

Community Action Intro:

A overview of low-cost networking and planning

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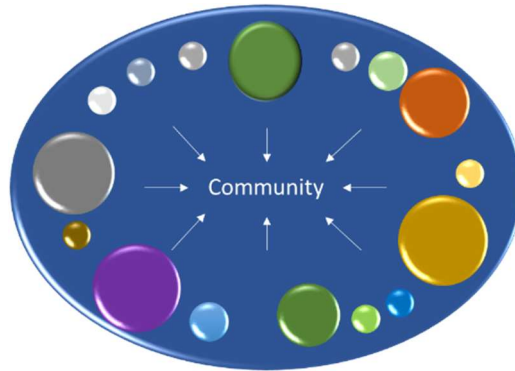
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Summary

This is how local groups can create a community network,



draft and promote a community plan,



and build support for all kinds of projects that create a stronger community.



It's also how we build a national network of organized communities and lay the foundation for a climate-friendly future.



Communities matter



Celebrating the Parkdale Community Economic Development Plan, October 2016, Parkdale, Toronto.

“Communities matter.” We’ve all heard it said at one point or another, but the truth is they really do. A strong and engaged community is the all-important foundation for tackling so many issues: social, economic, and environmental.

What makes a community strong is its people: good neighbours, volunteers, community groups, and local businesses. This “social infrastructure” is every bit as important as the physical infrastructure and services.

A strong community can meet challenges head on, often turning challenges into opportunities to build a better future. If you look at community groups, they all address challenges and needs within the community, and offer solutions to help people take action or enhance the quality of life within the community.

Communities are the front line for action on issues of national and global importance, as are the thousands of organizations and local leaders who are tackling these issues through local initiatives. We cannot even begin to conceive of a sustainable, just, and vibrant future for Canada without looking at strong, engaged communities as the foundation for action.

So many of the national issues – including crime and safety, economic uncertainty, energy security, climate change, health care, and quality of life – find integrated solutions at the community level through urban design and community engagement. A well-designed and active community is healthier, safer, efficient, and resilient.

This is why communities matter, and why we need to celebrate and support the role of communities in making Canada a great place to live.

Start with a basic network and a plan

Community Action Networks

Most communities in Canada have at least 40 groups or associations of one kind or another, including social, cultural, religious, health, recreation, environmental, food, social services, business, and ratepayers. Add in municipal institutions (schools, libraries, and recreation centres), local politicians and municipal staff, community foundations, business leaders, and community leaders, and you have a formidable network of people who are dedicated to improving their community.

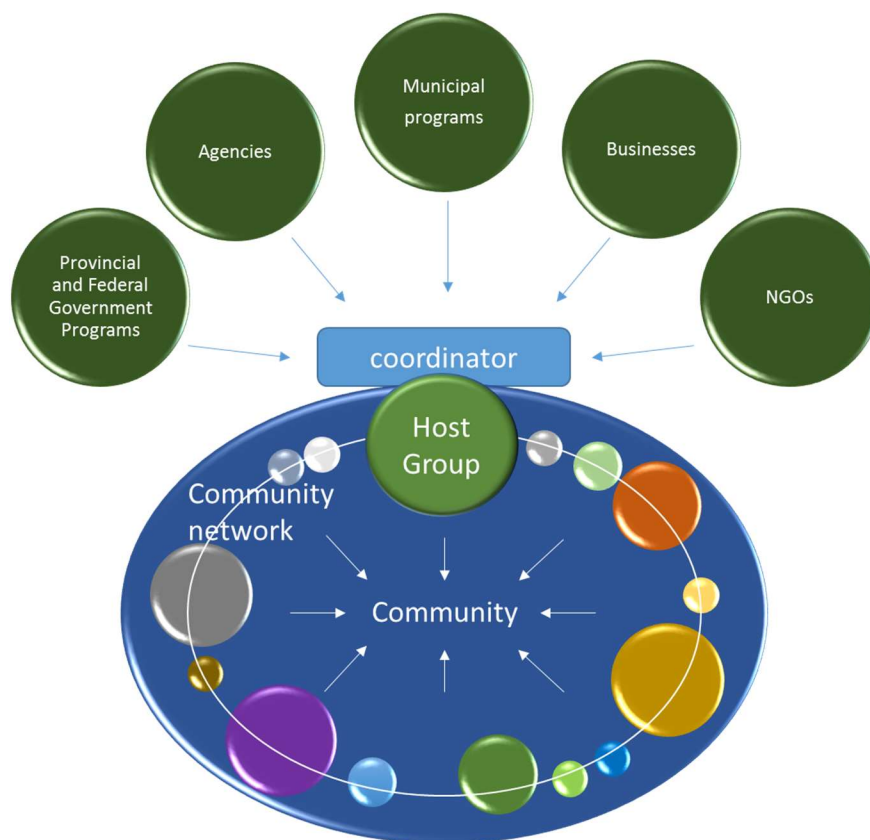
Few communities have an organized network. It can take time and money – resources that are in short supply! At the same time, however, there may be informal networking between organizations, formal project partnerships, community planning exercises,

or many other activities that build cooperation and a sense of common purpose.

