

Identifying Target Populations, Problems, Causes, and Strategies

A Guide to Evaluating Strategic Planning Information

Besides being time consuming, the strategic planning tasks of collecting, compiling, and evaluating information are challenges to community planning teams. This publication, with its evaluation form, will help planning groups organize community information collected via surveys, group meetings, personal interviews, and other techniques to assess local needs.

The large amount of gathered information from a strategic-planning or a needs-assessment instrument may initially overwhelm the people responsible for analyzing the information and writing a report. Using this guide, local leaders and strategic planners can organize their information into four categories to address community issues: identifying target populations, problems, causes, and strategies. Presenting community information in an easy-to-read format is necessary because the officials responsible for implementing the plan have little time to read extensive studies.

The following section offers several suggestions for compiling community input into a manageable form.

Processing Community Information

Regardless of the issues, most information obtained from local citizens fits into the four categories identified on the evaluation form (see the next page). For exceptions, the planning committee will have to use another method to draw inferences from the data.

It will take considerable time for a planning committee to process all feedback from the community. However, though time consuming, in the long run, it will enhance the planning effort in evaluating and implementing the key issues identified. Using an appropriate computer software (database) will enable planning groups to manage large amounts of data efficiently and effectively.

Remember to take great care to process community information correctly. The following steps can reduce the amount of information the planning committee must process.

1. After soliciting verbal comments from citizens, enter their statements as concisely as possible into a program that allows you to assign codes and sort similar comments.

2. Evaluate the sorted comments to see if some items may fit better in another category. If so, then code the appropriate items and re-sort the information. There may be a few statements that would fit into two categories.
3. Look for broad themes in the sorted information. Count the number of comments for each broad theme identified (for example, economic development), and record the number of comments for each theme, or issue. This frequency count of issues is one way of prioritizing issues and will help determine issues the citizens feel are most important. Finally, beneath each broad category, record the citizens' specific concerns, or statements, relating to these issues.
4. Complete steps one through three for all sorted items in the database, then repeat the process to "double check," identifying subgroups of issues.
5. Rank the broad topics from the highest to the lowest priority. This step helps the planning committee, economic developers, and local officials identify the issues to focus on, setting the priorities for the strategic plan.

The following section illustrates how to record statements on community issues that were gathered from citizens. It also shows how to use the evaluation form to sort the statements related to target populations, problems, causes, and strategies.

Collecting Information

When collecting statements from citizens, try to distill, or summarize, the information into one concise sentence. When prioritizing, short sentences (one liners) make the task easier. These statements will be used later to stimulate discussion among the community leaders and officials who are responsible for the community's strategic planning. Some statements may need to be clarified through later discussion. Some issues may be identified that require further education for the target audiences.

Example Scenario

A community initiated a strategic planning effort to focus on two important issues in the area: economic development and housing development. The strategic planning committee conducted a series of town meetings and summarized the following concerns for each issue.

ISSUE: Economic Development

Citizens' concerns:

1. The community doesn't have money for economic development.
2. A job training and counseling program is needed.
3. Too many employees work in low-paying jobs.
4. Employers won't pay higher wages to unskilled workers.
5. Prices are too high.
6. The county needs to attract better paying jobs.
7. Employees don't know about available job training and counseling programs.
8. Unskilled workers don't get enough training.

ISSUE: Housing Development

Citizens' concerns:

1. The city doesn't have bond money for housing acquisition and development.
2. A housing counseling program is needed.
3. Too many people live in inadequate housing.
4. Landlords won't rent to unmarried women with children.

5. Interest rates are too high to encourage home ownership.
6. The county should adopt a Fair Housing Ordinance.
7. People don't know about available housing programs.
8. Single parents don't get enough help.

