classifying local organizations into categories to coordinate organizing a council of agencies.

## Including Organization of Sponsorship in Extension Work

When structure and resources are developed during the organization of sponsorship stage, a basis for expanding community action efforts and the development of programs emerges. Recognizing the human, social, and financial assets present among

change agents allows for a pooling of the resources necessary to achieve effective community action. The organization of sponsorship stage of community action is therefore vital to long term program development and the development of action plans. Organization of sponsorship can include the following efforts:

### 1. Develop the framework for forming a group structure

An assessment must be made regarding whether to create a new group or adapt an existing group to deal with some local problem or issue. In order to make this assessment, there are several actions that can take place, such as calling a meeting of interested parties to plan for action, putting an ad in the local newspaper, asking local governmental officials to take responsibility for common needs or issues, appointing a committee to address the issue, forming a new group/committee to address the issue, or talking to friends and colleagues to garner support and set up a new network. Through these and other efforts, a diverse group of individuals which share common and uncommon ideas emerges.  This framework allows for diversity in the decision-making process and enables a variety of organizations or members to be linked and work towards a common goal. Based on the interest and experience of these individuals, duties and roles can be developed to advance the community group's goals and objectives.

### 2. Establish a decision-making structure to prepare for goal-setting and strategic planning

Once a group structure is in place, a strategic plan must be developed. In order for the plan to be developed and implemented properly, a hierarchy or structure must be determined by all individuals involved. Forming a Board of Directors or an ad hoc committee are two ways to handle this. The formation of subcommittees to address specific components of the action plan can also emerge at this stage.  This structure will evolve over time as new members are brought in, and as the complexity of the action plans become evident.  Without such structure in place, the goal and vision setting and strategy development that take place in stage three will be very challenging.

### 3. Identify community resources

It is important to maximize existing resources within a community. Resources can take a variety of forms (financial, human, and physical). Different social groups have access to different resources; therefore, pooling resources is more conducive to accomplishing joint action and assists in reaching a wider community with the action efforts. Pooling resources can include:

- assessing and consolidating financial resources,

- coordinating legal assistance,

- assessing the action agendas of other local groups, and

- assessing and coordinating local human resources.

### 4. Develop a strategy for allocating resources

Once resources are identified, a strategy must be developed to allocate those resources effectively and in a timely manner. The key here is to be able to apply resources to accomplish multiple goals and needs. Included would be actions to determine what other community organizations or groups are addressing the same issue or need.  Partnerships and collaboration with such groups can then be undertaken to utilize resources effectively and enhance partnerships. For example, if a community is trying to address teenage pregnancy, and an organization is already teaching courses on family planning, perhaps the new group formed could provide follow-up information in a brochure or on their Web site. Effective resource allocation involves collaborating with other community organizations, examining local and state resources, and long-term planning of such allocation. Misusing resources can stifle the community action process.

## Summary

*Organization of sponsorship* is the second key step in the community action process. In this stage, the newly formed or already existing group, formally comes together and assesses the resources necessary to develop visions, goals, and a strategic plan.

Stage two allows a diverse group of citizens to initiate social change through focused community action. This collaboration not only enhances individual community member's well-being and sense of attachment to the community, but also allows them to see how collaborative efforts can be effective in producing change within their community.  Ultimately, organization of sponsorship provides a strong group structure, which is the basis for stage three of the action process: *visioning, goal setting, and strategy formation.*

## References and Useful Reading

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Theodori. G.  2004.  *Preparing for the Future: A Guide to Community Based Planning*.  College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Cooperative Extension Service.

Wilkinson, K. 1970. "Phases and roles in community action." *Rural Sociology.*  35 (1): 54-68.

Wilkinson, K.P.  1991. *The community in rural America*. New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1991.

## Useful Websites

Community Development Institute East. http://www.ext.wvu.edu/cdi-east/

The Community Development Society. http://www.comm-dev.org/

Community Resource Group. http://www.crg.org/

Civic Practices Network http://www.cpn.org/

Grass-roots.org. http://www.grass-roots.org/

International Association for Community Development. http://www.iacdglobal.org/

*Southern Rural Development Center.* http://srdc.msstate.edu

Sustainable Development Communication Network. http://www.sdgateway.net