The goals of a Community Action Network are:

- a. Establish a basic community network
- b. Identify community priorities – a common vision and projects that will enhance the community
- c. Promote community action – co-promotion of the community and its vision

Each community network is autonomous, and will vary in its approach and level of organization, but imagine the power and potential of a nation-wide network of community action networks.



Community sparks

It only takes a few sparks to start a community network – a few individuals and organizations who see the potential.

The best way to start is talk informally with a few community leaders to see if there is interest in creating a community network and action plan. Before you do, pull together a little background information:

1. Generate a list of community groups and potential lead groups
2. List some of the key priorities for the community
3. Identify some of the top community projects underway or proposed by community groups
4. Identify possible supporters for a community action plan
5. Identify a possible host organization for the network and plan.

One senior group needs to take the lead as the host for the project – preferably a group that is well-respected and trusted within the community, that has the capacity to convene a network, and that can promote the resulting plan and priority projects.

The host is responsible for handling any funds associated with the network and community plan. They would also contract or manage a volunteer coordinator for the project.

Moving forward

Once you have the initial interest and support in place, there are many ways to move forward, ranging from a no-budget, volunteer driven process to a fully-funded project.

- A Community Action Plan can be an online page, a broadsheet, a community paper insert, or a formal publication

- Projects can include existing priorities, new collaborations, or community-wide campaigns
- Promotional activities can include community meetings, arts and cultural events, movie nights, food festivals, posters, t-shirts, and flags. Be sure to promote your plan at all community events!
- Groups can use a community plan to support their fundraising, or you can develop a community fund in support of all groups and projects.

Keep in mind that the whole idea behind a community network and action plan is to generate support for the actual projects on the ground. A low-cost process can be just as effective as a glossy publication if the commitment of the network is strong and content of the plan is solid.

Keep it fun: celebrate the successes and the potential of your community, its groups, and volunteers.

Keep it friendly: build a big tent and build connections between groups and people.

Keep it focused: find the common vision and priority projects that will benefit your community.

For more ideas:

<http://climateaction.ca/ideas>

Seven steps to results

Here are seven steps to creating a network, drafting a plan, and turning it into action on the ground:

1. Steering Committee
2. Coordinator
3. Community Network
4. Community Consultation
5. ACTION PLAN
6. Campaigns and Projects
7. Celebration and Review

Find common goals for the community

Empower groups and people to act

Celebrate success

Seven steps to results

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Find six to a dozen leaders within the community who will kick start the process

Include a cross section of representation from the community

Look for people who can make things happen

Seven steps to results



Appoint a coordinator to help guide the process

It can be either municipal staff, a community leader, or a volunteer

Seven steps to results



Develop a network of organizations and individuals

Groups to include: ratepayers, health and social services, faith, environmental, arts and culture

Most communities can list up to 40 groups

Seven steps to results



Create an asset map of the community

Identify a vision for the community

Identify projects and steps to achieve the vision

Seven steps to results



Ways to turn the community vision into reality

Include major projects, new ideas and community campaigns

Publish and promote

Seven steps to results

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Help find sponsors and volunteers for projects

Connect local groups with provincial and national projects and campaigns

Promote projects and events

Seven steps to results

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Host an annual event to celebrate community action

Review the Action Plan and identify new priorities

Prepare for the next year

Realizing our potential

Why organize?

It takes work to organize a community, to build a community network, to draft a common vision and action plan, and to collaborate on projects and campaigns. In a time of tight funding and ever-increasing pressures on our time, why would we bother?

This is why:

1. We believe in our communities

Organizing ourselves will help us provide value to our community.

2. We need to raise new funds

A community network and action plan demonstrates our commitment to “collective impact” – something funders are looking for.

A community network and plan creates opportunities for increasing donations and volunteer from the community and local businesses.



3. We want to see action

Clear community priorities and on-the-ground action will generate demand for supportive policies and funding. Our own commitment to act becomes an effective tool in promoting government and business leadership and support for the voluntary sector and communities.

There's one other reason. Imagine if communities across Canada each had a community network and a local action plan, all focused on making their communities a great place to live. Imagine the collective impact we would have in creating the foundation for a better future for Canada, based on quality of life for all Canadians.

That's the true potential for community action. And it starts with a few community sparks.



Keep in touch: <http://climateaction.ca>

Community Action Checklist



Community Action is people helping people. It is community groups and volunteers working to local priorities through services and projects to help build a better future. This checklist is a simple way to gauge the level of organization and support for community action in your community.

Community: _____

How many groups are there?

Number of community groups

Number of major groups

Is there a community network?

A community network can range from a contact list and informal meetings to a formal process to build collaboration and a common vision.

No

Informal

Formal

URL:

Is there a Community Action Plan?

A Community Action Plan covers a common vision, priorities, and existing or proposed projects and campaigns. It can cover social, economic, or environmental issues, or an integrated approach.

No

Yes

URL:

What are the priorities for community action?

1.

3.

2.

4.

Are there major projects or integrated community campaigns?

1.

3.

2.

4.

Is there support for community action?

Foundation

Business

NGO

Community

Municipality

Province

Federal

Other: