Part III. School-based Community Development Project

The community needs assessment survey can be used as a resource for designing community development projects. By using the information, you can select community projects capable of meeting the needs and concerns of residents. This section is intended to help students learn how to use the survey information to identify community projects and how to implement a community project successfully.

Objectives

I.   Students will learn to use the community needs assessment to identify community projects.

II.   Students use the action model principles to plan and implement a community project.

III.   Students will learn to develop support for and to anticipate the consequences of a community project.

Initiation and Preparation

The students review the results of the survey. With the teacher's assistance, the students begin to evaluate the information and research potential projects to determine their feasibility.

Tools: Reference books, census reports, newspaper clippings.

Resources:
- Needs assessment survey.

- Teacher gathers the materials necessary for the students' project presentations.

- Visual aids, overheads, posters, or handouts.

To encourage support, the project coordinator should facilitate involvement and commitment of community leaders and citizens

Organization and Decision-making

- Students select a project.

Tools: Newspaper or local publications, leader interviews.

- ◆ Students arrange meetings with community leaders and obtain sponsors for the project.

- ◆ Using the community action model, students develop a plan of action for their project.

Resources: Community action steps (review the Community6 Action section in A Primer on Community in Part I).

- ◆ Students obtain pledges for project resources. Specifically, the students mobilize volunteers, equipment, and materials necessary for the project.

Implementation

The students implement their plan and continue to review their progress.

Reflection

The teacher leads the students in a discussion about the project's progress and success. The students should identify any problems that may have occurred during implementation and discuss how those problems might be avoided in the future. The students should also consider what worked during implementation so the same method can be replicated. The objective is to evaluate the project to determine both the positive and negative aspects of its implementation.

Celebration

Those who participated in the project are recognized. A celebration honors students' contributions to the community as well as their learning accomplishments. Students and volunteers can be recognized in the media, such as in local newspapers or other publications, and a ceremony can be held to recognize those who contributed to the project, including the community leaders, the project sponsors, and students.

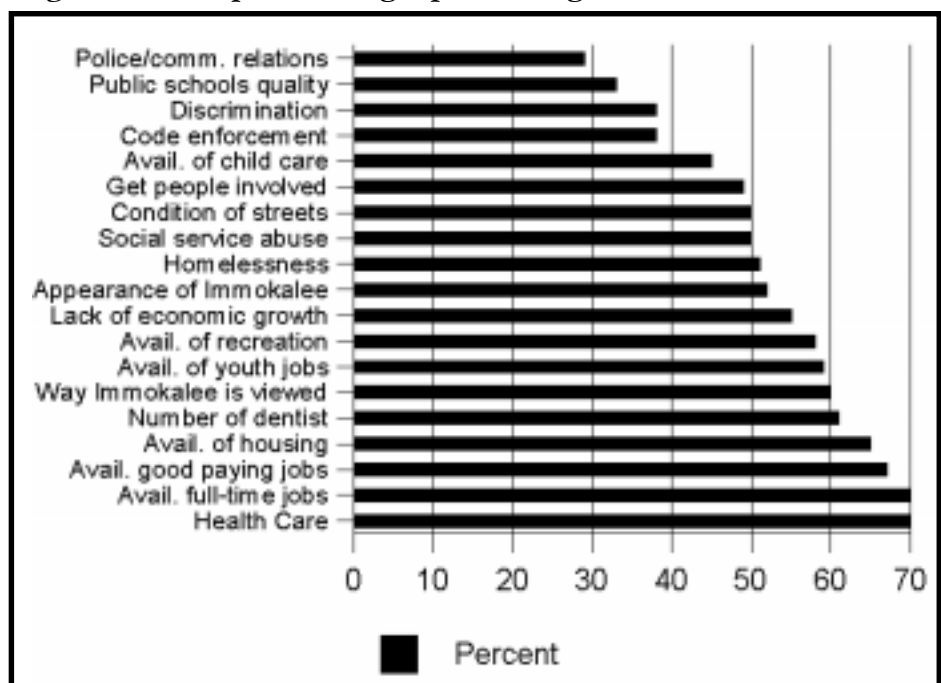## Community Projects: Beyond the Needs Assessment

The information collected in a needs assessment survey helps community leaders and citizen groups make more informed decisions about local programs and policies and provides your group with a list of potential community projects. Admittedly, some projects identified in the needs assessment, such as constructing a new road to help reduce traffic congestion, are better handled by local government agencies or larger community organizations. The question is "What worthwhile but manageable community projects can your group tackle?" Careful selection and evaluation of potential projects assures that your project will be feasible and rewarding for both the group and the community.

