



# Local Prosperity Councils Guidebook



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# About Local Prosperity

Since USDA's inception, we have helped the American people weather the storms of war, the flu pandemic, the dust bowl, the Great Depression, natural disasters, and farm crises. Per the vision of Secretary Perdue, USDA has the opportunity and responsibility to work to assist our communities address the storms of hunger, homelessness, rural poverty, fractured families, at risk youth, distressed communities, and addiction.

In order to meet this call to action, the Center for Faith & Opportunity within the USDA Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement has launched "Communities of Faith & Opportunity."

This bottom up, locally driven effort will strategically leverage best-practices, models, existing resources, and programs to empower and assist communities in addressing their community specific needs. This effort, along with local commitment and follow-through will allow us to establish community models throughout America that can be replicated in every state.

Additionally, the effort will align USDA with the variety of legislative and executive department policies and programs, including:

- Agriculture and Rural Prosperity Task Force Report;
- White House Initiative on Faith and Opportunity;
- Presidential Executive Order on Youth, Families, and Communities; and
- Executive Order on Establishing the White House Opportunity and Revitalization Council.



# About the Rural Prosperity Priorities

In 2017, Secretary Sunny Perdue released a report outlining the five greatest priorities to support agriculture and rural prosperity. These five priorities form the foundation for the Community Prosperity Council efforts. Below is a short description of each. Read the full report, [here](https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/rural-prosperity-report.pdf).

<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/rural-prosperity-report.pdf>



## INTERAGENCY TASKFORCE ON AGRICULTURE AND RURAL PROSPERITY

Rural America includes 72% of the nation's land and 46 million people. Rural areas encompass regions that focus on agricultural production as well as places where work is more often found in industries such as manufacturing, mining, and forestry. They include locales that are prosperous and rapidly-growing, locales that are chronically depressed, and everything in between. Rural America is home to many different racial and ethnic demographics and a wide array of economic activities. These residents live in a variety of settings, from counties bordering suburbs to remote and isolated areas.

The Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement develops and maintains partnerships focused on solutions to challenges facing rural and underserved communities in the United States, and connects those communities to the education, tools, and resources available to them through U.S. Department of Agriculture programs and initiatives.



### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Access to Capital
- Tax Reform
- Natural Resources
- Regulatory Reform
- Global Market
- Infrastructure

### INNOVATION & TECHNOLOGY

- Biotechnology
- Sound Science
- Productivity
- Research
- Development

### WORKFORCE

- Available
- Skilled
- Trained
- Educated
- Reliable

### QUALITY OF LIFE

- Educational Opportunities
- Health Services
- Rural Housing
- Community Resiliency
- Infrastructure

## Report to the President of the United States from the Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity [\[Link to Full Report\]](#)

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### Summary of Priorities:

**e-Connectivity for Rural America:** In today's information-driven global economy, e-connectivity is not simply an amenity - it has become essential. **E-connectivity**, or electronic connectivity, is more than just connecting households, schools, and healthcare centers to each other as well as the rest of the world through high-speed internet. It is also **a tool that enables increased productivity for farms, factories, forests, mining, and small businesses**. E-connectivity is fundamental for economic development, innovation, advancements in technology, workforce readiness, and an improved quality of life. **Reliable** and **affordable** high-speed internet connectivity will transform rural America as a key catalyst for prosperity.

**Improving Quality of Life:** Ensuring rural Americans can achieve a high quality of life is the foundation of prosperity. Quality of life is a measure of human well-being that can be identified through economic and social indicators. Modern **utilities**, affordable **housing**, efficient **transportation** and reliable **employment** are economic indicators that must be integrated with social indicators like access to **medical services, public safety, education** and **community resilience** to empower rural communities to thrive. Focusing and delivering key federal reforms will enable rural Americans to flourish and prosper in 21st Century communities.

**Supporting a Rural Workforce:** To grow and prosper, every rural community needs job opportunities for its residents, and employers need qualified individuals to fill those needs. This requires **identifying employment needs, attracting available workers** from urban and rural centers alike, and providing the **workforce** with **training** and **education** to best fill the available needs. There are many opportunities to partner with local businesses and organizations to identify gaps, to work with all levels of educational institutions to provide career training and development, to fine-tune existing training programs, and to grow **apprenticeship** opportunities to develop the required workforce. Providing rural communities, organizations, and businesses a skilled workforce with an environment where people can thrive will grow prosperous communities.

**Harnessing Technological Innovation:** By 2050, the U.S. population is projected to increase to almost 400 million people, and rising incomes worldwide will translate into a historic global growth in food demand. To feed a hungry world, we will need to harness innovation to increase output across American farmlands. In addition to increased crop yields, **technological innovation** can improve **crop quality, nutritional value, and food safety**. Innovations in **manufacturing, mining**, and other **non-agricultural** industries can enhance **worker efficiency and safety**. At the core of these developments that will further grow the rural economy is the expansion of **STEM education, research, regulatory modernization, and infrastructure**. Leveraging these innovations in an increasingly data driven economy will also require further development of **rural data management** capabilities.

**Economic Development:** Infusing rural areas with stronger businesses and agricultural economies empowers America. **Expanding funding options** to increase the **productivity of farmers and ranchers** will lead to the enhanced viability and competitiveness of rural America. By promoting **innovative farm technologies, energy security, recreation, agritourism** and **sustainable forest management**, communities will be empowered to leverage the bounties of rural America. Investing in rural **transportation** infrastructure is needed for carrying more "Made in America" products to markets at home and abroad, and boosting our country's global competitiveness. **Reducing regulatory burdens** and **attracting private capital** will support our ultimate mission of empowering Rural America to feed the world.

# About the Partners

## USDA Office of Partnership and Public Engagement

USDA's Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement develops and maintains partnerships focused on solutions to challenges facing rural and underserved communities in the United States, and connects those communities to the education, tools, and resources available to them through U.S. Department of Agriculture programs and initiatives.

The Secretary established the Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement (OPPE) to rapidly expand outreach to America's agricultural community and facilitate greater access to USDA programs. Additionally, OPPE serves as the lead agent for USDA partnership and outreach activities with tasking and reporting authority to direct, coordinate, and control all target programs. Programs include all components of the Office of Advocacy and Outreach including Small Farms and Beginning Farmer/Rancher and youth outreach and integration into workforce diversity 2030, Office of Tribal Relations, Military Veterans Agricultural Liaison and supporting Veterans Program Initiative, The Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and any other such programs the Secretary deems essential to serve the interest of USDA.



[Visit OPPE online](#)

## Regional Rural Development Centers

The Regional Rural Development Centers are funded through USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture and seeks to strengthen the capacity of the region's Land-Grant institutions to address critical, contemporary, rural development issues impacting the well-being of people and communities. For this initiative, the Southern Rural Development Center is taking lead.



[Visit SRDC online](#)



[Visit RRDC online](#)



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# About the Guidebook

The purpose of this Guidebook is to provide guidance to communities wishing to organize Local Prosperity Councils. The goal of these is to promote a “**climate of success**” for families and businesses that are part of prosperous communities that are safe, educated, healthy, and growing.

To achieve success in this great endeavor, we must come together in a **focused and targeted process** that will bring sustainable long-term results for our rural communities.

This will require **bottom up, locally driven efforts** along with great innovation and partnership at the federal and state level.

Our OneUSDA customer service initiative is preparing USDA to deliver unparalleled, effective assistance to the many sectors of our rural communities. This success, along with local commitment and effort, will allow us to establish community models throughout America that can be replicated across the country.

As we identify these communities, we will help establish a “**Local Prosperity Council**” that will identify the key challenges facing their citizens. This cornerstone approach will involve leaders from the faith-based, political, education, business, and other key sectors.

This Guidebook was developed by a team of community development professionals from USDA, Regional Rural Development Centers, and Land-Grant Universities. It is designed to provide basic information needed to plan, implement, and evaluate a Local Prosperity Council. The Guidebook is not a comprehensive manual; rather, it is designed to provide guidance on organizing, planning, and taking action on high priority initiatives in the local community that will lead to success.

**Goal:** Promote a “**climate of success**” for families and businesses that are part of prosperous communities that are safe, educated, healthy, and growing.

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# Overview of Local Prosperity Council Steps

For community prosperity to be realized, solid local leadership is needed. Local Prosperity Councils will serve as the organizing structure to help drive local change. The basic steps along the way are:

1. Assemble relevant partners
2. Identify Community Capitals
3. Prioritize most pressing challenges to address
4. Develop relevant strategies
5. Identify technical assistance and funding needed to address strategies
6. Link to relevant USDA and other assistance as partners
7. Establish measures to track success
8. Implement Plan
9. Celebrate Successes



# Recruiting Local Prosperity Council Members

Any undertaking of this size and importance needs a team approach. This team, called a Local Prosperity Council, will be key in guiding your successful efforts. You will also need other partners as you get ready to identify and launch strategies, but this Council will help guide the overall efforts. There is not a set number of people that should make up this Council. However, the team should be large enough to have a good perspective of the community, yet small enough to function nimbly. A team of 10-15 is a good target size for most communities.

## Who to Invite

Questions to think about when building a list of potential Local Prosperity Council members. Who in the community:

- Works closely with people that are struggling to make ends meet financially?
- Has access to resources you might need in order to be successful?
- Frequently works with a team of volunteers that might be interested in helping with different efforts?
- Has good contacts with community members that are hard to reach with information and services?
- Knows how to connect to the community with relevant messages?
- Holds the key to important political support in the community?
- Controls relevant resources for the community?
- Shares a similar mission emphasis: supporting community prosperity?

Here are a few examples to consider. This is not an exhaustive list but might help you identify someone you hadn't considered:

- Cooperative Extension Service, within the Land-Grant Universities
- USDA field offices that serve the community
- Faith based organizations
- Education organizations
- Economic Development agencies
- Social Service entities
- Non-profits
- Civic organizations
- Healthcare services



## How to Frame an Invitation

Most of us get quite a few requests for our time and attention every day. These may be from work, family, volunteer efforts, or a host of other directions. We all must make these important decisions daily as to how we will invest our time.

One important task, that you will have in inviting participation in the Local Prosperity Council, and the subsequent planning process, is to be thoughtful in not only who you invite, but also how you invite participants.

As we each filter the requests that come to us daily, we make important choices about when to say “yes” and when to say “no.”

### Consider this exercise:

Divide a sheet of paper into four parts like is shown in this diagram, then follow the steps below:

1. On the top left, list all the organizations you once were a part of with which you no longer participate. Include a broad range of groups, not just those from your work world, such as social groups, educational groups, family, volunteer, etc.
2. Now on the bottom left, list organizations and groups with which you are currently active. Again, think broadly.

1	3
2	4

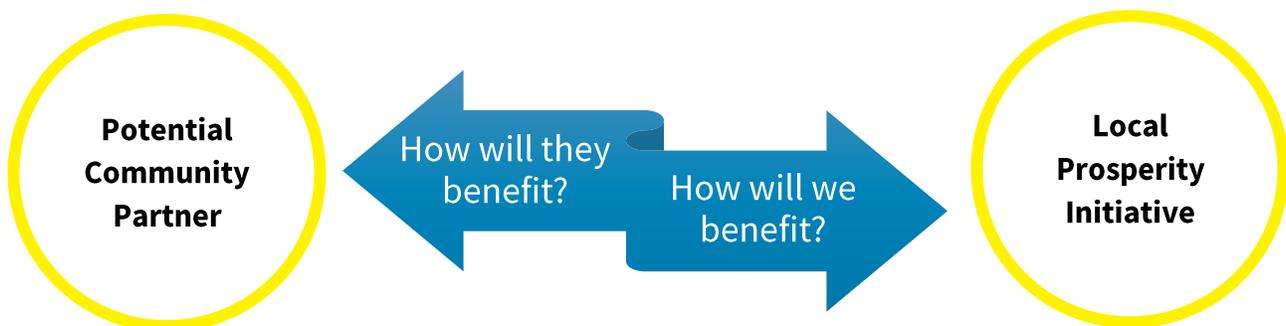
3. On the top right, look at the list you created first (in Box 1 and Step 1). Think about why you left those groups and jot down the reasons in Box 3.
4. Similarly, look at the list you created of organizations where you remain active (Step 2, Box 2). Why are you choosing to continue with these groups?
5. Finally, reflect on what you have written. What do you learn about your reasons for choosing to be active or leave a group setting? What can you apply to the way you frame this work?

As you consider what you have explored, it is likely you have written some things related to these topics:

- **Group progress** – how much progress the group has or is making
- **Group goal** – whether the group has a shared understanding of a clear goal
- **Leadership** – how effective the group’s leader is in communicating, sharing, and keeping the group moving forward
- **Time commitment** – how well the expectation of time commitment aligned with other responsibilities
- **Alignment of other responsibilities** – how well the effort aligned with other work or personal goals

These are important guidelines to keep in mind as you begin to approach potential Local Prosperity Council members. A “one size fits all” approach is not likely to be as successful as a tailored invitation. For each person on your list of potential members, ask:

1. Why will this person be particularly interested in community prosperity?
2. If we are successful in guiding community prosperity efforts, how will efforts benefit this person? (Examples: personal benefit, advance their work mission/goals, strengthen their organization, leverage their resources, etc.)
3. What unique perspective or resources do you hope this person brings to the Council?



Below is a chart with a few examples lined out.

Potential Partner	Their Benefit	What They Could Bring/Contribute
George Smith, local faith group leader	This work will further their goal of reaching our community's low resourced neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteers interested in helping</li> <li>• Experience with distributing food in the neighborhood</li> <li>• Trusted relationships in the neighborhood</li> </ul>
Hallie Johnson, local librarian	Expand use of the library's resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Computer lab for training workers</li> <li>• Meeting space for trainings and events</li> </ul>
Alex Owens, Cooperative Extension Service	Helps fulfil the mission of Cooperative Extension Service to serve the community's needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training programs on a variety of topics through Extension</li> <li>• Data to help understand current community situation</li> </ul>

As you can see, each person in this example would be interested for different reasons and also has a different set of potential resources or connections to contribute. Tailoring your invitation to join will be best received if you tap into these unique perspectives. For instance, a conversation with the librarian might go something like this:

**You:** Hi, Hallie (local librarian). Thank you for taking a few minutes to visit with me today. I am interested in finding people in this community that would really work closely together on issues related to community prosperity. As you know, we have so many people in our community that need our support in innovative ways to be successful. Since you have been in this community most of your life and are so well connected in this position in the library, I would love to have your participation. I know you are concerned about making sure the library's vast resources are used in the community, and I believe we are very likely to identify ways to help connect this effort with your interest. For instance, we may need a space for training classes or meeting space for working groups along the way. Your resources may be a perfect fit. Do you think this kind of partnership would be of interest to you?

**Hallie:** You're right. We are always looking for new opportunities to get people to use the library. This sounds like a potential good partnership. What would you need from me?

**You:** We are meeting next Tuesday with our potential partners. We would love to have you join us so we can explain the project even more and talk together about our shared interests.

**Hallie:** Sounds good. I'll plan on coming.

**You:** Thank you so much! I look forward to talking to you then.

Notice how, in the invitation, both the librarian’s potential interests (or the benefits to them) and potential contributions (how you will benefit from their partnership) both were mentioned. This helps her make a more informed decision about participating. Without these important connections to her interests and efforts, the request could easily be declined.

## Preparing for the First Meeting

Once you have had the opportunity to make this initial connection with each potential Local Prosperity Council member, bringing them all together for a joint meeting will help solidify commitments and start the forward movement. Be sure you follow up with each person prior to the meeting to confirm the date, start and end times and location, and provide any logistics information they may need.

The following agenda items are recommended for the first meeting (see sample agenda in Appendix A):

- Introductions around the room – Even if people know each other, taking the time to let each person say their name, the organization they represent, and respond to one common question to center the group helps build rapport. A good centering question may be something like: “Why does the idea of Community Prosperity interest you?”
- Overview of the initiative:
  - Purpose
  - Steps
  - Leadership structure – role of the Local Prosperity Council
  - USDA Ag. & Rural Prosperity Priorities
- Discussion – As you go through these questions, be sure to capture responses on a flipchart, whiteboard, and/or in written notes.
  - Are any key partners missing? If so who? Who could contact them?
  - What do we already know related to the community’s needs? For instance, has anyone done a recent community needs assessment within their organization? Are there written summaries or notes with these assessments that the group can use as part of the process?
  - What would be the best timeline for the local efforts?
- Next Steps
  - Securing commitment to join the Local Prosperity Council – Once the group has explored the expectations of the process and the role of the Council, ask who is willing to serve. If you have some that are unwilling/unable at this time, check with them to see if you could call on them for assistance with specific steps or if specific help is needed that is relevant to their interests. This allows those that simply cannot commit to the leadership role to stay engaged where they are most comfortable.



- Preparing for the needs assessment – This should include a discussion of how the community needs will be identified and prioritized (see next section for suggestions on how to take this step).
- Meeting schedule for this group – Most groups are more effective if they set a regular meeting schedule because this helps prevent overbooked schedules from limiting involvement. For instance, the group may decide to meet initially every week or every two weeks on a given day and at a set time, such as every Tuesday at 9:00 at the library community meeting room.
- Communication – Discussing how the group wants to keep in touch is important. This might be by gathering emails and having a group list, using a closed Facebook page, having a phone tree, etc. Choose the method that works best for everyone, ensuring no one is left out of the communication circle.
- Any other questions/discussion
- Adjourn on time

In the appendix are a number of tools that will aid you in this very important first step of selecting and organizing the Local Prosperity Council.

In the Appendix:

- **Appendix A:** Sample agenda for first meeting
- **Appendix B:** Win-Win Partnership Chart
- **Appendix C:** Local Prosperity Initiative – Overview and Process
- **Appendix D:** USDA Ag. & Rural Prosperity Priorities



# Identifying Community Challenges

Getting agreement on the challenge your community wishes to tackle first is very important. Be sure to get perspectives from a wide range of people as you go through this step. You can begin with your Local Prosperity Council but should also consider reaching out to other stakeholders and groups in the community. As you meet with different people, ask the question:

## *What do you think are the community's greatest challenges?*

You can narrow the question by using the USDA Rural Priority Areas and asking for people to list challenges under each one, or you can select one to start and ask about the challenges related to just that one:

- Providing e-Connectivity
- Improving Quality of Life
- Supporting a Rural Workforce
- Harnessing Technological Innovation
- Strengthening Economic Development

Here are some examples of ways you can reach out to the larger community:

- Post the question on a community social media site (such as Facebook)
- Ask local groups such as faith groups or civic groups to poll their membership for responses
- Host a community listening session
- Set up a booth at a community event to invite input

Once you have gathered responses, look for common themes that may provide insights. For instance, do you have a cluster of responses around education, healthcare, or some other major heading? Under those topics are there specific ideas that show up often?

After organizing the responses under themes and specific ideas under each, you may find it helpful to put the ideas into a decision table. For instance, the Local Prosperity Council can come together to consider which challenges are most pressing and which ones are feasible to address.

A simple process to help your group work on this task is to list the organized ideas into a simple chart with three blank columns on the left side. Your page might look like the one on the next page. In this example, we will pretend that all the challenges were either about education or housing. In your real community, you will likely have many more categories. A sample of this worksheet is also provided in Appendix E.

Once you have the list of challenges entered, count the number of times that challenges were mentioned as you talked to different stakeholder groups. Put that in the “Number” column. Next, go to the “Could” column. As a group, consider which of these concerns you could address with the assets you have available or

with ones that you could easily access. Put an “X” by the “Could’s”. Finally, go to the “Should” column and mark the challenges that are high priority, meaning the need to address them is urgent and will likely result in meaningful long-term prosperity in the community. Put an “X” besides these in the “Should” column. Note that while all the challenges are likely to be very important, this step of considering what is MOST pressing is important in setting priorities.

The last step in this process is to see what makes the most sense as a starting point given this information. Your first efforts should be focused where you have a large number of community members recognizing the problem (number), you have the capacity to begin work with existing or accessible assets (could), and the challenge is a high priority (should). In the example below, you can see that three of the ideas surfaced as important in all three columns (highlighted in yellow). So, with just a few key questions, your community can begin to see potential starting points for addressing urgent challenges.

**Sample Prioritizing Community Challenges chart:**

Prioritizing Community Challenges			
Should	Could	Number	List of Challenges
<b>Category: Education</b>			
X	X	25	High school graduation rates are low
X	X	30	After-school care is limited
		8	Broadband access is not available for many families
<b>Category: Housing</b>			
		31	Not enough quality housing for lower income families/individuals
	X	22	Knowledge about home ownership opportunities is limited
X	X	26	Dilapidated and abandoned housing is taking space that could be used by quality housing

# Building on Community Assets

Building efforts on the community’s existing assets will lay a strong foundation for success. Thinking through these at the beginning may help launch an initiative much easier. Exploring assets can also help identify projects that have the most support vs. ones where extra effort will be needed to gain the required resources.

## Exploring the Community Capitals Framework.

Community assets represent a broad array of resources. The Seven Community Capitals developed by community researchers, Neal and Jan Flora, represent this diversity. Thinking through your community across these seven capitals can help ensure you are capturing a wide range of assets.

Strong and resilient communities are ones that have worked to build these seven community capitals.

The diagram shows the seven components: Natural, Cultural, Human, Social, Political, Financial, and Built.

The chart below briefly describes each of the capitals and gives some practical examples of each. (See also the Seven Community Capitals handout in Appendix F.)



Capital	Definition	Examples
FINANCIAL	Financial resources that can be invested in local projects or initiatives. Efforts to build wealth for individuals or groups.	Foundations, grants, loans, financial institutions, banks.
POLITICAL	The ability to influence rules, regulations, and policies through access to individuals/groups that have the power to influence decisions and/or through participation in events open to citizens to help shape decisions (such as forums).	Access to elected and appointed officials, ways for citizens to have a voice on local issues, political organizations, voting.
SOCIAL	Connections among people and organizations that help make things happen in the community and that build trust and cooperation. These can include connections within the community to people or organizations as well as connections to people or organizations outside the community.	Community coalitions that bring people together around common causes, civic and social groups/clubs; community engagement activities, events or activities that build trust among different groups (such as across races, ethnicity, etc.)