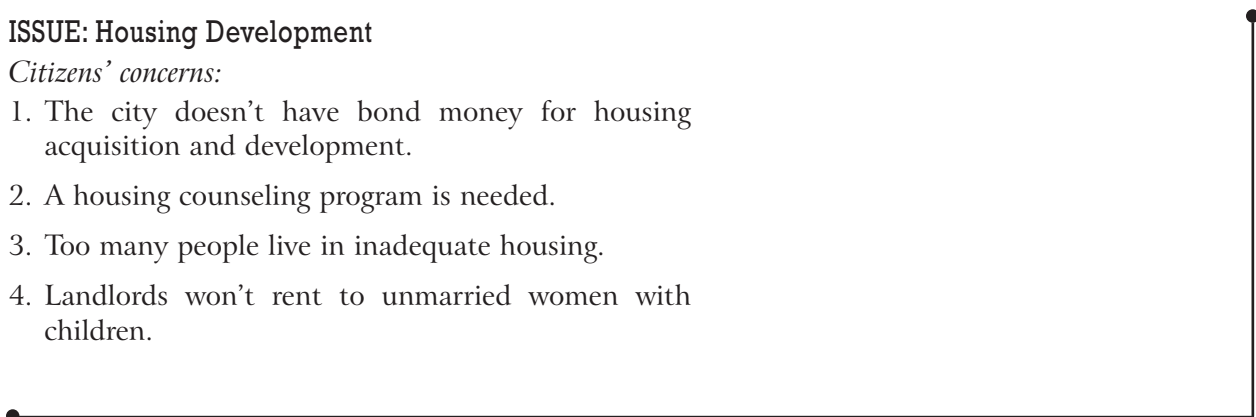
Using the Evaluation Instrument

To help organize community information more easily, determine where each citizen statement of concern fits into the following categories: target populations, problems, causes, strategies. Note that a target population may be part of a problem, so a statement might fit into both categories – target population and problem.

Instead of rewriting the statements, put the numbers of the statements under the appropriate categories on the evaluation form, separating the numbers by commas.

Use the sample, or blank, evaluation form below when sorting and categorizing the citizens' statements of concern. Examples of filled-in evaluation forms follow the sample, or blank, one.

Evaluation Form	
ISSUE:	
I. Target Populations	Statement #s: _____, _____, _____, _____
II. Problems	Statement #s: _____, _____, _____, _____
III. Causes	Statement #s: _____, _____, _____, _____
IV. Strategies (to address problems and causes)	Statement #s: _____, _____, _____, _____



Examples of Completed Evaluation Forms

The evaluation form is used to identify where each statement of concern would fit into the four categories. Each category will likely contain more than one concern. When finished, you should know the affected population, the problems, their causes, and some suggested strategies (action steps) for solving the problems in your community. The statements of concern for the two issues of the example scenario were sorted and categorized as follows:

Evaluation Form

ISSUE: Economic Development

I. Target Population

Statement #s: 4, 8, _____, _____

II. Problems

Statement #s: 3, 5, _____, _____

III. Causes

Statement #s: 1, _____, _____, _____

IV. Strategies (to address problems and causes)

Statement #s: 2, 6, 7, _____

Evaluation Form

ISSUE: Housing Development

I. Target populations

Statement #s: 4, 8, _____, _____

II. Problems

Statement #s: 3, _____, _____, _____

III. Causes

Statement #s: 1, 5, 7, _____

IV. Strategies (to address problems and causes)

Statement #s: 6, 2, _____, _____

Drawing Conclusions

In the example scenario, the community strategic planning committee drew the following conclusions from the evaluation instrument, based on the statement numbers beneath each category.

ISSUE: Economic Development

- The workers face low wages and high prices. (target population and problems)
- A major cause of these problems is not enough money for economic development.

ISSUE: Housing Development

- Unmarried women with children and single people are the targeted populations affected by housing in the community.
- The main problem is that too many people live in inadequate housing. Causes include a lack of bond money for housing acquisition and development, high interest rates, and lack of information about available housing programs.

Making Recommendations

Using the example scenario, the strategic planning committee made the following recommendations for each issue.

ISSUE: Economic Development

- Develop a program for training workers.
- Develop a program for recruiting high-wage companies to the community.

ISSUE: Housing Development

- Develop a counseling program for first-time homeowners.
- Develop a Fair Housing Ordinance program in the community to educate landlords and tenants.



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