MAKING GOALS + TIMELINES

SMART GOALS

When it comes to community work, residents and neighborhoods have many goals and objectives. It is extremely important to tackle goals in a manage-able way. There is a method for creating goals called SMART goals. See SMART Goals Worksheet.

By creating a process for identifying and achieving overall long-term goals and smaller short-term goals, you can make your neighborhood vision a reality. Creating a SMART framework allows you to develop an effective strategy and action plan to accomplish and measure outcomes within a defined time frame.

SPECIFIC. You must know what you are working toward before you can plan a successful course of action. Define the goal as clearly as possible, why it is important, who will be involved and how you want to achieve it. Get as specific and detailed as possi-ble.

MEASURABLE. In order to know if you have reached your goal, you have to be able to measure it. Having measurable goals not only tells you when you successfully reach them, but also allows you to track progress, meet your deadlines and stay moti-vated and focused. When framing goals, always ask the question, "How will I know when it is accom-plished?"

ACHIEVABLE. Goals should be challenging, but re-alistic and attainable. If they're too easy, there's real-ly no point. And if they're impossible, it will increase frustration and could kill the group's momentum. Identify how you will accomplish the goal. By lay-ing out the game plan, you can identify constraints, limitations and necessary leg work. Be mindful of elements that are out of your control.

RELEVANT. Make sure the goal matters and is meaningful. It should be relevant to the needs/ desires of the neighborhood, and to other goals. Relevance will drive the group forward. It also needs to be the right time, so be aware of other factors and the current socio-economic 'climate.'

S M A R T

Specific   Measurable   Achievable   Relevant   Time-Bound

TIME-BOUND. Creating timeframes and target dates will drive progress by creating a sense of 'urgency' while also being realistic based on the group's capacity. It is important to establish achiev-able timelines for the end goal/long-term results as well as more frequent, shorter-term deadlines.

GOALS VERSUS TACTICS

It can be easy to confuse or interchange goals and tactics. A goal is the end outcome that you want to achieve. A tactic is a tool/activity used to reach that goal. It is important to view them as two distinct things. Sometimes with community work, people focus so much on the tactics that they forget the overall goal, which impacts project sustainability. For example, a cleanup is a tactic to achieve the goal of reducing litter. Focusing just on repeated cleanups could be an easy habit to fall into, because it is a tangible, feel-good tactic. However, it does not address the root causes of the ongoing litter.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths | Weaknesses | Opportunities | Threats

As part of creating goals and tactics, as well as asset-mapping, it is very helpful to do a SWOT analysis. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

Thinking through and identifying these things can help to prioritize tactics, projects and goals. This can be a great activity in smaller working groups, or compiled from individuals. When addressing various neighborhood issues, think about who holds power or controls the 'issue.' In some cases, this may be an entity or it may be undefinable.

TIMELINES AND BENCHMARKING

Defining one large overall goal and final deadline without smaller goals, tasks, and evaluation methods will not allow time to make necessary changes and adjustments to strategies, tactics, and larger goals. Not breaking down the process into smaller increments and timelines makes it less likely to meet the overall desired outcome.

Benchmarks are shorter goals and timelines that allow you to build out the incremental steps, goals, and phases that will move the group along to the desired overall goal. It is much easier to identify the long-term goal and timeline first, and then work backward to create medium-term and short-term goals and benchmarks. Goals in any phase should be SMART.

The length of these timelines and phases should make sense, and may need to correspond with other events, times of year, seasons, holidays, etc. It is important to research and plot out other important dates and existing events in the community. Those dates could affect capacity, as members of the group may be involved in other events or activities that will limit their time and availability. Aligning goals or phases with certain times of year (or dates of other events) can also help to create/strengthen your narrative, provide opportunities for recruitment and publicity, etc. See Benchmarking/Timeline Worksheets.

RESOURCES

SMART Goal Resources

- www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm

Timeline/Benchmark Resources

- govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/reports/orguide.pdf