Using the needs assessment to identify community projects marks the first phase of community action: Initiation [3]. This phase involves recognizing needs and gathering the necessary information. Once the problem is defined, you enter the second phase—Organization of Sponsorship—where the students organize themselves and other community members to take responsibility for a problem by taking action [3]. These sections will discuss the activities involved in both of these phases, including determining potential community projects, gathering project information, evaluating a project's feasibility, and achieving group consensus.

Determining Potential Projects: A Review

The needs assessment identifies many areas of concern for community residents. Through careful analysis, you can arrange these areas in order of importance. The analysis should begin by using a summary table or chart to review the need assessment results. For example, the results in Figure 3.1 indicate that health care, jobs, and affordable housing were significant concerns among Immokalee, Florida, residents. Once the data are reviewed, the students are ready to select from among the priority concerns. Stu-
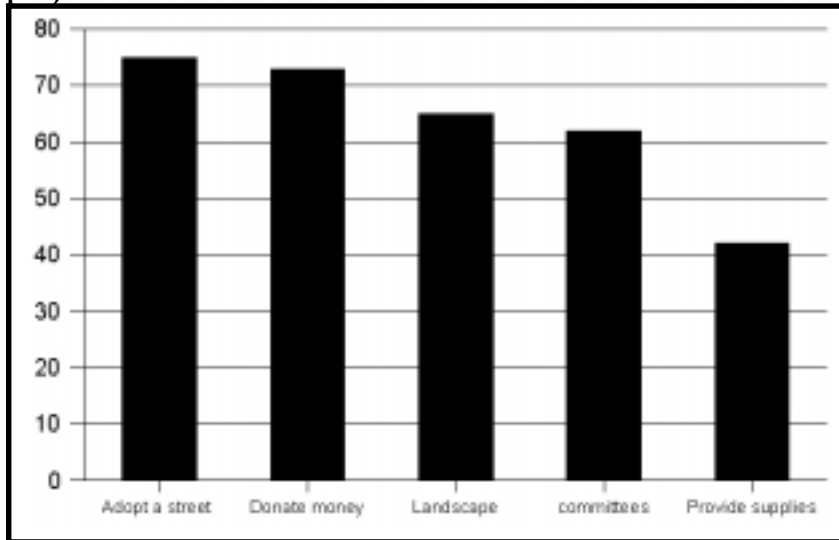
Figure 3.1 **Sample showing a prioritizing of results**

Figure 3.2 **Sample of additional information for identifying projects**

dents should be assigned to small groups with about four to five members for this step.

Next, each group should identify potential community projects for its selected priority area and begin researching one or more projects. If other questions in the needs assessment survey provide additional information on a topic, students can use this to identify project ideas. For example, Figure 3.1 shows that 52 percent of respondents felt Immokalee's appearance was a serious problem. Answers to other questions (Figure 3.2), suggest a few more specific projects, such as creating an adopt-a-street program and landscaping medians and roadsides, and help answer questions about a project's feasibility (which is discussed later is this section).

Brainstorming is a second technique that can be used to identify project ideas. Students should list project ideas using the Possible Community Projects and Solutions worksheet in this section (see Figure 3.3).

The groups should select a community project in which they are interested and one they believe will contribute to their community. Students should research potential group projects and make formal presentations about their projects to the class [1]. The class should then vote on a final project using the following criteria:

* Importance of the project

* The information that can be gathered about the project

* Whether the group can handle the project

Gathering Project Information

Each group should collect information so as to define its project and determine whether it can be undertaken. Defining the project requires asking specific questions, such as the ones listed below, to learn more about the problem and one or more of the potential projects listed on the *Possible Projects and Solutions Worksheet* [1].

◆ What projects have been successful in solving the problem or satisfying the need?

◆ Is there more than one way to accomplish this?

◆ How will the project help the community and the residents?

◆ What other groups or organizations will be needed?

◆ What resources are needed to implement the project?

◆ What special skills are required?

◆ How much will the project cost?

◆ How long will it take to finish?

Figure 3.3 **Sample project ideas for health care**

Possible Projects and Solutions Worksheet

Problem: Health care

Possible Solutions:
1. Develop and distribute brochures that tell about accessing health care services in the community.
2. Work with local health care agencies to recruit doctors and other health care practitioners to the community.
3. Develop an accident prevention program aimed at seatbelt safety, bicycle safety, etc.
4. Plan health screenings at schools, work sites, and community centers in cooperation with local agencies.

