Session Five
Community Situational Analysis
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Lori is a rural sociologist and state Extension specialist who assists communities and community organizations in creating a vision for their future, developing a strategic plan to implement the vision, and building leadership capacity.
Understanding Communities and their Dynamics

1. Basic Understanding of Community
2. Community Demographics
3. Community Economics
4. Community Power Structure
5. **Community Situational Analysis**
6. Community Sustainability
7. Community Development Process
Role of Educator--Overall

• Help community understand its strengths and weaknesses.
• Help community learn to develop capacity to plan and implement.
• Teach about strategies, tried & true as well as emerging.
• Assist communities to access and use relevant data and other research.
Learning Objectives

At the end of this session you will be able to:

• Explain the purpose of a situational analysis
• Conduct a situational analysis
• Link the results of a situational analysis to a planning, decision-making, or action process
An opening question

• You have been asked to help the community identify a solution to an issue that has been a source of conflict.

• How would you try to understand:
  – What led the community to the current situation?
  – How the different sides of the conflict “see” the issue and its possible solutions?
  – Whether there was support for any possible solutions?
What is a Situational Analysis?

A systematic method for:

- Collecting
- Analyzing
- Delivering Information

About

- Past Trends
- Current
  - Conditions
  - Issues
  - Problems
  - Opportunities
  - Challenges

Historical  Political  Community  Cultural  Context
A Situational Analysis Is a Key Step in a Larger Development Process

• Where are we now?
  – The situational analysis
• Where do we want to be in the future?
  – Develop a vision for tomorrow
• How do we get to the future we desire?
  – Design an implementation plan
Why is a Situational Analysis Important?

Because …

• We can’t decide what to do or where to go if we don’t understand how we got to our current situation

• We can’t design action strategies if we don’t understand the situation from the perspective of those involved in the situation

• What we think we know is not always so!
Ways to Use A Situational Analysis

- Define concerns -- Clarify what is.
- Separate “facts” from “myths” and “predictions.”
- Clarify community values – Who are we and what do we stand for?
- Identify action options -- Clarify what might be.
- Consider consequences of action options
Ways to Use A Situational Analysis

• When done in preparation for a development or intervention effort, a situational analysis helps us to:
  – Define the current situation.
  – Identify potential supporters or opponents.
  – Identify ways to modify the development proposal to minimize opposition and increase support.
Why do a Situational Analysis?

• Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.

  *Theodore Roosevelt*

• “It ain’t what you don’t know that gets you into trouble. It’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so.”

  *Mark Twain*
Situational Analysis Can Be Used to Explain:

- Historic development of the community.
- Trends in the social, demographic and economic composition of the community.
- Social, economic, and environmental processes operating in a community.
- Functioning of community systems and dynamics.
Situational Analysis Can be Used to Explain: Cultural Capital

- Habits
- Goals
- Values
- Sacred Symbols
- Ways of Seeing
- Ways of Acting

- Interprets the meaning of past, current, and possible future events
- Comes to understand possible action strategies
- Defines its essential characteristics and experiences
Situational Analysis Can Be Used to Explain: Social Capital

- Facilitates coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.

- Is composed of:
  - Characteristics of social organizations such as trust and social norms.
  - Social networks linking people together within the community and to resources outside the community.
  - Willingness to become engaged in the civic life of the community.
The Process of a Situational Analysis

- Define the purpose
- Gather existing data
- Identify information gaps
- Determine what additional information is needed and how to collect it
- Collect and analyze required information
- Create a report with recommendations
- Share with community
Roles of Extension in a Situational Analysis

- Convener
- Facilitator
- Information source
- User of the information
- Networking link
Components of a Situational Analysis

- Analysis of trends using secondary data
- SWOT analysis
- Key informant interviews
- Focus groups
- Network analysis
Components of a Situational Analysis

- **Analysis of trends using secondary data**
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What Is an Analysis of Trends?

A statistical picture of our community based on secondary data to:

- Identify trends
- Describe trends
- Compare the community with others in the region, state or nation
Extension and an Analysis of Trends

- Connect community to University and state data.
- Help the community interpret the meaning and implications.
- Emphasize the importance as part of planning or development process.
- Provide information for community grant writing efforts.
How to Do an Analysis of Trends

• Decide on focus of analysis
  – Points in time
  – Change over time
  – Distribution across space or within categories
  – Comparison with other geographic areas or groups

• Identify appropriate sources:
  – **What** do you want to know
  – **Why** do you want to know it
  – **How** do you want to know it
Cautionary Notes

