

Association of Scottish Community Councils



Setting Goals

Decision Making Tool Kit

Introduction

Setting goals can be an excellent consensus-building activity. It is energizing to watch a group of people who may start with very different opinions and visions work together and listen to each other to develop one set of goals. These goals set the stage for action, defining what tasks will be considered and embraced. By sharing together in the decision making process to develop goals that everyone agrees upon, we find this process generates commitment to follow through and getting the work done.

Definition

People working together to transform a vision, purpose or desire into discrete statements of direction



Essentials

Goals are brief, positive, written statements about what a group wants to accomplish. Goal statements also serve as means of helping everyone stay on track: How is this action going to help accomplish the goal? Is this work tangential to what everyone agreed to accomplish?

Goals should be based on reality. That means before setting goals, issues such as threats to a resource, concerns about the future or pressures related to use, growth or access all need to be identified. Plus there should be a general understanding of the effected natural, cultural or recreational resources. In short, know what is trying to be accomplished and why it is important to do it.

Goals can be short-term or long-term. They can be revised and updated to reflect changing environments, accomplished actions and broadening efforts.

The terms vision, mission, goals and objectives are often used interchangeably. They are all related, but very distinct parts of the puzzle. Here's how:

- Mission: answers why an organization exists – or why a project is starting – and its purpose.
- Vision: summarizes the ideal state of an organization – or project or resource.
- Goal: transforms a vision into a discrete statement of direction.
- Objective: breaks down a goal into tasks that are measurable and time-oriented (e.g., all maps for the resource will be done by a week from Tuesday).

How it Works

1. Brainstorm and Document

With a group of people and a facilitator, such as in a workshop, record participants' needs, desires and even concerns. If a lot of issues and problems are listed, work on turning the negative statements into positive



ones. Be sure everything is recorded exactly as the speaker intended and is posted for all to see and read.

2. Refine, refine, refine

Work with the group to sort through and focus the ideas, i.e., group ideas that are similar under one theme. Systematically mark or label each idea so that no one's thoughts appear to be disregarded. If one idea or issue does not fit into any of the themes, and the group decides it is not viable enough to become its own category, check back with the original speaker to further discuss the idea or to make sure he or she agrees with the group's decision.

For each summary heading, begin creating statements that capture the ideas. The statements should be in terms of directions and destinations: what do you hope to achieve? Remember, goals are not visions; they should be statements of what can realistically be accomplished.

To accomplish this step, depending upon the size of the group, it may be easier and more productive to divide into smaller groups having one small group per theme.

3. Develop a Consensus

Once there are goals written for all of the themes, review them together as a group. Each statement should embrace the direction and potential actions that the entire group desires to take. There may be a lot of focus on single words, or making subtle changes, but this is important to the process. Everyone should be comfortable with what is said and how it is said.

Depending on the situation and the developed goals, you may want to prioritize goals based on resources (human, environmental, or financial), external threats or pressures such as pending legislation or an upcoming planning meeting or timing if some goals are long-term and others are short-term.

Choose an Approach

1. Single purpose approach: addresses a specific need, like creating a park, stopping construction of a waste facility or planting flowers on a street.

2. Multi-purpose approach: works simultaneously to meet several needs; for example creating a park that includes a visitors' centre, interpretative trails and preservation of important habitat.

3. Comprehensive approach: views a resource in its entirety as an interrelated environment. This approach attempts to satisfy numerous needs while utilizing a long-range planning philosophy.

When to Use

- You desire to form consensus among a number of people about what they share in common and what they want to do.
- You want to clarify tasks, calculate timetables and decide on actions.

Not Recommended If...

- You need action. There's a clear, single issue that needs to be fought against and goal setting could be a distraction or use up needed resources.
- You are in the preliminary stages of a project or a group is just forming. Prior to documenting goals, a group needs to have defined its mission and vision, or, in other words, have a sense of itself and why it has come together.