BUILT	Facilities and infrastructure (and related services) that were built to support a community.	Buildings, utilities (water, sewer, electric), Internet, telecommunications, roads, bridges, hospitals, schools, houses.
HUMAN	Skills and abilities that individuals have that allow them to earn a living, strengthen community, and otherwise contribute to communities, their families, and self-improvement. It includes education, training, and skill building activities.	Formal educational institutions (such as schools, colleges, and universities), workforce training, adult and youth leadership programs, informal education (such as through Cooperative Extension Service, clubs, and faith-based organizations)
NATURAL	Natural and environmental resources that exist in a community.	Water features (rivers, lakes, etc.), woodlands, parks, wildlife.
CULTURAL	Values, norms, beliefs and traditions that are a part of a family, school, group, or community. These also include things such as art and books that have historical or cultural significance.	Cultural events and festivals; libraries or museums that maintain cultural or historical displays; art, food, music, and such that are unique to the area or to different racial or ethnic populations in the community, historical associations.

Sources:

Flora and Flora (2008); Flora, Flora and Fey (2004); Jacobs (2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d); Flage and Hauser-Lindstrom (2007); Emory, Fey and Flora (2006); Beaulieu, L. J. (n.d.). The Seven Types of Community Capitals.

## Mapping Your Community's Assets

While it is possible to apply the mapping process to the entire community very broadly, you may find it helpful to narrow the scope of the map to an area of immediate interest or concern. For instance, beginning with one of the USDA Rural Prosperity Priorities (listed below) could be a great starting point, or working from your community's biggest challenge if you have already taken that step (see page 17 above/ Appendix F for a description of each):

- Providing e-Connectivity
- Improving Quality of Life
- Supporting a Rural Workforce
- Harnessing Technological Innovation
- Strengthening Economic Development

Let's imagine that your community chose "Supporting a Rural Workforce" as a starting point. Consider what assets your community has under each of the Seven Community Capitals that could directly support or assist in workforce development efforts. For example, you might have some things like these:

<b>Financial</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local civic clubs provide scholarships.</li> <li>• Local foundation is interested in funding equipment around educational needs.</li> </ul>
<b>Political</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The mayor just declared workforce as a major priority during her term.</li> <li>• The governor recently made a proclamation regarding the importance of workforce efforts, especially targeted at youth.</li> </ul>
<b>Social</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A local civic club is interested in helping match youth to mentors that share similar career interests/experience.</li> <li>• The local ministerial alliance has churches active in after school care. They are thinking about how to link services better among their participating churches.</li> </ul>
<b>Built</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The community college has a workforce development lab open to people exploring different careers.</li> <li>• The library has a computer lab open to the public for educational purposes.</li> </ul>
<b>Human</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have a large number of retired educators that are interested in helping tutor.</li> <li>• Ten businesses have recently expressed interest in offering apprenticeships.</li> <li>• 4-H clubs have STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, math) curriculum.</li> </ul>
<b>Natural</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abundant agriculture land could provide an opportunity for developing workforce skills around farming/ranching.</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three annual community festivals bring a lot of people together in the community and could be used to help promote efforts.</li> </ul>

While the above only lists a few examples under each category, it provides a flavor of the kinds of support that might be available to assist in workforce efforts. Your community asset map would likely have many more entries. However, don't worry if you don't have a lot of assets for every category. Some initiatives will lean more heavily on some and less on others. That said, don't skip over any of these without giving it some thoughtful consideration.

A mapping tool is in Appendix G to help you document your assets. This process is best done in a group where a lot of perspectives can weigh in on what is available. You could consider doing this exercise as a group with your Local Prosperity Council, sharing the worksheet with key stakeholders and asking them to complete it, hosting a community meeting to identify assets, or any other creative way to help ensure all assets are captured.

# Finding Relevant Data

## How data can help

Now that you have input from the community and have identified your assets, looking at data on the identified challenge can help clarify even further on what needs to happen. Examining data can help leaders get a clearer picture of what is happening, set goals, and raise interest from stakeholders and funders. This section will help you identify sources of data that may help you with these important tasks and provide some guiding questions to help you get the most meaning from the data you find.

Data sources related to the five Ag. & Rural Prosperity Priorities noted earlier are abundant and good starting points for benchmarking where your community is on these important issues related to community prosperity. The section below lists several data sources that provide information on at least the county level. Below each site is a listing of the kinds of information that is available on the site. In addition to these sources, consider tapping local data sources that may be able to tell the story even further.



## What questions to ask about data

When looking at data, these questions can help guide you:

- **Is the source reliable?** Does the data source have its own agenda or does it gather data consistently and responsibly over time?
- **Are the data describing the right geography** (national vs. state vs. county vs. city)?
- **Does the time period the data cover make sense for this project?** For instance, most national data sets lag behind by one or more years.
- **Do the measures make sense for what we want to know about our community?** Is the information relevant to what we want to measure?

### Different ways to compare data:

Data can often be compared in multiple ways. These three are most commonly used:

- **Cross-sectional**, looking at several different kinds of data at a single point in time – This would be useful when you want to consider how different measures compare at one point in time. For instance, you might want to look at graduation rates, unemployment, and poverty all at the same point in time for a community snapshot. This helps to answer the question: What is the overall picture of our community?
- **Comparative**, looking at one region compared to another. This can be useful to get a sense of how the community is doing compared to other communities nearby, in the state, or in the nation. For instance, you might be interested in learning if broadband access is the same or different in your

county compared to others in the state or in the nation. This helps answer the question: How are we doing compared to other places on this topic?

- **Longitudinal**, considering how the situation changed over time. Longitudinal data provides opportunity to see what the trend is over time on a given data point. For example, you may want to know if average income has gone up, gone down, or stayed the same over the past ten years. Also, the intensity of change can be an important part of the story. This helps answer the question: Are things getting better or worse around this topic?

## Where to find data on common issues:

Below are some commonly used, reliable data sources that can help you find information about your community. All of them have information at least at the county level, and some can go even deeper, such as to a community or zip code. Below each site is a listing of the information you can explore on the site.

**Caution! Lots of Data Ahead!** You can quickly access a lot of data in a matter of minutes using reliable, easy to navigate websites. However, it is also easy to get so much data so quickly that it becomes overwhelming and hard to manage. In order to help balance the “just right” amount, you may find it helpful to use the data recording worksheet in Appendix H to think about the data you would like to gather before you begin. To do this, start from the priority(ies) your community is interested in exploring and the challenge you want to address. Then, look at the suggested data points for each one. Now compare this list with the challenges and assets you have identified so far. Which data would tell you more about the challenges your community identified? Which ones might tell you more about specific strengths that may exist in the community related to this priority? Write these in under “data type.” Then, use the remaining space on the check sheet to add in anything else you would like to know more about, relative to these issues you have already identified. Now, with this list in hand, take a look at the information available on each of the sites below. Which sites have the data you listed? You will likely want to begin with those. While the list may generate other ideas that are important, resist the urge to look at everything right now. You can always come back to explore other pieces as you go further in the planning process. Also, consider which data you might be able to get locally. If you have a local source, write that into the space provided.



A miniature sample is provided below.

Priority Area: Quality of Life		
Data type	Website source	Local source
Poverty rates	Census	
Health care access	County Health Rankings	
High school graduation rates		Local High School

## United States Census Bureau – Explore Census Data

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>

### What you can view:

- People
  - Age and sex
  - Age group
  - Disability
  - Education
  - Employment
  - Income and earnings
  - Insurance coverage
  - Language
  - Marital and fertility status
  - Origins
  - Population change
  - Poverty
  - Relationship
  - Veterans
- Housing
  - Basic count
  - Financial characteristic
  - Occupancy characteristic
  - Physical characteristic (including computer and Internet access)
- Business and industry
  - Assets and capital expenditures
  - Business characteristic
  - Business owner
  - Economic series
  - Employment
  - Establishments/firms
  - Expenses and purchased services
  - Fuels and materials
  - Inventories
  - Labor costs
  - Sales, receipts, revenue or shipments
- Governments
  - Counts of governments
  - Public employment and payroll
  - Public Pensions
  - Public School System Finances
  - Government Finances
  - Tax Collections

## United States Census Bureau Quick Facts

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/>

### What you can view:

- Population
- Age and Sex
- Race and Hispanic Origin
- Population characteristics
- Housing
- Families & Living Arrangements
- Computer and Internet Use
- Education
- Health
- Economy
- Transportation
- Income & Poverty
- Businesses
- Geography

## Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids County Data Center

<https://datacenter.kidscount.org/>

### What you can view:

- Demographics
- Economic well-being
- Education
- Family & Community
- Health
- Safety and Risky Behaviors
- Age
- Family Nativity
- Race and Ethnicity
- e-Connectivity:
  - Digital Distress
  - Farm Internet Use
  - Worker Productivity
  - Maximum Advertised Internet Speeds
  - Digital Divide Index

## United States Dept. of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service – Selected Operations and Producer Characteristics

Census of Agriculture 2017, Chapter 2, Table 45

[https://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick\\_Stats/CDQT/chapter/2/table/45](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick_Stats/CDQT/chapter/2/table/45)

### What you can view:

- Internet access
- Ownership type
- Age of producers
- Years of operation
- Gender
- Race/ethnicity

## County Health Rankings

<https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings>

### What you can view:

- Health Outcomes
  - Length of Life
  - Quality of Life (mental and physical health, low birth weight)
- Health Factors
  - Health Behaviors
    - Tobacco use
    - Diet and exercise
    - Alcohol and drug use
    - Sexual activity
  - Clinical Care
    - Access to Care
    - Quality of Care
  - Social and Economic Factors
    - Education
    - Employment
    - Income
    - Family and Social Support
    - Community Safety
  - Physical Environment
    - Air and Water Quality
    - Housing and Transit

## Innovation 2.0

<http://www.statsamerica.org/ii2/overview.aspx>

### What you can view:

- Human Capital & Knowledge Creation
  - Educational Attainment
  - Knowledge Creation and Technology Diffusion
  - SETM Education and Occupations
- Business Dynamics
  - Establishment Formation
  - Establishment Dynamics
  - Venture Capital Dollar Measures
  - Venture Capital Count Measures
- Business Profile
  - Foreign Direct Investment Attractiveness
  - Internet Connectivity
  - Industry Profile
  - Proprietorship
- Employment & Productivity
  - Job Growth
  - Hare of High-Tech Industry Employment
  - Industry Performance
  - Gross Domestic Product
  - Patents
- Economic Well-Being
  - Per Capita Personal Income Growth
  - Compensation
  - Income Inequality
  - Poverty Rate
  - Unemployment Rate
  - Dependency Based on Income Sources
  - Net Migration
- Social Capital
  - Altruism (literacy, local radio media, outreach, philanthropy, volunteering)
  - Formal Membership and Participation (organizational memberships, active political participation, voting participation)
  - Informal interaction (home ownership, household composition, local to traded industry ratio, Residential stability, single-parent households, suicide rate)
  - Shared norms (foreign born, ideological homogeneity, median age, non-English speakers at home, political homogeneity, racial diversity, religious homogeneity, socioeconomic inequality, youth and senior population)
  - Trust (property crime, violent crime, trust in governance, generalized trust, institutional trust)
- State Context
  - Per Pupil Education Spending in K-12
  - Science and Engineering Graduates from State Institutions
  - STEM Talent Flow
  - Total R&D Expenditures as a Percentage of GDP
  - R&D Spending by Universities and Private Firms Per Capita
  - Industry-Performed R&D as a Percentage of Industry Output

- Federal Expenditures for Academic and Nonprofit R&D Per Capita
- University R&D Expenditures in Science and Engineering Per Capita
- Industry Funding of Academic Research Per Capita
- State Funding of Academic Research Per Capita
- Institutionally-Based Startups
- Small Business Innovation Research and Technology Transfer Awards
- Kauffman Entrepreneurship Index
- Establishment Entry Rate
- Establishment Survival Rate
- Volunteer Rate

## Collecting Data

Now you are ready to dig in to see what you can learn. Depending on what you have selected, this may take a bit of time to explore, particularly if you need to reach out to local sources for data. Take time to find what you need, making notes of the important pieces and the sources as you find them. See Appendix H to help organize this information.