- It is easy to get and give different impressions
- You need to consider:
  - What are they counting? What are they not counting?
  - How are they counting it?
  - The effects of definitions and measurements
  - The time frame that is being used
  - The influence of small numbers on percent change
**Common Sources of Secondary Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Common Federal Sources</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Census or State Data Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Bureau of Economic Analysis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Census</td>
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<td>County Business Patterns</td>
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<td>Housing</td>
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<td>Housing and Urban Development</td>
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<td>Health</td>
<td>Health and Human Services</td>
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<td>Vital Statistics</td>
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<td>Centers for Disease Control</td>
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<td>Workforce</td>
<td>Census</td>
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<td>Bureau of Labor Statistics</td>
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<td>Dept. of Labor</td>
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<td>See: <a href="http://www.fedstats.gov">http://www.fedstats.gov</a></td>
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## Common Sources of Secondary Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Sources of Secondary Data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Fact Finder</td>
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<td>Regional Economic Information Service</td>
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<td>Quick Facts</td>
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<td>Census of Agriculture</td>
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Components of a Situational Analysis

- Analysis of trends using secondary data
- **SWOT analysis**
- Key informant interviews
- Focus groups
- Network analysis
**SWOT Analysis**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
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- A scan of the **internal and external environment** of a community or an organization.
- It is one of the most **frequently used** methods for situational assessment.
Why Do a SWOT Analysis?

- Explore possibilities.
- Identifying opportunities for success
- Clarify directions and choices.
- Determine where change is possible.
- Adjust and refine plans mid-course.
- Organize communications about an initiative or to
- Organize information gathered
Components of a Situational Analysis

- Analysis of trends using secondary data
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- **Key informant interviews**
- Focus groups
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What Are Key Informant Interviews?

• Selected individuals in a community who have unique perspectives on the issue

• Key informants are persons who are either involved with the issue:
  – As a part of their job or as a volunteer  OR
  – Because they are knowledgeable about the community, its citizens, and its history
Why Do Key Informant Interviews?

• To get “insider information” about a community
• Some uses – To understand:
  – What people think are the important issues or problems
  – How people understand or give meaning to an issue
  – What people identify as the causes or roots of the issue or problem
  – Which strategies or actions people believe are possible or effective
Why Do Key Informant Interviews?

Some purposes in community development:

– Define the nature of an issue
– Enumerate the community stakeholders
– Identify community-based resources
– Identify action alternatives
Extension and Key Informant Interviews

- Extension can:
  - Help identify key informants within the community
  - Conduct key informant interviews
  - Help the community interpret the results

- Agents can use interviews to:
  - Learn about the taken-for-granted way of life in a community
  - Establish relationships with community influentials
How to do key informant interview

• Determine the critical information you need
• Develop open-ended questions
• Identify key informants using a snowball approach
• Conduct interviews
• Evaluate responses by looking for:
  – Key phrases
  – Commonalities/differences discussed
  – Ideas/issues not addressed
Example of a key informant interview

• Help me to understand the different views on this proposed land use change. How are people looking at this proposal?
• What are people who support this proposal arguing?
  – What are their hopes for what will happen if this proposal passes?
  – What are their fears if the proposal is not passed?
  – Can you tell me who I should talk to if I wanted to learn more about the views of those in favor of this proposal?
• What are the people who oppose this proposal arguing?
  – What are their fears as to what will happen if this proposal passes?
  – What are their hopes if the proposal is not passed?
  – Can you tell me who I should talk to if I wanted to learn more about the view of those opposed to this proposal?
Cautionary Notes on Key Informant Interviews

- Time intensive but relatively inexpensive
- Assure consistency in the process
- Manage the data results
- Accuracy and comprehensiveness of sampling
- Ensure diversity of interests
- Cross-cutting issues require key informants from all spheres of influence in the community
Components of a Situational Analysis

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- **Focus groups**
- Network analysis
What Is a Focus Group?

- A semi-structured interview with a small groups (8-12 participants)
- Encourages flexible and creative discussions
- Engages participants in discussions of issues more effectively than one-on-one interviews
- Allows each person can react, contrast, or build upon what others have said.
Why Do a Focus Group?

Focus groups are useful when:

- Creative group thinking is needed
- The issue or problem is complex
- New perspectives are needed
- Ideas, perceptions, and assessments are needed quickly
- Need background information
- Need to understand viewpoints of different groups
- Need to set priorities, or to identify problems, constraints, costs or benefits, or potential impacts of potential actions
Extension and Focus Groups

- Convene a focus group
- Help plan a series of focus groups
- Facilitate a focus group
- Network for assistance in interpreting results
How to Do a Focus Group

- Define the desired information outcome
- Determine the best mix of persons
- Develop 3 to 5 questions to guide the discussions
- Identify a facilitator or train local facilitators
- Conduct focus group and record discussion
- Interpret results
Example of a use of focus groups