For some complex issues, such as economic development, it may be helpful for two groups to gather information on the same project and then compare their findings. Students should gather as much information from a variety of sources as possible.

Sources of Information for Community Projects

◆ *Resource people or experts*: Interview people—of the community or experts outside your community—in fields associated with the project to learn more about the topic [1].

◆ *Library:* The library is an excellent source of information. Reference books, census reports, newspaper clippings, or other reference material can supply factual information. Additional information may be obtained through searching the World Wide Web of the Internet by using a computer in the library or computer lab.

◆ *Observation and Discussion*: When possible, students should observe the identified problems in their community first hand. For example, if the safety of park facilities were identified as a problem, the students can go to the parks to examine the facilities. For some topics such as trying to observe the need for community job training programs for the unemployed, direct observation is not possible. Discussing the topic with

unemployed residents would, however, provide your group with needed information about the problem.

♦   *Tours and Trips:* It may be helpful to see how other communities have handled certain problems. Trips to nearby communities may provide students with insight on how a problem could be better handled in their community by understanding the difficulties other communities faced with similar projects [1].

Evaluating a Project's Feasibility

Groups must decide whether they can handle their proposed community project. Such a decision requires assessing what contribution each group can make and the limitations of each group's resources [1]. If a project seems unmanageable for a group it could team up with other service organizations or contact local leaders for help [2]. The following questions help determine a project's feasibility:

♦   What other groups or organizations are willing to help?

♦   What groups or organizations might oppose the project?

♦   How will the money be raised to implement the project?

♦   How successful have related projects been in the past?

♦   Can the group devote the time necessary to complete the project?

♦   Can the group's effort make a significant impact with the project?

The answers to these questions give students an idea of whether thier project is feasible. For example, by polling students on how many hours each could contribute to the project each week and tallying the number, students could determine whether their available time would meet the requirements for a proposed project. If one group determines its project is unmanageable, the that group could help other groups study their proposed projects. We provide worksheets for practice on gathering project information and evaluating project feasibility at the end of this section (see *Gathering Information for Community Projects* and *Recognizing the Impact of Community Projects* worksheets).

Group Consensus

Once each group has had the opportunity to present its project, the students should discuss the proposed projects and try to reach general agree-

ment favoring one project. All of the students should be given an opportunity to voice support for or concerns about the projects. The group members should listen to their peers and decide from the discussion which final project is best for the group.

A complete discussion of proposed projects usually leads to group consensus. However, if students are having difficulty agreeing on a final project, allow the students to amend the projects. Compromising the project's objectives might help achieve group consensus in which every group member supports and is eager to implement the selected project.

Sources

[1]   Clouse, James and Lee Cary. 1987. Community Development: An FFA Rural Initiative—Student Manual. Washington, D.C., United States Department of Education.

[2]   . 1982. Systematic Project Design: A Handbook for Volunteers. Washington, D.C.: Information Collection and Exchange. PE 1.10:R-44A

[3]   Wilkinson, Kenneth P. 1970. "Phases and Roles in Community Action." Rural Sociology. 35: 54-67.

Possible Community Projects and Solutions
Instructor's Guidelines

Instructions

This exercise challenges students to develop a project proposal that is feasible for their groups and helps to solve a community problem. The students identify a problem or need; then they develop a project design to solve or help solve the problem.

1) Divide the class into groups of four or five students. Provide each group with a copy of the needs assessment analysis and the "Possible Projects and Solutions Worksheet."

2) Have each student in each group select one community need or problem from the analysis that interests him or her.

3) Require each student to generate a list of possible solutions to the need or problem.

4) Have each student select a manageable solution from the list of solutions and formulate a general project idea that would help solve the community need or problem.

5) Have the students present their problems and proposed solutions to the class.

6) Have the class select one project.

Possible Projects and Solutions Worksheet

Step 1:

Select one community need or problem from the analysis that interests you.

Problem: _____

Step 2:

Generate a list of possible solutions to the problem above.

Possible Solutions:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

Step 3:

Select one manageable solution from the list of solutions and create a project idea you believe would solve the need or problem.

Solution: _____

Project Idea: _____

_____

_____

Step 4:

Discuss the project ideas within your group after each member has completed his or her worksheet.

From the discussion, refine your project idea.

Gathering Information for Community Projects
Instructor's Guidelines

Instructions

After selecting a community project, each group needs to gather accurate and comprehensive information about the problem or the project it has decided to undertake. Accessing appropriate sources is necessary to ensure that students obtain the information they need to plan their project. This exercise encourages students to develop skill in applying information to the project they have selected.

