

## **ONLINE STRATEGIC PLANNING: *Another New Tool in the COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TOOLBOX***

<http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/~lced/cdo/>

### ***Why Strategic Planning?***

Everyone can agree that planning is key to realizing community goals that matter most to your stakeholders. ONLINE STRATEGIC PLANNING has been added to the Community Development Toolbox to help communities and community organizations document their assets and set goals to meet the economic challenges facing rural places in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

ONLINE STRATEGIC PLANNING is borrowed from corporate culture which prescribed the setting of long term goals and objectives, the outline of a course(s) of action and an allocation of resources (Chandler, A.D., 1962<sup>1</sup>). For community development, strategic planning becomes equally important to allow the community to formulate a vision, identify a mission and set goals to determine their future. A clear and practical strategy will ensure that your organization grows to meet its vision and does not lie on the shelf and collect dust. The COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TOOLBOX' ONLINE STRATEGIC PLANNING provides the framework to help your community organization build a simple and powerful plan for your future. To access, login at <http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/~lced/cdo/>, enter the information for the login (there will be no charge and under no circumstances will your name be forward or used for commercial purposes, the information is used solely for our own evaluation).

### ***Strategic Planning in 7 (Not-so-Easy) Steps***

The strategic planning process is not easy. This online version is comprised of 7 steps beginning with creating your planning committee to writing the final report. This process takes time, but does not have take forever. Using online tools, you are in charge of how your organization works through the process and how much time you allocate to each step. Each step includes interactive worksheets. Using the same login each time you access the site will make certain that you retrieve the information you have previously entered. Your login name also serves as a means to store all of your information.

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<sup>1</sup> Chandler, A.D. (1962). *Strategy and Structure*. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press.

### **Step 1: Establish a Planning Committee**

Create a planning committee that represents the diverse interests in your community. Use the worksheets to focus on stakeholder interests and skills and to record potential committee members.

### **Step 2: Define a Mission Statement**

Create a sense of mission for your community organization. The 4 worksheets in this section help your committee to define the parameters of your mission – your purpose, values, the stakeholders you serve and the way you intend to conduct your business. There is also a work space to help you brainstorm these concepts.

### **Step 3: Summarize the Results of Your Needs Assessment**

Creating strategies for your community organization need to be based on realistic and robust assessments of local attitudes and an evaluation of community assets. Community assessments provide the data and the rationale for setting priorities for your community development efforts. The worksheets in this section provide a framework for you to summarize the most important findings of your needs assessment. If you have not completed an assessment in the past year, then use the links provided to help you organize an appropriate strategies.

### **Step 4: Evaluate Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)**

A systematic identification of these 4 attributes becomes critical to building future goals and objectives that are realistic within the parameters of your local and regional economy. The SWOT analysis allows you to objectively summarize your community's internal strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities and threats that lie in the external environment, all representing forces that may greatly impact your organization. These worksheets provide space for the committee to brainstorm and more objectively articulate your community's position in the regional economy.

### **Step 5: Establish Goals**

Develop goals to establish the direction you want to take for your community development initiatives. Goals express your aspirations for the future of your community. Goals must be tied to outcomes rather than activities. The worksheets in this section

allow you to organize goals and determine the timeframe for each. To maintain your focus choose only a few goals, the ones you chose should reflect your most desirable outcomes.

### **Step 6: Identify Objectives and Strategies**

These next set of worksheets help to document the means of accomplishing the goals stated previously. For each goal, there is a worksheet to document objectives (the details behind the goal), strategies (the action steps), the resources you will need to fulfill the objective and a place to document whether those resources exist locally. Also, this step includes a GANTT chart (timetable) to help you document work assignments and deadlines.

### **Step 7: Prepare a Written Report**

This final step, often the most difficult, is made easier using the online model. At this point all worksheets are reproduced and ready for editing in your final report. Select *view* to print the worksheets as they were entered, or select *edit* to fine-tune the report. It is possible to highlight the text, copy and insert it into word processing software for creating a more complete report.

## ***What is the Best Way to Use ONLINE STRATEGIC PLANNING?***

Each of the members of the strategic planning committee need to have a good understanding of the planning process. The first step should be to have committee members become familiar with this process by reviewing the 7 steps independently or as a group. Committee members can go online and explore the various aspects of the process prior to the start of the project. Once everyone is familiar with strategic planning, find a facilitator to help the committee stay focused. If possible, the facilitator should be impartial and objective of the group process – the referee, yet represent the stakeholders interest. A committee member would not make a good facilitator because as a stakeholder it would be difficult to be dispassionate. A member of the University of Illinois Extension Community and Economic Development team is able to serve as facilitator for your committee.

For each work session, the facilitator could set up a computer and projector in the room, go online to access the program and project



## ***Other Tools in the COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TOOLBOX***

### **ONLINE COMMUNITY SURVEYS**

Community surveys can help leaders build a foundation for community and economic development in your community. This online interactive tool provides educational and technical assistance to communities and organizations for setting priorities for a survey, determining sample size, evaluating surveying techniques, and identifying questions. This web-based tool describes a nine-step process for conducting a survey, to login go to: [www.ag.uiuc.edu/~lced/newsurvey2](http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/~lced/newsurvey2). When you login for the first time, choose a one word User ID such as the first part of your email address — it should be easy to remember. The information you input for your special application of the survey tool will be stored and easily retrievable the next time you (or other members of your committee) login to the site.

### **The TELECOMMUNICATIONS READINESS INDEX**

The TELECOMMUNICATIONS READINESS INVENTORY is an inventory and evaluation diagnostic of the telecommunications infrastructure in a community. There are three components: Part A, the telecommunications Quotient helps committee members analyze individual affinity for using telecommunications technology; Part B, the Readiness Inventory, helps the community document local Internet access and evaluate the community presence on the World Wide Web (after completing this survey a benchmark score is calculated for future analysis); and Part C, includes an assessment of telecommunications providers in the community. Attached to the tool are surveys communities can use to measure potential demand for telecommunications locally.

This tool allows communities to understand the complex nature of telecommunications infrastructure and thereby empowers them to better navigate telecommunications community/industry negotiations. <http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/~lced/tcii/>

### **Thumbs Up - Evaluating Community Websites**

Thumbs Up is an evaluation tool designed to help community members find what works and doesn't work in the design and planning stages of their websites. By choosing random community websites the user of this tool gets to view other community's attempts at putting their presence on the Internet. Following the look at the site an evaluation form is presented in a modified "Siskel and Ebert" thumbs up or down format. This fun and straightforward scoring puts some quantitative value on impressions of the website. Go to: <http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/~lced/commtele/thumbsup.html>

To access other tools in the COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TOOLBOX go to:  
**<http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/~lced/toolbox>**