• We use focus groups in a community visioning process.
• I train local residents to facilitate a focus group discussion with their civic organization or in their neighborhood using these questions:
  – **Heritage:** What do you cherish about this community and want to see preserved for the future?
  – **Change:** If you could change just one thing to make this a better place to live and work, what would you change?
  – **Vision:** Imagine this community as you would like it to be in 10 years. Describe how it will be different.
  – **Action:** Given this vision for tomorrow, what does this community need to start doing now to get there?
Responses from a community visioning process using focus groups

• Heritage
  – *The “small town” atmosphere and the qualities of life that come with rural living.*
  – *The beauty of the natural environment.*
  – *The history and heritage of the community, in particular the importance of family farming in defining a sense of identity and a way of life.*

• Change
  – *Community beautification and the renovation of downtown and the riverfront area.*
  – *Expand and diversify the economic base by increasing employment opportunities and strengthening the retail sector.*
  – *Identify ways to address youth-related problems in the community.*
Vision
- A thriving economy providing employment and retail choices to residents and generating new income for local government.
- A revitalized downtown with a beautiful river front area.
- A clean and attractive natural environment that is appreciated and cherished by all residents.
- Still retain the cherished qualities of small town life regardless of its size.

Action
- The people need to be committed to acting for themselves by becoming more involved in community decision-making, community service, and community affairs.
- Economic development must become a key focus of community efforts.
- Initiate a community clean-up and create a long-term commitment to enhancing environmental quality.

Responses from a community visioning process using focus groups
Cautionary notes on focus groups

Selecting participants is critical - must reflect the purpose.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Then</th>
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<tr>
<td>How the community in general thinks.</td>
<td>Select participants that reflect the population.</td>
</tr>
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<td>The action preferences of particular interest groups.</td>
<td>Do several groups to reflect the diversity of interest.</td>
</tr>
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<td>The priorities for action or perceptions of potential impact.</td>
<td>Select participants whose interests differ on the issue.</td>
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</table>
Cautionary Notes on Focus Groups, continued

- Quality depends on selection criteria and participants’ willingness to participate
- Deciding on how to capture the content
- Need a skilled facilitator
Components of a Situational Analysis

- Analysis of trends using secondary data
- SWOT analysis
- Key informant interviews
- Focus groups
- Network analysis
What Is a Network Analysis?

Social Networks are:

- The web of social relationships that link organizations through individuals who occupy positions in several organizations
- At the heart of decision making, authority and power in the community
What Is a Network Analysis: Involves…

• Diagramming social relationships
  – Individual and organizational level
  – Relationships that link community outside its boundaries

• Identifying who serves on what boards or who knows whom
Why Is a Network Analysis Useful?

Useful when you need to:

- "See" the social relationships in the community
- **Understand** how social ties make individuals’ decisions about participating interdependent
- Use the social relationships to **influence** a wide range of individual and social outcomes
Extension and a Network Analysis

- Understand the underlying dynamics of social relationships and social influence
- Help community understand what a network analysis is and assist in conducting one
How to Do a Network Analysis

- **Identify** board members of an organization
- **Interview** with following types of questions:
  - What organizations do you belong to?
  - What leadership positions do you hold?
  - Who else has a leadership position?
  - If you want to get information who do you talk to?
  - Do you ever seek advice from this person?
  - If you wanted to make something happen who would you contact first?
  - Do you belong to or serve on regional/state boards?
- **Chart** relationships
A new Ag/Natural Resources county agent used this method to identify the leadership structure in his community. He began with the members of the Ag Advisory Council and then branched out from there asking these questions:

- If you wanted to learn about how farmers in this area thinking about an issue, who would you talk to?
- If you wanted to be sure that farmers in this area learned about a new service or program, how would you do this?
- If you wanted to get farmers in this community to participate in a new program, how would you go about doing this?
- Who would you say is someone that farmers in this community look up to?
- Who do farmers in this community ask for advice?
Cautionary Notes on Network Analysis

- **Time** involved in interviews
- May be **resistance** to the revealing of underlying networks of influence

But an important way to identify local influentials and those with extra-local networks
Summary on Uses of a Situational Analysis

• Defines assets and resources
  – What skills and resources do we have?
  – What do we do? Produce? Know how to do?
  – What do we need that we might be able to provide for ourselves?

• Identifies the cultural and social capital that can be mobilized for development.
Summary on Uses of a Situational Analysis, Continued

- Locates community influentials who have power based on their ability to network and build coalitions
- Identifies networks that link:
  - Persons with organizations
  - Organizations and institutions
- Provides a context for discussing public issues and making public choices
A situational analysis is the beginning point for all community development efforts.

The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.
Albert Einstein

The greatest challenge to any thinker is stating the problem in a way that will allow a solution.
Bertrand Russell
Additional Resources: (Links on Handout)

- Situational Analysis. University of Wisconsin Extension
- Situation Analysis by Roger Rennekamp, Martha Nall and Julie Zimmerman
- The Community Toolbox
- Useful Community Development Toolbox
Looking Ahead

Community Sustainability

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