1) Give students a copy of the "Gathering Information for Community Projects Worksheet;" they can work in groups or individually.

2) Encourage students to describe their problem. They should consider the problems and answer the questions provided.

3) Hold a discussion about information sources for community projects. Have the students explain what information they obtained and how useful each source was. Students will learn from each other about sources they may have overlooked.

Gathering Information for Community Projects Worksheet

Proposed Project Idea: _____

     Use a variety of information sources to answer the following set of questions. Your group may want to interview resource people or experts, search for information in the local library or through the Internet, observe the problem first hand, or travel to a nearby community to tour a similar project or program.

Questions

1. Is there more than one way to solve the problem?

    _____
    _____
    _____

2. How successful have related projects been in the past?

    _____
    _____
    _____

3. How will the project help the community and the residents?

    _____
    _____
    _____

4. What other groups or organizations are willing to help?

    _____
    _____
    _____

5. What groups or organizations might oppose the project?

    _____
    _____
    _____

6. What special skills are required?

    _____
    _____
    _____

7.   How long will it take to finish?

_____
_____
_____

8.   How will the money be raised to implement the project?

_____
_____
_____

9.   What help from outside the community, if any, would be necessary?

_____
_____
_____

10.   Can the group devote the time necessary to complete the project?

_____
_____
_____

11.   Can the group's effort make a significant impact with the project?

_____
_____
_____

Overall recommendation

Based on the answers to questions 1 through 11, should you carry out this project or choose another?

_____

Gathering Information for Community Projects Discussion Guide

Discussion Questions

1. Why is information about your problem and proposal necessary?

2. Why are certain sources of information appropriate for some projects and not others?

3. What are some information sources that your group identified?

4. Based on the information you have, what are the strengths and weaknesses of your project idea?

Recognizing the Impact of Community Projects
Instructor's Guidelines

Instructions

Because community projects have consequences, it is important for students to anticipate the effects of projects. This exercise helps students learn to think about how their project will affect residents.

1) Give students a copy of the "Recognizing the Impact of Community Projects Worksheet," describing the hypothetical community project.

2) Suggest that students work individually to generate a list of possible project effects.

3) Discuss the answers with the students to help them understand why these effects may occur and why we should anticipate effects.

Recognizing the Impact of Community Projects Worksheet

Making a list of the residents you believe will be affected and predicting how they might be affected helps determine which residents need to be specifically considered and accounted for when planning a project.

Example: The Beta club has decided to sponsor a "Paint Your Heart-Out" day. This project involves painting the homes of residents who are unable or cannot afford to repaint their homes themselves.

Your assignment is to determine whom this project will affect and how they might be affected.

Instructions

In the first column list residents that will be affected by the project. In the other column write how they will be positively and negatively affected. Finally, evaluate the effects and determine how the project could be modified to eliminate or reduce any negative effects.

Those affected	Project effects
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	

Recognizing the Impact of Community Projects Key

Those affected

◆ Low-income residents

◆ Professional contractors

Project effects

◆ The effort would improve the appearance of the homes in low income neighborhoods.

◆ The effort may encourage residents to take pride in their homes and neighborhoods.

◆ Some residents may believe the offer to paint their home implies that their home looks undesirable. They may, consequently, be offended by the offer.

◆ Contractors whose specialty is painting homes may want to be involved in the community project.

Solutions

◆ Allow residents to help the volunteers, such as having them select the color of paint for their home. The goal is not only to paint the houses but to show low-income residents that people care and want to help them.

◆ Ask some local contractors for their advice or assistance. For instance, contractors could give some "tips" to the volunteers about painting a house. These tips would improve the project and possibly give local contractors some publicity in local newspaper articles written about the project.

Building a Foundation for Community Leadership

Involving Youth in Community Development Projects

Identifying Possible Projects

- Review needs assessment results to determine priority needs

- List project's ideas

  – Study data from other survey questions for ideas

  – Brainstorm with your group

- Select a project for further study

Defining Your Project

- *What* can be done to solve the problem?

- *How* can we accomplish this?

- *What* other organizations can help?

- *What* resources are needed for the project?

Defining Your Problem *(cont.)*

- *What* special skills are required?

- *How* much will the project cost?

- *How* long will it take to finish?

Sources of Information for Community Projects

- Resource People or Experts

- Library

- Observation and Discussion

- Tours and Trips

Evaluating a Project's Feasibility

- What other groups are willing to help?

