

Association of Scottish Community Councils



# Action Agenda

Decision Making Tool Kit

## Introduction

Because people often want to immediately get to work and "solve" the problem, it can be hard to convince them of the necessity of taking time to discuss, plan, and reach consensus. Once that vital preliminary work is done, then it is time to identify actions that move people out of the idea stage into the results stage. An action agenda guides the group for getting things done and realizing their goals and ultimately their visions.



Experience has shown that the more concise, targeted, and thorough the action agenda is, the more likely people will enthusiastically connect and volunteer to get the work accomplished. Avoid the temptation to belabour its production or make its scope too large. An action agenda is a snapshot-in-time, a summary document that depicts what needs to be done and urges that it get done.

## Definition

A strategy broken down into steps that describe what will be accomplished, by whom, how, and when.

## Essentials

An action agenda, also called an action plan, is an annotated list of proposed outcomes. The purposes of an action agenda are to schedule proposed actions, to remind participants of past decisions and agreed-upon goals, and to provide a means for viewing the entire range of recommended work.

Often presented in a table or chart format, the plan gives only enough information and guidance to get people working on the actions they have collectively decided on. It can be organized in various ways: topics, dates, sequence, priorities, responsibility, geography, or level of interest. Each step within the plan clearly defines the components of what, who, when and how.

- "What" is the name or short description given to the action.
- "Who" is the list of one or more individuals or group to be involved and responsible for conducting the action?
- "How" identifies the tasks necessary for completion such as seeking financial assistance or funding, getting technical recommendations, acquiring resources, making contacts, etc.
- "When" refers to the timing of the action. Projected dates may be used, or the list may simply be organized in sequence. Less precise terms, such as "immediate" and "later" or "near-term" and "long-term," can allow more flexibility; specific dates can always be added.

Wording should be succinct to keep the action agenda small and manageable, while effectively explaining and guiding. Future iterations of the agenda may be produced later as actions are completed or plans modified.

# How it Works

## 1. Make sure the group is ready

The action agenda should build on work already done within a group: goals have been set, visions imagined, ideas discussed, and issues explored. People have developed a sense of who they are within the group and what their purposes are for being together. They know some of their strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and constraints. They see what needs to be done, and how it might be accomplished.

## 2. Generate the actions

Using the group's goals as guidelines; ask the question, "What do we need to do in order to achieve our goals?" List the answers on flipcharts or large Post-It® sheets. Brainstorm at first, and then narrow the field down to what is practical, agreeable, feasible and timely. Make a selection among all the ideas. Select and re-select until there is consensus on a list of actions that can actually be accomplished by the people involved, with the resources they can bring to bear. If a member or sub-group of the overall group is already engaged in an action that fits the groups' goals, include that in the agenda as a way to get an early success and to give credit and support to that action or to the group doing it. This becomes an example of how the whole process can work, how each action can be accomplished.

## 3. Define What

Once you have a consensus list of actions,



begin deliberating on the naming and wording of each one. The words used to describe the action will tell much about what needs to be done. The name of an action may make it or break it - in promoting it, in instilling it with vitality, in establishing its meaning.

#### **4. Define Who**

Decide who needs to be involved in the action. If after careful thought no one can be named, ask the question: "Is this do-able?" Without designated responsibility, there will not be enough impetus to follow through. If the group is committed to the action being included, then someone will step forward; otherwise, delete it.

#### **5. Define When**

Estimate the amount of time required to do the job. Work backward from the completion date to calculate when to begin the project. Evaluate each action in the context of all other actions to see if priorities can guide the timing, and to see how it fits, time-wise, into the overall agenda.

#### **6. Define How**

This requires identifying the needs of the action. Is there a need for money? Does the group need to recruit additional volunteers? Does the action suggest that you might want to apply for a grant from a foundation or government agency? Is sufficient expertise represented in the 'who' list to either fulfil the action directly or find a way to get others to do it? Are material resources needed? Is further planning needed? Looking at the action, the way it is worded, who is responsible and involved, and when you want it accomplished are clues for the formulation of the 'how' component. If able, schedule a second meeting to discuss this last step. Fresh minds and clear thinking are an advantage. It may also be more effective for

those who are responsible for completing this task to create a work plan that specifies the steps and materials necessary. In other words, create a mini action agenda for each task detailing how and when the task will be accomplished. This smaller group can then report back to the larger group at a future meeting.

## **7. Pull it all together**

Draw the material together and type it up. In addition to the actions, consider including an introduction giving the background on the group's formation, steps taken to this point, and goal statements and visions. Also have a short conclusion about what is going to happen next.

## **When to Use**

- You are ready for action and know what the issues, goals, and alternatives are for your resource.
- You have people ready and willing to get work done and want a guide that keeps everyone on the same page.
- You want to generate enthusiasm in the community and be able to document results.

## **Do Not Use**

- You have not laid the groundwork in goal setting, consensus building and visioning.
- You don't have people willing to act.
- You are engaged in a comprehensive planning process that will not soon have activities that can realistically be accomplished.

