



UniverCity Connections

CSU, Downtown & the Poudre

Areas of Focus Task Group Process Guide

Areas of Focus

We are entering the action-planning phase of this process and it is important to have a logical process to move the areas of focus that we have selected from ideas toward implementation. Stakeholders have identified several focus areas and the next step in this process is to identify goals and objectives, and plan specific strategies for each of these. Each of the task groups will be asked to follow a multi-step process to create the needed plans.

Each task group should:

- agree on a convener who is responsible for convening each task group meeting, and providing updates back to the Stakeholders as a whole;
- assign (or share the duties of) a facilitator to run task group meetings to keep the group on task and focused (s/he may or may not be the convener), and a recorder to keep a record of the discussions and decisions;
- find suitable meeting places convenient to as many task group members as possible;
- arrange to have necessary supplies and equipment (e.g. flip chart pads, markers, easel);
- schedule and hold a number of work sessions sufficient to complete the planning steps; and
- participate in full Stakeholder meetings to report progress, check for linkage and leverage, and ensure agreement on the direction of the effort.

Tasks To Be Completed — Questions to Ask During Strategic Planning Work:

1. Identify and recruit key individuals to participate on your task group.

A solid core group of diverse participants is important for each of the task groups. Consideration should be given to the recruitment of additional expertise, influence and perspectives to help balance and strengthen each task group, and ensure creative and implementable plans. Particular attention should be paid to identifying people and groups in the community who may be working on similar issues or who may think this is *their turf*. We want to work with them and not compete with them.

Recruiting additional task group members should be approached cautiously. This is not an exercise to merely increase the numbers on the task group but an attempt to get the “best” people in the area involved in these discussions. Characteristics to look for in new members to participate on task groups include:

- Key expertise, authority or perspective that is missing in this task group?
- Willingness to stay involved at some level through implementation.
- Already trying to make change in this area.
- Ability/influence to assist/block implementation.
- Resources to assist with implementation.
- Ability to "stretch" toward new ways of addressing issues.

- Leadership and enthusiasm for the area of focus.
- Members of the public who are already attending and monitoring Stakeholders work.

2. Assess how the community is performing now in this Area of Focus.

Task groups must accurately assess the community's current performance in the area of focus using the knowledge and experience of task group members. To be successful in this assessment the right "mix" of members is needed (item 1 above). Activities may be underway in the area that directly address the area of focus under consideration. The task groups must look at these efforts for potential partners, good ideas and potential pitfalls.

- What are the current realities and future trends in this area of focus?
- Where are the communities strengths and weaknesses with this area of focus?
- What opportunities exist, what threats?
- What information do we need to gather to inform our discussions?
- Where can we get the information and who agrees to get it?
- What other efforts are underway in the community within this area of focus and would it make sense to partner with them.
- What current/past efforts in this area can be built on?

3. Establish and prioritize your goals and objectives.

The task groups should establish and prioritize short and medium term goals and determine which ones will receive the greatest attention.

- Which goals provoke passion, excitement and commitment?
- Which goals provide the broadest impact on the future of the community?
- Is there a logical sequence in which these goals might be achieved?
- What are some achievable milestones or objectives in the short and medium term that you can set your sights on?

4. Identify potential barriers and suggest options to overcome them.

Each task group must directly confront obvious barriers to implementation. Many times community based planning efforts make greater progress through eliminating barriers than by advocating specific solutions.

- What barriers exist to achieving the objectives?
- How might they be overcome?
- What aspects, circumstances, activities and behaviors within the community may enhance or impede our progress and how can they be addressed?

5. Identify potential actions/initiatives to accomplish the goals.

Each task group should brainstorm a variety of strategies that could be utilized to make positive change for the community within the area of focus. After reviewing all of the possibilities, a manageable number (2 to 4) of priority strategies should be selected and recommended for further development. The integration of the strategies of all the task groups into a coherent conceptual plan for the site is the true product of this effort. The task group must be clear about what specific measurable outcome is intended to result from implementation of the initiative.

- What specific strategies could we use to achieve the objectives or eliminate barriers?
- What are the action steps might be involved in implementing these strategies?
- Would the anticipated outcome of these strategies happen without this effort? Are they being implemented in some fashion already?
- Do these strategies require the kind of public/private and community-wide collaboration built in to this project?
- Do they address core issues or merely cosmetic problems?
- What objective benchmark can we use to evaluate whether implementing a priority strategy will have the desired impact on the community?

6. Identify needed and available resources.

Once each task group has selected priority strategies and begun to conceive specific action steps, an inventory of city, CSU and business and other resources relevant to the ideas can be prepared. Action ideas cannot be considered to be implementable until the resources needed for specific initiatives have been identified and acquired.

- What monies, in-kind support, volunteers, or matching resources are needed to implement the proposed strategies?
- What is the projected cost? What are some options to cover the costs?
- What assets are dedicated to or available to address this area of focus?
- How might we engage them?
- If we know where the resources might be acquired, what are the steps necessary to secure them?

7. Identify areas of overlap with other task groups.

Preliminary reports from the task groups will make it clear that there are areas of overlap among them. Communication between individual task groups is critical to avoid duplication and identify potential leverage. Task groups will share ideas and jointly develop common initiatives.

- Do you see common objectives with another task group?
- Do you have strategies that require common resources?
- Do the activities of one task group directly impact the ideas/results of another?

8. Develop a timeline -- placing a goal date for each step.

Each action step should have a planned beginning date and an estimated duration to enable evaluation of progress and to ensure efficient allocation of resources.

- Are there several time phases to this activity?
- Do implementers change over the life of the activity?
- When can implementation reasonably begin, and when can implementation reasonably be expected to be completed?

9. Complete a detailed description of the conceptual plan integrating all of the strategies.

This step crystallizes the options selected into a tangible plan. Task groups should try to delineate specific action steps, identifying what resources will be required, where they will come from, what the time frame for action is, and who will be responsible for

leading the implementation. Figure out how to personalize for the community the “benefits” of the proposed change. Make it quantifiable.

- The Plan should suggest:
 - Who will coordinate various action steps? (People, organizations, community partners, etc.)
 - What are the steps involved in implementation?
 - What resources are needed & how do we get them?
 - When will we start/finish individual actions?
 - What measurable result do we expect to come from these actions?
 - How do these actions interact with other planning in this part of the city?