- How will the money be raised to implement the project?

- How successful have related projects been in the past?

3-22

Evaluating a Project's Feasibility

- Is the project significant to the community?

- Can the group devote the necessary time to the project?

3-23

Community Projects: Preparing for Action

Successful and effective action on a project requires the development of strategies, organization of resources, and mobilization of support for your project. A group can plan for such an endeavor by writing a Plan of Action [1], identifying community members and groups that will support the project, and mobilizing the needed resources—activities characteristic of community organization phases three and four, Goal Setting and Recruitment [2]. This section will illustrate the activities involved in these phases, including developing a plan of action, identifying resources needed for a project, and encouraging project support.

Developing a Plan of Action /77

Planning is simply systematic organizing a set of tasks to reach a goal or, in this case, completing the project. It enables your group to solidify the project's idea and develop strategies to attain your goal. A good plan identifies tasks, assigns responsibilities to individuals or groups, and includes a time table for carrying out each step.

Planning can be done step by step. Each step represents a task. Tasks are ordered and scheduled, including the resources needed for each task [3]. The plan's timetable sets deadlines for completing specific tasks. By accomplishing each task, you are more likely to complete the project successfully.

Planning Considerations

* Responsibility for the project

Typically your group assumes responsibility for carrying out the community project, though this may not always be the case. For example, your group may assist another group's community project [1].

If your group is the primary sponsor of the project, it needs to select a project coordinator. The coordinator oversees the project and facilitates involvement and commitment of community leaders, citizens, and students.

* Project dates

Because the beginning and ending dates of the project determine its time schedule, these dates must be identified before deciding how much time each project task can take to complete [3].

◆ Participation of all group members

It is important all group members are involved in planning the project so that each member is aware of the project tasks [1]. Also, involving each student ensures that he or she becomes more fully invested in the project and is thus more likely to see it through to completion.

◆ Contacting recruits

The tasks that require extra help or resources will need to be identified. Contact people who can provide these resources and schedule the delivery of help and materials.

Mobilizing Resources and Group Members for Action

Recruitment requires much planning and effort. In the previous section, students gathered general information about the resources necessary for a project. Yet planning the project requires detailed and complete information about its resources, such as materials, money, manpower, and skills. It is important to plan for the resources because by not locating them initially and confirming the offers of assistance, your group may be surprised during a project to find the resources unavailable when needed.

Materials and Finances

To plan your project, you need a cost analysis or a precise estimation of what resources are needed to implement and maintain a project because unexpected costs may occur during implementation or in the future [3]. For example, a project to develop a softball field in an unused section of a park would need to consider funding for construction and maintenance.

Once you have included the materials and costs for the project in your plan of action, you then need to determine the sources. Sources of financial support for community projects include the following:

◆ Local businesses

◆ Local organizations; e.g., Kiwanis, Rotary

◆ Fund-raisers

◆ Business and professional groups; e.g., Chamber of Commerce

◆ Community improvement grants

These financial support sources might be found in local organizational directories or the yellow pages of the telephone book. It is a good idea to compile a list of possible sources for money, then assign students sources to contact. Students should keep a record of pledges, including those for materials, money, time, or advice. (See also the *Project Resource Exercise* for practice in assessing resource needs.)

Volunteers and Technical Skills

A **resource** does not necessarily refer to money or materials [3]. Resources also include the volunteers, technical experts, and consultants who provide assistance, technical information, or advice needed for a project.

Writing Your Plan of Action

Use the project information gathered in the previous section and the steps below as a guide to write your plan of action. You may want to consider using one of the many project management software programs on a computer to develop your plan of action. Though developing an action plan on the computer is not necessary, project management programs have the advantage of providing various charts and graphics that display the time line for conducting specific activities and applying each set of resources. Whether you use a project management program or the worksheets provided in this section, conduct the following steps.

Step 1

List all the tasks required to complete the project. Next, prioritize your list by determining which tasks need to be completed in the beginning, which tasks must follow other tasks, and which tasks can be completed last. Write the tasks in order on the "Project Task Worksheet" (see the example in Figure 3.4).

Step 2

Write a complete description of each task, considering the resources and other assistance needed for its completion.

Step 3

Based on experience and the information learned about the project, esti-

Figure 3.4 **Sample project, "Clean and Green Day" for picking up litter along streets and highways**

Task	Description	Date	Member
Arrange dates	Organize a meeting and determine the date of the event.	During first monthly meeting. 3/5	Joe
Schedules	Make a s schedule of work shifts.	3/15	Alicia
Tools	Obtain tools from hardware store.	3/20	Damon
Supplies	Solicit supplies for event, including garbage bags, from local stores.	3/20	Mary

mate the time it will take to complete each task. Record the estimated time needed to complete each task in column three.

