

Broadly Supported: Broad Participation, Public Input, and Buy-In

Module Three

Introduction

Securing broad participation and strong buy-in requires the ability to identify key regional stakeholders and provide pathways in which to effectively engage new participants. Three of the four elements within this category are explored in this module: (1) Broad Participation, (2) Public Input, and (3) Buy-In from key decision-makers. The fourth element, Persuasive, will be discussed in a later module.

Broad Participation:

The Introduction on page 9 provides an explanation of how the planning initiative began, stating that 32 individuals comprised the planning council. This is certainly a good starting point, but the council did not stop there. Page 99 describes the establishment of eight working groups that ultimately incorporated over 160 individuals into the planning process. The list of members on pages 155-157 confirms that these individuals span a broad range of interests and expertise.

Public Input:

The Southern Tier Region developed a comprehensive approach to public engagement and utilized multiple techniques to maximize regional input and participation. This design resulted in a strongly supported plan. Specifically, the public input plan involved:

- Posting relevant information to the state's Regional Council website
- Conducting an on-line public survey
- Holding five public forums at different locations throughout the region which included table discussions and comment cards for sharing in non-threatening ways.
- Allowing the public to attend part or all of the planning sessions.
- Reaching out to existing groups and networks with participation opportunities
- Conducting one on one meetings with key stakeholders
- Publicizing all opportunities to participate in available media outlets
- Giving focused attention to areas particularly at risk

Buy-In:

The planning council was established as a part of the state Governor's regional council plan. As such, the planners have immediate state level buy in and support. Not resting

on that alone, the planners appear to have generated significant buy in based on the Implementation Agenda (beginning on page 28) which lists a variety of Lead Agencies that have apparently agreed to take ownership of various Action Items. Some strength could have been added to this section by including evidence of local elected official support, specific letters or endorsements by key stakeholders, or other tangible evidence.

HQP Attributes Related to Evidence Base

Part of achieving broad participation and buy-in is making sure that the public is being engaged and heard. This is a regional effort and residents represent the labor force, the investors, and the tax base, so it is critical to make sure that their voice is heard. Responsibility (one of the other HQP elements) is directly tied to participation and buy-in from the respect that the individuals recruited will become the leaders for implementation. The earlier these stakeholders are brought into the planning process, the better so that they can have an active hand in shaping the plan which will likely lead to a greater commitment to implementation.

Your Plan: What to Do in Module Three:

Most importantly: Look around the table at who is here today and who is not. Economic development does not happen in a vacuum. Instead, it involves education, business, finance, family, government, healthcare, non-profits and social aspects, just to name a few. Who are you missing at the planning table to ensure that you are connecting the pieces and gaining essential buy-in from the decision-makers?

Secondly, while it is neither practical nor feasible to have the entire region's population actively participate in planning, think about how you can offer opportunities for the public to weigh in on these matters that impact them daily. Consider a broad range of avenues that go beyond traditional large group settings such as town hall meetings or forums. Seek input streams that allow for more comfortable sharing, such as round table discussions, open houses, surveys (paper and on-line), comment cards, etc. Think, too, about making these options accessible. Particularly for a large region, hosting one session for the public and expecting everyone to come to you will limit participation. Take the initiative to go to the people that will be living your plan.

Begin drafting the "Introduction" with special emphasis on the "Regional Colaboration."