## Comparing Data to Community Assets and Challenges

Now that you have your data in hand, what did you learn about the assets and challenges your community identified? Here are some questions to consider as a team:

- Is the situation better than expected, worse, or about the same?
- Did you learn anything new about the situation?
- How do the data influence the priority chart? Does anything change in urgency (“should”) or in feasibility (“could”)?

### Sample chart from above

Prioritizing Community Challenges			
Should	Could	Number	List of Challenges
<b>Category: Education</b>			
X	X	25	High school graduation rates are low
X	X	30	After-school care is limited
		8	Broadband access is not available for many families
<b>Category: Housing</b>			
		31	Not enough quality housing for lower income families/individuals
	X	22	Knowledge about home ownership opportunities is limited
X	X	26	Dilapidated and abandoned housing is taking space that could be used by quality housing

# Determining Priorities

At this point, your team has done a lot of work to learn about the concerns facing the community. Now you are ready to move forward in prioritizing these for action. During this process, your team may have already identified the top priority on which you want to work. If so, then you are ready to move to the next step. Keep reading. However, if the list of possibilities is still long, a simple prioritizing process can help your group visualize where the greatest concerns and interests are. Start with the chart in the section above that you edited (revisited the “coulds” and “shoulds”) based on the data you found. Then list the items that are both coulds and shoulds on a chart page. For instance, using the example:

Prioritizing Community Challenges			
Should	Could	Number	List of Challenges
<b>Category: Education</b>			
X	X	25	High school graduation rates are low
X	X	30	After-school care is limited
		8	Broadband access is not available for many families
<b>Category: Housing</b>			
		31	Not enough quality housing for lower income families/individuals
	X	22	Knowledge about home ownership opportunities is limited
X	X	26	Dilapidated and abandoned housing is taking space that could be used by quality housing

The three challenges were:

- High school graduation rates are low.
- After-school care is limited
- Dilapidated and abandoned housing is taking space that could be used by quality housing.

Give each of your team members 2-3 colored sticky dots. Then ask each person to place their dots beside the challenge that should be given the highest priority for the community. Each person can put all their dots on a single item or can spread them out for up to 2-3 items (depending on the number of dots you provided). Typically, within a matter of minutes, the team can quickly see how the items are ranked within the group’s collective wisdom. Rest assured (and communicate to the team) that while one or more items will likely rise to the top, the other ideas will not be discarded. Rather these become a second wave of effort once you have reached your goal with your first priority.

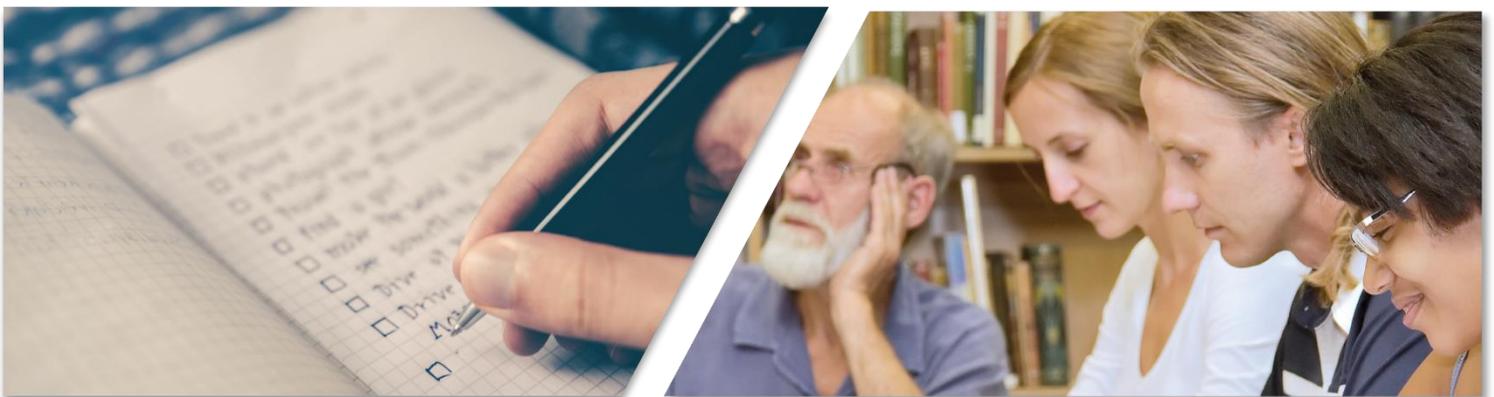
**Pause and reflect:** Given the priority you have selected, do you have the right people at the planning table? For most communities, once you get to this level, you will quickly see there are key stakeholders related to the priority that might not have been engaged initially. Before moving forward, list those stakeholders and make a plan for inviting them to the next planning session. Some questions to consider:

- Who might be interested in helping?
- Who might benefit from working on this issue?
- Who does the team need on their side to be successful?
- Who might block their efforts if not included?
- Who might be overlooked by the team?

Once the team has the list of potential partners, you can begin thinking specifically about how each one is affected by or might benefit from work on this community issue. For instance, think about:

- How are each of those listed above affected?
- Why do they care?
- What are their concerns?
- What are their interests?
- What are they missing that working together with you may provide?

Before leaving the meeting, get volunteers to contact each person on the list to invite them to the goal setting session (next step). Refer to the Win-Win Partnership Chart in Appendix B for a template.



# Developing Relevant Goals & Strategies

## Writing SMART Goals

Congratulations! If you've gotten your group this far, you are ready to roll! With your priority selected, data in hand, and partners engaged, you are ready to begin the task of setting goals and identifying strategies that will move your community toward progress. The first step in this work is to set a SMART goal on which you can all agree.

**SMART** is an acronym that helps define a solid goal. This slide outlines the characteristics of SMART goals and provides a few guiding thoughts for each. Briefly describe each part. SMART goals are:

**Specific:** Knowing what you want to achieve and where you want to focus your efforts is important. As you develop specific goals, think through exactly what you hope to accomplish. Be clear.

**Measurable:** Develop measures that will allow you to document whether you are moving in the right direction in terms of achieving your goals. Think about the ultimate outcomes you want to achieve and the measures you want to use to document your progress along the way.

**Attainable:** Match your goals to the resources that will be available in your region. Consider goals that align with the assets of your region. These assets are those you identified using the Community Capitals framework. Also, be sure to be realistic about what you will accomplish.

**Relevant:** Is the goal something that your team is truly committed to tackling and that really matters in the community? In addition, ask yourself as a team, "Are we the right or appropriate group to address this goal or is there another entity that is better equipped to tackle this goal?"

**Time Framed:** Having a timeline for your goal is important. In order to keep things on track, build a timeline of when your team goal will to be accomplished.

Let's look at an example. Supposed you have decided to work on your community's high school graduation rates. A SMART goal might look something like this:

**Increase high school graduation rates in "Your County" by 5% over the next two years.**

**Specific:** This goal tells exactly what you want to change – high school graduation rates in Your County.

**Measurable:** It is possible to measure high school graduation rates over two year to know if they have gone up by 5% or more.

**Attainable:** With the right strategies (we will talk about this next), a school could see increases of 5% over two years.

**Relevant:** You have already done the work of identifying your community’s priorities, so you know this is relevant to community needs.

**Time Framed:** The two-year window tells you exactly how long you have allowed to reach your intended goal.

Now it’s your turn. In Appendix I is a SMART goals worksheet to help you think about the parts of your goal.



Adapted from: Heathfield, S.M. (2011)

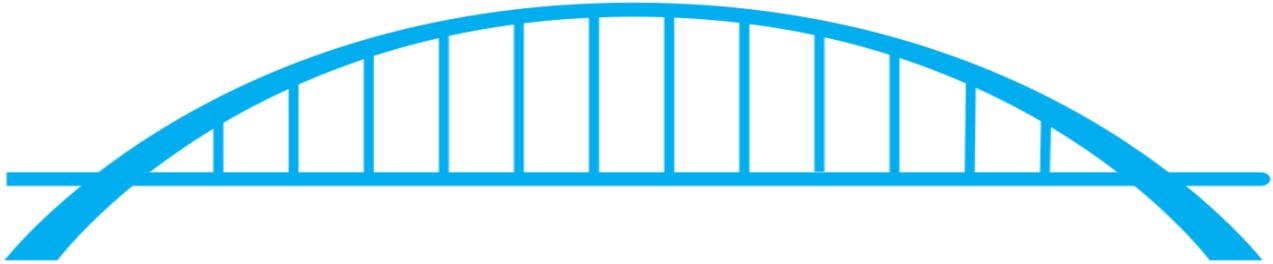
## Identifying Strategies to Meet Your Goal

Setting a SMART goal is the first step in your plan. Now, let’s move on to identifying the strategies that will help you reach your goal. One way to identify great strategies is to start with brainstorming possibilities. One way to do this is to build a strategy bridge (see Appendix J for template). Here is how that works:

**Step One:** Imagine what your community would be like if you met your SMART goal. What would look different? These ideas go on the right side of your bridge, forming the right-side pillar. This is the **WOW** pillar. Wow, won’t it be great when we reach our goal!

**Step Two:** Now move to the left pillar. This is where you are **NOW**. What is happening now that is causing the concern your goal is seeking to address? You can include data you found, lists of concerns you have, or anything else that describes why this goal is needed.