Step 4

Name the individuals responsible for each task in column four. We suggest having students take turns signing up for the tasks until all tasks are covered.

Step 5

Schedule each task and its associated activities on a calendar. This can be done graphically with a time line chart (like the one shown is Part II, *The School-Based Community Needs Assessment Survey* of this handbook). When scheduling tasks, consider the estimated time each task requires and the when the resources are needed.

By following the steps above, you can create a plan of action ready to be put into action. Plans are useful only if they are used to track progress and update members. Group members should have a copy of the plan so each individual is aware of upcoming activities and the progress of the project.

Encouraging Project Support

In addition to a plan, a successful project also needs the support of the community leaders and residents [1]. Though group sponsorship is crucial for a project's success, community support can lend it credibility and pave the way for future projects. Because of this students should pursue community support with the same fervor with which they pursue sponsorship.

Community leaders, especially if they are involved with the issue your project addresses, can provide valuable insight and expertise to your project. Also, these people can be influential in creating additional support and arranging help for a project [1].

We suggest selecting a few students to present the project to community leaders. These students should be prepared to answer any questions the leaders have. The project information prepared by the class is ideal to use for this meeting.

Students should talk to residents who might be affected by the project to get their reactions or suggestions. Considering how they will be affected is critical to earning their support; such consideration helps to avoid opposition later when the plan of action is implemented.

Similarly, the media can be asked to promote the project. Not only do they inform community members, but they can generate support and help for your project. (See also *Promoting Your Community Needs Survey* for ideas on preparing news releases to promote your project.)

Beginning and Ending

With the support of your community and a plan of action, you are ready to begin implementing your project. However, it is important to remember that your plan of action is the group's guide to completing its community project. Therefore, the plan should be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure the project is successfully implemented.

We believe everyone can learn from our projects. During and after implementation of community projects, students should examine their activities and ask themselves:

◆ Did we accomplish what we planned? Why, or why not?

◆ What "worked" and what did not?

◆ What have we learned from this project?

◆ How did the community benefit from our efforts?

Because community projects are challenging undertakings that require commitment and work, all people involved should be recognized for their efforts. A "celebration" should be held to bring everyone involved in the project together for recognition and appreciation. A celebration or recognition ceremony may include a ribbon cutting for a new facility or a party for student and adult volunteers. The celebration is a time to praise the efforts that contributed to a job well done.

Sources

[1]   Clouse, James and Lee Cary. 1987. Community Development. Washington, D.C., United States Department of Education.

[2]   Wilkinson, Kenneth P. 1970. "Phases and Roles in Community Action." Rural Sociology. 35: 54-67.

[3]   Wzorek, Carol. 1987. Small Projects Design and Management: Training Manual for Volunteers and Counterparts. Washington, D.C., Information Collection and Exchange. (P.E. 1.10:T0050).

Project Task Worksheet

Task	Description	Time	Member

Project Resources Exercise:
Instructor's Guidelines

Instructions

When planning, it is important to know what project resources are necessary and who will provide those resources. This exercise challenges students to evaluate the resource needs of their project ideas.

1) Provide a copy of the "Project Resource Worksheet" to each student. Have the students list all of the necessary project resources in the first column.

2) Encourage the students to determine whether each resource will be provided by their group, by an outside source, or by a combination of the two. The students should check the appropriate source column, "Group" or "Outside."

3) Have the students discuss the resource needs of various project ideas and assess which projects have adequate resources.

Project Resource Worksheet

When planning, it is important to know what project resources are necessary and who will provide those resources. List all of the necessary project resources in the first column. Next, check whether each resource would be provided by students or another outside source.

Resource	Source	
	Group	Outside
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		
15.		
16.		
17.		
18.		
19.		
20.		

Building a Foundation for Community Leadership

Involving Youth in Community Development Projects

Planning Considerations

- Responsibility for the project
- Project dates
- Contact recruits
- Locating resources
- Participation of all group members

Sources for Financial Support

- Local businesses

- Local organizations

- Fund-raisers

- Business and professional groups

- Community improvement grants

Steps for Writing a Plan of Action

- List and prioritize project tasks

- Describe each task

- Set task deadlines

- Determine responsibility for tasks

- Schedule the tasks