FCS9229

UF UNIVERSITY *of* FLORIDA

IFAS Extension

IFAS Community Development: Empowering Your Community, Stage 4, Recruitment[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

The previous three stages of community action developed the group structure and focused plans for change. In the fourth stage, community action efforts are advanced through *Recruitment* (Wilkinson, 1991; Theodori, 2005; Marcus and Brennan, 2005; Brennan and Regan, 2005; Brennan, 2005b). While small scale recruitment efforts may have emerged earlier during the initial formation of the group (stages 1 and 2), the recruitment in stage four represents a clear and focused process of identifying and mobilizing local activists who can significantly contribute to community action efforts. However, this stage must be open to the entire community and representative of all of its groups. While we may be familiar with people we believe to be capable of leading community action, we most likely are unaware of various other individuals who can contribute to an even greater extent. The process of recruitment

serves to bring in new voices, skills, and experiences and to prove to the community that participation from all is wanted and encouraged.

Recruitment

Facilitating the recruitment and the active involvement of local residents in community development efforts often can be time consuming and difficult. And can become even more problematic when a broad and representative grouping of the local population is sought. However, in order to build community support, involvement, and interaction, all local residents should at least have the opportunity to actively contribute. While it is often unrealistic to expect total participation, all efforts must be made to actively and routinely reach out to members of the diverse groups that make up the community.

The recruitment phase originates from the effort of the original group of active residents, council, or planning committee to mobilize and plan for action (see stage 1,2, and 3) (Wilkinson, 1991; Theodori, 2005; Brennan, 2005; Marcus and Brennan, 2005; Brennan and Regan, 2005). Through the initial stages, human and other resources are mobilized,

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cohesion develops, leadership is enhanced/developed, and the actions of various groups are focus to achieve maximum impact. At this point in the action process, a committed and active force of local residents is recruited to carry forth action plans.

Recruitment in Your Extension Work

The recruitment stage can be successfully implemented by taking a variety of steps. All of these build upon the framework established in the earlier stages and provide a wide range of opportunities for increasing awareness and drawing others into the action process.

1. Holding a formal community wide gathering of residents

Holding a community meeting to inform local residents of the group's vision, goals, and strategies for improving local life is a useful way to create awareness and to provide opportunities for involvement. In order for this meeting to reach a wide audience, all means available should be used to promote, market, and generally encourage attendance from all community members. Countless ways exist to do this, such as advertising in local newspaper, newsletters, flyers, church bulletins, and public announcements through politicians, leaders, organizers, and religious representatives. Formal invitations should be extended to all resident groups, coalitions, and organizations. Once again, it is vital that no individual or group feels alienated, uninvited, or unwelcome. If such conditions emerge, the end results are likely to have disastrous effects on community action efforts.

2. Present a focused overview of the action efforts

Once brought together, this diverse group should be informed of the planning and actions taken to date by the original group of participants and organizers. Included would be introductions, presentations describing the background of organizers, and a summary of the events that have brought them together. Also included would be a presentation of the mission statement, goals, objectives, and strategies for achieving change. For all of these

items, it is vital that the process and activities that led to items be fully presented and explained in detail to all interested parties. This serves to enlighten future participants as to the scope of problems (as supported with data accumulated in stages 1 through 3), as well as to legitimize the community action efforts by showing that all efforts have been developed in an unbiased and systematic way.

3. Provide opportunities for general public feedback and contribution

Those presenting community action efforts are provided with a remarkable opportunity to receive feedback from other local residents that can actively contribute to the formation of goals and objectives. This meeting also provides an opportunity to gauge the general public's reactions to proposed community action efforts. The acceptance or rejection of these efforts can be a valuable tool in the program and policy development for the organization.

It is therefore vital that invited participants have extensive opportunities for voicing questions or concerns and to provide various forms of feedback. It is also an opportunity to measure the group's reaction to proposal plans of actions and to instigate group discussions. During this meeting and discussion, all efforts should be made to promote the program to attendees and to encourage their active participation. This can take several forms, depending on the population. Activities such as formal meetings, focus groups, group interviews, and other tactics can be used to measure public interest and support, as well as to address needs that are not otherwise common knowledge.

4. Formal initiation for participation and active involvement

All of the above steps culminate in an opportunity to formally invite all local residents to be actively involved in community action efforts. This opportunity cannot be overstated, and further highlights the importance of the previous steps in the community action process. This is the single best opportunity to garner public support and to recruit activists. At this point, participants can be asked to self-select into subgroups or to sign up to participate in the general program.

Conculsion

This stage is essential in that it provides the basis for developing an active, enthusiastic, and informed group of activists. These are the troops that will carry out the active phase of community development. These informed and active citizens will also aid in spreading awareness of issues and serve to bring other residents into active involvement. Those brought together during the recruitment stage will lead the next phase, *Implementation*.

References and Useful Reading

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Useful Web Sites

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/

Mapping the Assets of Your Community: A Key Component for Building Local Capacity http://srdc.msstate.edu/training/trainingcurricula.htm

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

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