Using the example on page 30 of high school graduation rates, here is an example of how the bridge ends might look:



### NOW

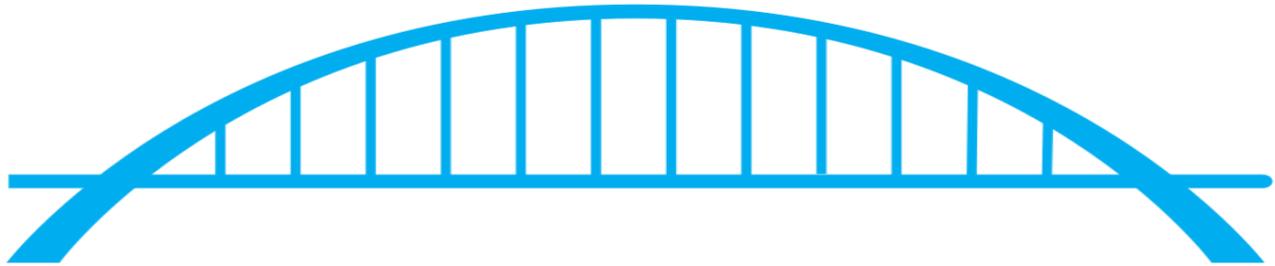
- High school dropout rates are higher than the state
- Youth that are not going to school are getting in trouble with the law at higher rates
- Youth that didn't finish high school are finding it hard to get a job

### WOW

- Students with a high school diploma get better jobs
- Youth are finding employment or going to college after high school
- Truancy is lower
- Fewer youth are getting in trouble with the law

**Step Three:** This is where the brainstorming step begins. Given what you have put into the two pillars, what ideas do you have that can help your community move from the NOW to the WOW? During brainstorming, all ideas are good! So work with your team to get as many ideas out on paper. These go in the middle of the bridge in the **HOW** section. Again, don't limit the ideas yet. Rather see how many creative approaches your team can identify.

Here is how it might look, using our example.



### NOW

- High school dropout rates are higher than the state.
- Youth that are not going to school are getting in trouble with the law at higher rates.
- Youth that didn't finish high school are finding it hard to get a job.

### HOW

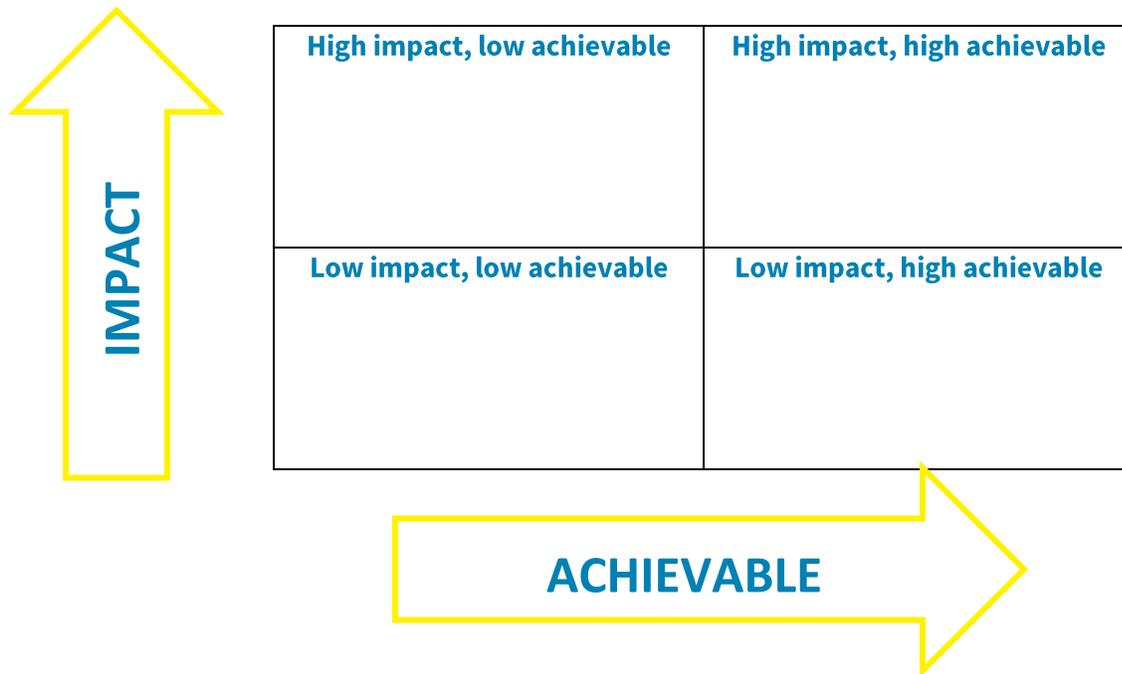
- Start a mentoring program for at risk youth.
- Identify community volunteers willing to help tutor youth may not be able to afford to pay.
- Recruit local businesses to offer fun incentives for school attendance
- Work with local churches to host fun, educational events such as robotics.
- Start a summer feeding program that includes educational activities
- Find local businesses willing to provide internships or apprenticeships to help

### WOW

- Students with a high school diploma get better jobs.
- Youth are finding employment or going to college after high school.
- Truancy is lower.
- Fewer youth are getting in trouble with the law.

Now that you have a good list of possible strategies listed in your HOW section, you are ready to narrow the list down to where you want to start. You will likely want to start with something that is very doable but that promises to have a strong impact. One way to think about this is to draw a table like the one on the next page. Then write each of the strategies you have identified on a single notecard or sticky note. Put one idea on each card/note. Then place the ideas where you think they fit best, thinking about two things:

- Will this strategy have a lower or higher potential impact on the goal?
- Given the assets you have identified in the community, is this strategy lower or higher in our ability to achieve it?



Now, look at the strategies you have placed in “high impact, high achievable.” If you still have several ideas to prioritize, consider these questions as a team to make your final selection. Typically, a beginning group will start with only one strategy to gain traction together. However, if your group is large enough to support more than one strategy, you could consider taking on more than one idea. A word of caution: Avoid spreading the group so thin that they experience burnout before seeing successes. Keep in mind that even if an idea is not chosen as the starting point for now, this doesn’t mean the team will not come back to it after getting the first strategy underway. On that note, record all of your ideas to be revisited as the group begins to make progress together.

**Which strategies will:**

- Come closest to producing the desired outcomes?
- Appeal most to your target audience?
- Make the best uses of resources & assets?
- Help overcome key barriers?
- Be likely to spur the growth of the priority identified?
- Have good support from partners in the community?

# Develop and Following a Plan of Action

## Planning for Action

Now that the team has selected a strategy, it's time to get down to planning the action moving forward. This is a key step as it helps determine responsibility, initial tasks, and timelines. Ideally, the team will walk through this process with its partners to help encourage their buy-in to the work and allow them the opportunity to contribute in meaningful ways. If someone's help is needed for the plan of action that isn't present to volunteer, then an action step needs to be that someone will contact them to gain their support.

Three basic elements make up a strong Plan of Action:

1. **Specific steps that need to be taken** – What steps would need to be taken to help move from where the team is now to the point where the team is launching their initiative? Break the steps into manageable 'bites' and arrange the bites into a logical order.
2. **A person who will take leadership for each of the steps** – The team cannot move forward if they have an "unclaimed" step. Steps should be shared evenly among the partners so the load is not shouldered by just a few people. Also, avoid assigning steps to "all team members" unless it is a task that everyone really must have a role in carrying. The old saying applies here, 'Everyone's job is nobody's job.' If a step does need to be shared among several people, ask for a lead person to help keep the step on track.
3. **A realistic timetable for completing each step** – Keeping things rolling is vital! Having a timeline for when steps will be completed is very important. Avoid assigning deadlines when possible. Instead, ask each person who takes ownership of a task when they can realistically complete the step. This accomplishes a few worthy goals. First, it enhances the individual's buy-in to the timetable. If someone makes a commitment to complete a task by a certain date, it carries much more weight with them than if they are assigned an arbitrary date that does not consider their other obligations or constraints. Second, it can help identify potential roadblocks or stumbling points. For instance, suppose a person accepting a step indicates they cannot complete the step until two months from now. Other steps are now on hold for completion of that step. If the two-month delay will threaten forward movement, it may be a good idea to either negotiate the date with the person or see if someone else would be willing to take on the step within a shorter timeline.

A Community Plan of Action template is included in Appendix K to help you organize these details into a single document. There is also a sample Plan of Action so you can see how it works.

### Three Elements of a Plan of Action

WHAT

Needs to get done?

WHO

Will take responsibility?

WHEN

Will the task be finished?

# Find Relevant Resources and Partners

## Getting Started

Early in this process, your team devoted some time to identifying assets available in the community. This building block is essential as you now turn the corner toward gathering resources to get started. Beginning with what you have gives you a head start on your journey.

With your strategy clearly in mind, start by going back to the asset mapping your team developed. What of those assets could be used to help you work on the strategy you identified? Look across the entire community capitals worksheet. Perhaps you need to find assets that are:

- **Cultural** – Ways to reach out to different groups in your community
- **Natural** – Access to fields, lakes, streams
- **Human** – Education and skill development support
- **Built** – Physical space for your work
- **Social** – Connections among partners and groups to help support the effort and get the word out
- **Political** – Buy-in from elected or appointed officials
- **Financial** – Funding to purchase materials



Notice that “financial” is listed at the bottom of this list. That is on purpose. Often communities can make the mistake of seeking out grants or other financial resources without first taking stock of what is available from the other capitals.

Always start with what you have before looking for funding. Then once you have identified true gaps in resources, you are ready to consider other sources to supplement your efforts.

Where to look for funding? Funding comes from a lot of different sources. Some funders may live within your own community. Often people living locally will have a great interest in helping to support efforts that will make the community better. So you can begin by spreading the word about what you want to do among local residents. As you do this, you may find it helpful to write out a list of what is needed rather than just list a budget amount. For instance, for the example we have used of setting up a tutoring program, we might list such things as:

- Computers – five at \$1,000 each
- Software – six programs at \$100 each
- Tables – six at \$200 each
- Chairs – fifteen at \$30 each

While this, of course, is not an exhaustive list of what might be needed, you can see how a list like this might be developed. Going through this step helps in two ways:

1. Clarify what is needed so you can develop an accurate budget.
2. Gives people an opportunity to either donate good, usable materials to support the work OR select an item they would like to provide.

People like to see their investments. A simple “Donated by...” label added to the corner of a desk, computer, or chair can be a fun way of recognizing local investments.

Once you have explored local avenues for meeting needs, you may wish to begin looking at state, federal or private funding sources. Keeping a clear focus on your exact needs as you search is vital to prevent your team from getting off course. Potential grant funding can be a great boost to a local initiative if it is solidly connected to the local need. However, going after funding that is not a good fit can threaten to derail the project as your team gets pulled off course from the original plan. Stay focused and search for the right opportunity to help guide success.

## United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

USDA serves communities from a wide array of agencies. While USDA is based in Washington, DC, many of its agencies have regional and local offices to help strengthen communities. You can learn about all USDA has to offer by visiting their website: [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov). A few of the USDA agencies that work with communities on issues they face are highlighted below. These descriptions come from the USDA website:

<https://www.usda.gov/our-agency/agencies>

- **Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS)** - AMS facilitates the strategic marketing of agricultural products in domestic and international markets while ensuring fair trading practices and promoting a competitive and efficient marketplace. AMS constantly works to develop new marketing services to increase customer satisfaction. <https://www.ams.usda.gov/>
- **Farm Service Agency (FSA)** - The Farm Service Agency implements agricultural policy, administers credit and loan programs, and manages conservation, commodity, disaster and farm marketing programs through a national network of offices. <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/>
- **Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)** - FNS increases food security and reduces hunger in partnership with cooperating organizations by providing children and low-income people access to food, a healthy diet, and nutrition education in a manner that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/>
- **Forest Service (FS)** - FS sustains the health, diversity and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. <https://www.fs.fed.us/>

- **National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)** - NIFA's mission is to invest in and advance agricultural research, education, and extension to solve societal challenges. NIFA's investments in transformative science directly support the long-term prosperity and global preeminence of U.S. agriculture. <https://nifa.usda.gov/>
- **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** - NRCS provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain and improve our natural resources and environment. <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>
- **Risk Management Agency (RMA)** - RMA helps to ensure that farmers have the financial tools necessary to manage their agricultural risks. RMA provides coverage through the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation, which promotes national welfare by improving the economic stability of agriculture. <http://www.rma.usda.gov/>
- **Rural Development (RD)** - RD helps rural areas to develop and grow by offering Federal assistance that improves quality of life. RD targets communities in need and then empowers them with financial and technical resources. <https://www.rd.usda.gov/>
- **Rural Utilities Service (RUS)** - RUS provides financing to build or improve infrastructure in rural communities. This includes water and waste treatment, electric power and telecommunications services. These services help expand economic opportunities and improve the quality of life for rural residents. <https://www.rd.usda.gov/about-rd/agencies/rural-utilities-service>
- **Rural Housing Service (RHS)** - RHS offers a variety of programs to build or improve housing and essential community facilities in rural areas. RHS offers loans, grants and loan guarantees for single- and multi-family housing, childcare centers, fire and police stations, hospitals, libraries, nursing homes, schools, first responder vehicles and equipment, housing for farm laborers and much more. <https://www.rd.usda.gov/about-rd/agencies/rural-housing-service>
- **Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS)** - RBS offers programs to help businesses grow as well as job training for people living in rural areas. These programs help provide the capital, training, education and entrepreneurial skills that can help people living in rural areas start and grow businesses or find jobs in agricultural markets and in the bio-based economy. <https://www.rd.usda.gov/about-rd/agencies/rural-business-cooperative-service>

# Select Measures to Track Success



Now that you have a plan in place, one more step is needed to guide you to success. That step is to select measures to help you track your progress along the way. A good measurement plan will have checkpoints to make sure the project stays on track. You certainly don't want to be several months or years down the road before you realize your strategy isn't helping you get to your goal. It would be much better to have checkpoints along the way to be sure your project is moving toward your goal. One way to do that is to think about success in three layers. These layers are sometimes called the ABCs of measuring.

Here is how that works:

## ABC Measures

**Attitudes, knowledge, or skill** – When you launch a new strategy, the first thing that will change is participants' attitudes, knowledge, or skill. All of this happens inside their brains before they start doing anything differently. Often changes in this layer can happen fairly quickly – from within a few minutes to several days or weeks, depending on what is being learned. These are usually called short term outcomes because they happen relatively quickly. For example, suppose your team selected the strategy of starting a tutoring program for high school students in order to reach the goal of increasing graduation rates. Before students or tutors make a choice to participate, they would need to know some things. Here are a few examples:

- Tutors need to know:
  - Why this work is important (attitude)
  - What commitments are expected of them (knowledge)
  - How to work with students that are struggling (skill)
- Students need to know:
  - Why participating in tutoring is important to their future (attitude)
  - Where and when tutors will be available (knowledge)
  - How to manage their time so they can participate (skill)

Notice how these things are happening inside the individuals before they even start taking action. The next layer is where the action starts:

**Behavior** – With the brain work done, now your team will be looking to see if behaviors begin to shift. These are concrete things that people have to physically do differently. Behaviors take a little longer to change than the Attitudes/Knowledge/Skill level. Behaviors may take from several weeks to several months to change. Some behaviors that need a lot of brain work first may take even longer. These are usually called medium term outcomes because they take a little longer. Following the example above, this might include:

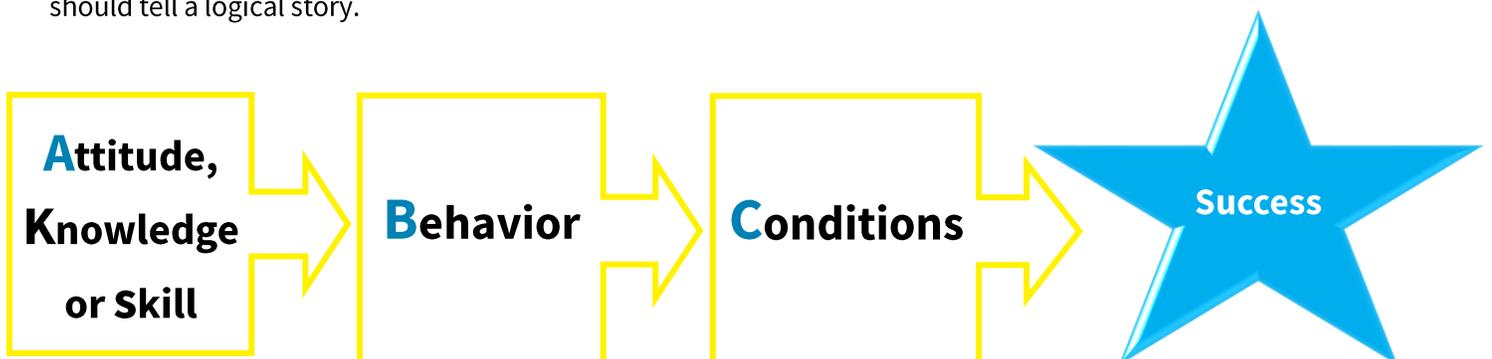
- Tutors begin to:
  - Sign up to assist with sessions
  - Show up regularly for sessions
  - Prepare materials for the students
- Students begin to:
  - Sign up for tutoring
  - Show up for sessions regularly
  - Bring class materials in subjects that are difficult for them
  - Turn in assignments on time
  - Go to classes regularly

Once behavior changes begin, changes in conditions start happening.

**Conditions** – If the participants in your strategy continue to make good progress in changing the behaviors, their conditions are likely to change over time. These conditions are the overarching changes you hope to see as a result of your efforts. These changes usually take a while – sometimes years – as they follow the behavior changes. Sometimes the behaviors have to be in place for a while to see a change in the condition. This layer is often called long-term outcomes for that reason. Here is how that might look in the example:

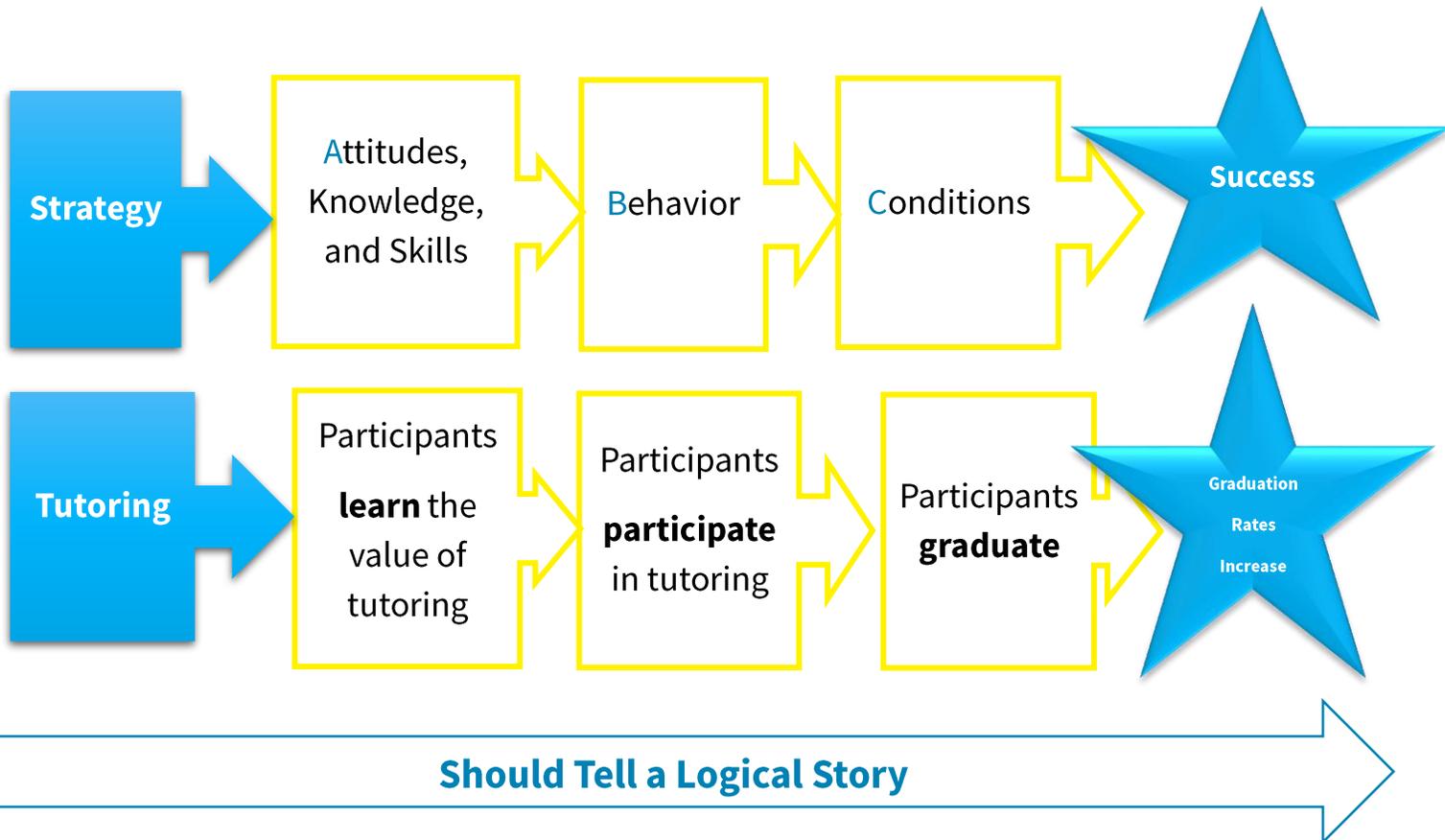
- Tutors may:
  - Feel more connected to the community
- Students may:
  - Pass difficult subjects
  - Pass state tests
  - Graduate

Notice how these weave together to help ensure that the goal (increase graduation rates) is met. The pieces should tell a logical story.



For the example, the story might sound like this:

If tutors agree to participate and students decide that tutoring is valuable (A layer), then students will participate in the sessions with consistent tutors to help (B layer). If students are tutored well, then their graduation rates will improve (C layer).



Now, take a few minutes with your team to think through these three layers. For the strategy you identified, consider:

- Who are the people/groups with which you plan to work (such as tutors and students in the example provided)?
- For each group you identified, what:
  - Attitudes, knowledge, or skills do you hope to change? (short-term outcomes)
  - Behaviors do you hope will change? (medium term outcomes)
  - Conditions to you hope to change? (long term outcomes)

With these layers identified, the next step is to consider how you will measure these. Finding a balance of things to measure that (1) ensures you are watching progress all along the way while (2) not becoming so burdened with measuring that you don't have time for working on your strategy is important. To start, select one item from each of the ABC layers you created of outcomes to measure. Try to pick the one that you think matters most. Don't worry! After working through this step, you can always go back and pick other measures to add.

From the tutoring example, consider these three layers:

- **Attitudes, knowledge, skills** – Students need to know why participating in tutoring is important to their future (attitude)
- **Behavior** - Students show up for tutoring sessions regularly
- **Conditions** - Students pass difficult subjects

Thinking through how to measure each of these over time is important in keeping the project on target. For instance, you would not want to wait until four years from now when today's high school freshmen should be graduating, to know if the project is working. Instead, by having different points in time to check progress, you can either confirm that you are on track, or make corrections if things seem to have stalled or are not progressing like you hoped.

In order to develop a simple measurement plan, you need to decide on a few pieces related to each layer.

- What information do you need?
- Who has the information you need?
- How will you get the information?
- How often/when will you get the information?



Here is how the plan might look for the example:

	What you want to measure	What information you need	Who has the information	How you will get the information	How often/when you will get the information
<b>Short Term Outcome</b>	<b>Attitude, Knowledge, Skill</b> Students need to know why participating in tutoring is important to their future	How many students sign up for tutoring?	Tutoring coordinator	Ask for a report	Monthly
<b>Medium-Term Outcome</b>	<b>Behavior</b> Students show up for tutoring sessions regularly	How many students are coming to their tutoring appointments?	Tutors	Provide the tutors with sign-in sheets	Monthly
<b>Long-Term Outcome</b>	<b>Condition</b> Students pass difficult subjects	How many students participating in tutoring pass the classes on which they are receiving help?	Students and teachers/schools	Ask students to share grades with tutors if they are willing.  Or  Ask teachers/schools to provide a report of progress for participating students	At grade reporting intervals (i.e. 6 weeks/9 weeks)

A Measurement Plan Template is in Appendix L to help you gather your information.

# Communicate Your Story

With any effort, thinking about how you will communicate your story is important. Good communication lets your community and other stakeholders know what the team is doing, why it is important, and how they can support the effort. Communicating throughout the entire process is important, not just waiting until the effort is over.

Benefits of communicating with your community and stakeholders early on:

- **Raises awareness** – you can turn this initial awareness into support later.
- **Generates support** – the more support you can gain, the more likely you are to succeed.
- **Strengthens your reach** - getting your message out to a variety of stakeholders can help reach isolated groups that may be interested or find value in what you are doing.
- **Helps to craft messages** - different audiences will need messages tailored to their interests. Communicating early helps you learn to shape those messages better as time goes on.
- **Highlights successes/impacts along the way** – this keeps your work relevant and keeps supporters engaged. For instance, you can use your measurement plan to share small successes along the way.

## Communicating to Different Audiences

One of the most important first steps in thinking through your communication strategy is to figure out your audience(s). A major part of your audience is your stakeholders – groups that have a stake or interest in the effort. Communicating the progress toward your goal with stakeholders is key to its sustainability. Stakeholders can be inside or outside your team and are affected by the group’s outcomes. Think about some other audiences, other than stakeholders, that you might need to target when sharing information about your program. These can be broad groups, such as people living in your community, or narrow, such as the teachers in a local school.



Think about who needs to hear about your strategy in your community? For instance:

- Who might benefit from this effort?
- Who might have resources that could help? Go back to the asset map you created on page 18 for ideas.
- Who might be willing to fund part or all of the project?
- Who might be willing to volunteer?
- Who are the local decision-makers that will be interested in the efforts?
- Who can help you reach groups that might not otherwise hear about your efforts?
- Who are trusted sources in your community?

Here are some things to consider when thinking about your different audiences:

- **How do they like to receive information:** All audiences are not the same. For each group you identified, consider how they like to receive information. Do they prefer email, social media, local newspaper, flyers or some other method?
- **What do you want them to do:** You are likely to have different actions you want from different groups. For instance, are you looking to raise awareness, gain support, get more active engagement? Do you want them to help share the effort, participate themselves, or volunteer? It is important to answer this question for each audience, as it will affect the way you craft your message to them.
- **When do you need to start communicating:** Thinking about your Plan of Work timeline, when do you need to be launching communication to the different groups? For instance, in the example, communicating with high school principals and potential tutors would likely need to happen before beginning to send information to students and their parents.

Here is an example (see Appendix M for a template):

Audience	How they like to get information?	What you want them to do?	When do you need to start communicating?
High school principals	Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree to help market tutoring to students</li> <li>• Provide space for tutoring after school</li> </ul>	Immediately
Retired teachers (potential tutors)	At their monthly breakfast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer time to tutor</li> <li>• Help recruit other tutors</li> </ul>	After getting high school principals' support
At risk students	Social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sign up and participate in tutoring</li> </ul>	Once tutoring sessions are organized

## Crafting Your Message

Once you identify your audiences, you must think about your message. What do the groups need to know about your efforts? As noted above, tailoring your message to the specific group you are addressing will help ensure it gets the attention you want. For example, farmers and ranchers might be interested in different portions of your project than a local business owner.

Good messages follow a few guidelines such as:

- Consistent across different audiences – Even though you will be tailoring your message, you want to be sure your different messages don't conflict in any way, causing confusion.
- Framed around goals and strategies the group has planned – Using some consistent messaging such as calling the project by the same name or developing a logo will help get community recognition.
- Clear and concise – Shorter messages are more likely to be read than long ones. However, don't get so brief that you leave people unsure about what you are doing.

## Telling Your Story: Impacts

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Another important time to engage with your audience is to share impact stories. Communicating the impact of your program is a valuable tool to maintain support. These stories allow you to share your successes and keep your audience engaged. Some tips for writing an impact story:

- **Know your audience.** Different groups relate to different things, so you want to frame your story to best engage the group you're addressing.
- **Include an attention grabber.** This can be a statistic, a good quote, or an interesting participant story.
- **Give context.** Be sure to set the scene for your reader. What details do they need to be able to fully engage in your story?
- **Show the scope of your impact.** Impacts aren't just what you did, but what came out of your efforts. This could be attitude changes, behavior changes, condition changes, commitments to action, or even tangible effects like money leveraged.
- **Keep it short.** Your audience probably interacts with a lot of media each day. You don't want your story to get passed over because it was too long or too complex.

## Sharing Your Information

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Once you have identified your audience and crafted your message, it is time to get the information out. Remember, you can use the communication with your audiences to raise awareness, gain support, show progress, and tell your impact stories. Be sure to know the intended purpose and desired outcome for each piece of information you share. Look at your different audiences to determine what channel is best to reach them. Be aware of the rule of seven. People typically need to see or hear your message seven times before they will act.

Examples of ways to share information:

- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)
- Email newsletters
- Traditional print newsletters
- YouTube videos
- Dedicated project website
- News releases/media advisories (radio, newspaper, TV)
- Invite local media to events you are hosting
- Hang posters and distribute flyers
- Set up booths/materials at community events
- Give short talks at local community gatherings (clubs, churches, etc.)

## Talking to Potential Funders – Writing a Needs Statement

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One particular type of communication you may need as you move forward is how to write a needs statement for when you plan to talk to potential funders. Engaging with potential funders/contributors means sharing specific information. Key elements in this kind of communication include:

- **Stating the need clearly** – What is the problem you are trying to address? Be clear and concise. Example: Many young people in our community are unable to get living wages jobs because they lack the education to perform well in the jobs that are available.

- **Use data to back up the need** – What evidence can you point to that demonstrates the need? Example: Our local high school’s graduation rates are 10% lower than the state’s rates. And our state lags the national average by another 2%.
- **Give an example of someone affected** – Stories help people connect to the situation. Example: We have six young teenagers living in my neighborhood that have dropped out of school already. All six of them say they would go back to school if they could get some help with the subjects they were failing. But without help, they felt defeated.
- **Provide a clear statement of what you plan to do about the need.** Example: We plan to start a tutoring program in the high school that meets after school three days a week to focus on core subjects required for graduation.
- **Describe what you would like the funder to do.** Be clear to state what is needed. Do you need funding, volunteer time/services, access to space, or some other resource? If you need funding, be clear about how the funding would be used. Example: In order to be successful, we need your help to purchase six laptop computers for the tutoring space.

A guide sheet to help you develop a needs statement like this is in Appendix N. Try filling in the different parts. Then practice telling the story to someone else on your team. Your goal is to get the statement down to something you can share in about one minute.



# Appendices

<b>Appendix A:</b> Sample meeting agenda	Pg. 47
<b>Appendix B:</b> Win-Win Partnership Chart	Pg. 48
<b>Appendix C:</b> Local Prosperity Initiative Overview & Process	Pg. 49
<b>Appendix D:</b> USDA Ag & Rural Prosperity Priorities	Pg. 51
<b>Appendix E:</b> Prioritizing Community Challenges Worksheet	Pg. 52
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<b>Appendix N:</b> Telling Your Story – Writing a Needs Statement	Pg. 61

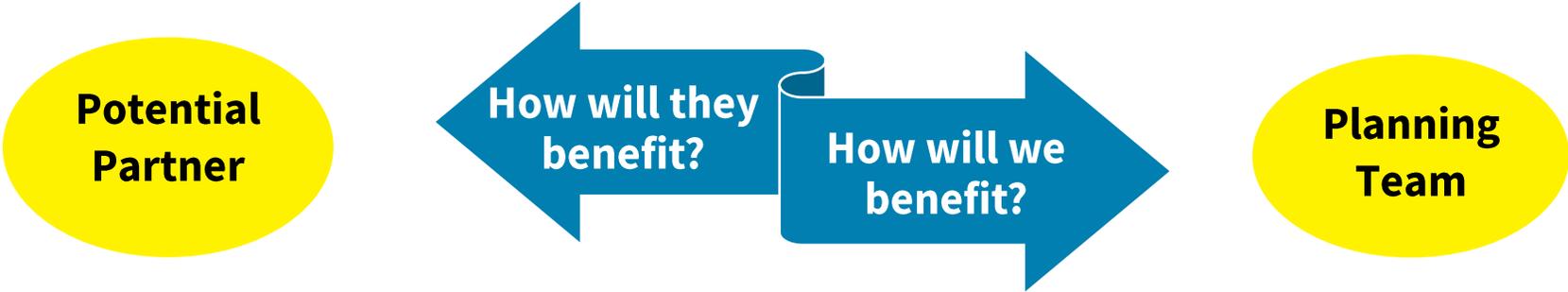
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# Sample Agenda

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<b>Introductions</b>	10 minutes
<b>Overview</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Purpose</li><li>• Steps</li><li>• Leadership Structure</li><li>• USDA Ag &amp; Rural Prosperity Priorities</li></ul>	30 minutes
<b>Discussion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are any key partners missing? If so, who? Who would contact them?</li><li>• What do we already know related to the community needs? For instance, has anyone done a recent community needs assessment within their organization? Are there written summaries or notes that the group can use as part of the process?</li><li>• What would be the best timeline for local efforts?</li></ul>	30 minutes
<b>Next Steps</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Secure commitment to join LPC</li><li>• Prepare for needs assessment</li><li>• Set a meeting schedule</li><li>• Determine the best group communication method</li><li>• Additional questions</li></ul>	20 minutes
<b>Adjourn on time</b>	<b>Total time: 1.5 hours</b>

# Designing a Win-Win Invitation



Potential Partner	Their Benefit	Our Benefit

# Centers of Community Prosperity

## Office of Partnership and Public Engagement

### MISSION

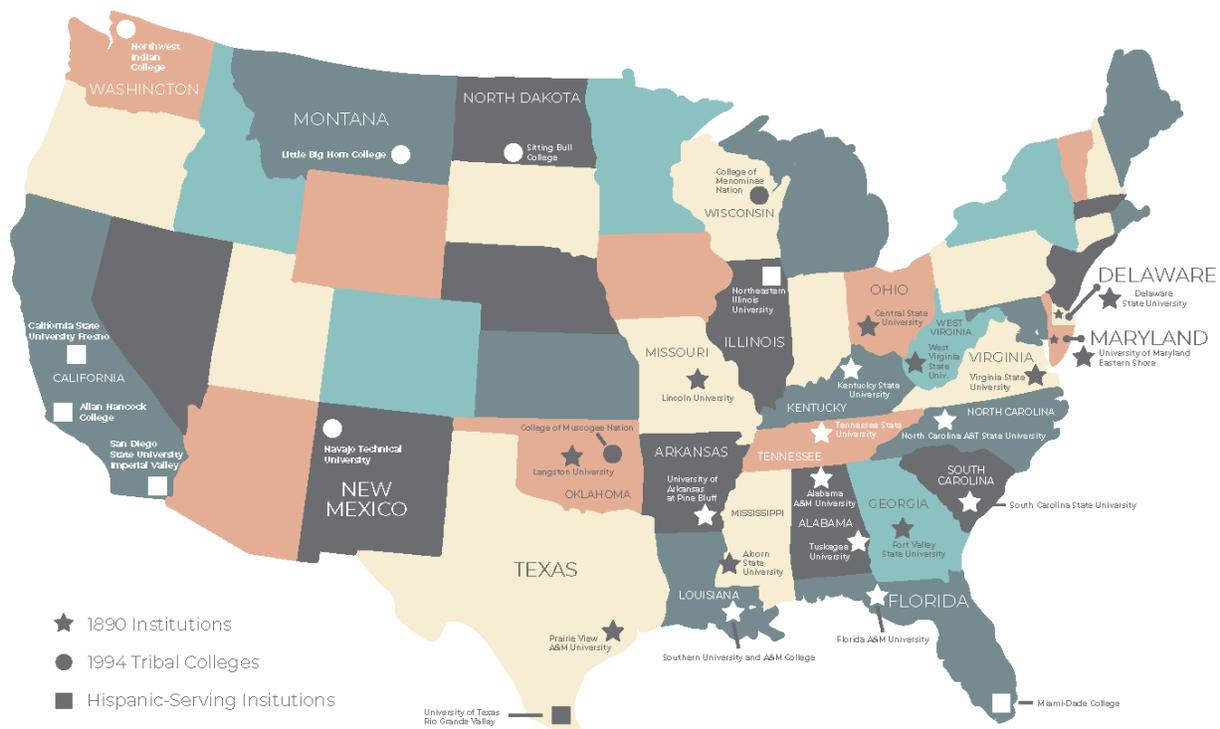
To develop partnerships with business and agribusiness, faith-based, education, elected, and other community leaders to identify key challenges and develop strategies for success. This will include the most effective and efficient utilization of all available resources, both public and private, to assist these communities in acquiring the education and tools necessary to foster hope and opportunity, wealth creation and asset building.

### VISION

To establish a sustainable development process focusing on locally driven, bottom-up solutions to address challenges in rural and underserved communities. This process will create a “Climate of Success” that fosters hope and opportunity, wealth creation, and asset building, for our families, farmers and ranchers, and businesses. These communities will be safe, healthy, educated, and growing.

### PLAN OF ACTION

- Establish Centers of Community Prosperity that foster hope and opportunity, wealth creation, and asset building;
- Strengthen partnerships and align Centers of Community Prosperity with 1862, 1890, and 1994 Land-Grant institutions, Hispanic-Serving Institutions and other public and private entities guaranteeing exceptional customer service and opportunities;
- Identify efficient and sustainable processes and effective strategies that will establish 200 Communities of Faith and Opportunity by end of 2019; and
- Help communities establish "Local Prosperity Councils" that engage the OneUSDA team, Federal, State, regional organizations and public and private entities.



# Communities of Faith & Opportunity Process

---

## USDA Community Prosperity Training Summit

1

- Communities and organizations attend Summits at higher education institutions and other locations around the country.

## Local Prosperity Council

2

- Communities form Local Prosperity Councils, including key partners from business, education, government, and other fields.

## Needs Assessment

3

- Local Prosperity Councils submit a needs assessment, addressing challenges and assets, to U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture and other federal partners link community challenges to potential federal resources, programs, and initiatives.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture sends Local Prosperity Councils individualized reports on potential connections to federal resources, programs, and initiatives.

## Implementation

4

- Local Prosperity Councils implement strategies and commit to interfacing with at least 3 federal resources, programs, or initiatives.
- USDA Centers of Community Prosperity provide outreach and training workshops on select challenges including youth, veterans, socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, urban agriculture, and farm stress, to be presented by USDA staff, higher education institution faculty, or other.
- Local Prosperity Councils, Centers of Community Prosperity, and U.S. Department of Agriculture regularly communicate on status of progress.

## Recognition

5

- USDA recognizes Local Prosperity Councils as Communities of Faith and Opportunity.

## Summary of Priorities:

**e-Connectivity for Rural America:** In today’s information-driven global economy, e-connectivity is not simply an amenity - it has become essential. **E-connectivity**, or electronic connectivity, is more than just connecting households, schools, and healthcare centers to each other as well as the rest of the world through high-speed internet. It is also **a tool that enables increased productivity for farms, factories, forests, mining, and small businesses**. E-connectivity is fundamental for economic development, innovation, advancements in technology, workforce readiness, and an improved quality of life. **Reliable** and **affordable** high-speed internet connectivity will transform rural America as a key catalyst for prosperity.

**Improving Quality of Life:** Ensuring rural Americans can achieve a high quality of life is the foundation of prosperity. Quality of life is a measure of human well-being that can be identified through economic and social indicators. Modern **utilities**, affordable **housing**, efficient **transportation** and reliable **employment** are economic indicators that must be integrated with social indicators like access to **medical services, public safety, education** and **community resilience** to empower rural communities to thrive. Focusing and delivering key federal reforms will enable rural Americans to flourish and prosper in 21st Century communities.

**Supporting a Rural Workforce:** To grow and prosper, every rural community needs job opportunities for its residents, and employers need qualified individuals to fill those needs. This requires **identifying employment needs, attracting available workers** from urban and rural centers alike, and providing the **workforce** with **training** and **education** to best fill the available needs. There are many opportunities to partner with local businesses and organizations to identify gaps, to work with all levels of educational institutions to provide career training and development, to fine-tune existing training programs, and to grow **apprenticeship** opportunities to develop the required workforce. Providing rural communities, organizations, and businesses a skilled workforce with an environment where people can thrive will grow prosperous communities.

**Harnessing Technological Innovation:** By 2050, the U.S. population is projected to increase to almost 400 million people, and rising incomes worldwide will translate into a historic global growth in food demand. To feed a hungry world, we will need to harness innovation to increase output across American farmlands. In addition to increased crop yields, **technological innovation** can improve **crop quality, nutritional value, and food safety**. Innovations in **manufacturing, mining**, and other **non-agricultural** industries can enhance **worker efficiency and safety**. At the core of these developments that will further grow the rural economy is the expansion of **STEM education, research, regulatory modernization, and infrastructure**. Leveraging these innovations in an increasingly data driven economy will also require further development of **rural data management** capabilities.

**Economic Development:** Infusing rural areas with stronger businesses and agricultural economies empowers America. **Expanding funding options** to increase the **productivity of farmers and ranchers** will lead to the enhanced viability and competitiveness of rural America. By promoting **innovative farm technologies, energy security, recreation, agritourism** and **sustainable forest management**, communities will be empowered to leverage the bounties of rural America. Investing in rural **transportation** infrastructure is needed for carrying more “Made in America” products to markets at home and abroad, and boosting our country’s global competitiveness. **Reducing regulatory burdens** and **attracting private capital** will support our ultimate mission of empowering Rural America to feed the world.

## Prioritizing Community Challenges

Should	Could	Number	List of Challenges
<b>Category:</b>			
<b>Category:</b>			
<b>Category:</b>			
<b>Category:</b>			
<b>Category:</b>			
<b>Category:</b>			

# Seven Community Capitals

	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Examples</b>
 <b>FINANCIAL</b>	Financial resources that can be invested in local projects or initiatives. Efforts to build wealth for individuals or groups.	Foundations, grants, loans, financial institutions, banks.
 <b>POLITICAL</b>	The ability to influence rules, regulations, and policies through access to individuals/groups that have the power to influence decisions and/or through participation in events open to citizens to help shape decisions (such as forums).	Access to elected and appointed officials, ways for citizens to have a voice on local issues, political organizations, voting.
 <b>SOCIAL</b>	Connections among people and organizations that help make things happen in the community and that build trust and cooperation. These can include connections within the community to people or organizations as well as connections to people or organizations outside the community.	Community coalitions that bring people together around common causes, civic and social groups/clubs; community engagement activities, events or activities that build trust among different groups (such as across races, ethnicity, etc.).
 <b>BUILT</b>	Facilities and infrastructure (and related services) that were built to support a community.	Buildings, utilities (water, sewer, electric), Internet, telecommunications, roads, bridges, hospitals, schools, houses.
 <b>HUMAN</b>	Skills and abilities that individuals have that allow them to earn a living, strengthen community, and otherwise contribute to communities, their families, and self-improvement. It includes education, training, and skill building activities.	Formal educational institutions (such as schools, colleges, and universities), workforce training, adult and youth leadership programs, informal education (such as through Cooperative Extension Service, clubs, and faith-based organizations).
 <b>NATURAL</b>	Natural and environmental resources that exist in a community.	Water features (rivers, lakes, etc.), woodlands, parks, wildlife.
 <b>CULTURAL</b>	Values, norms, beliefs and traditions that are a part of a family, school, group, or community. These also include things such as art and books that have historical or cultural significance.	Cultural events and festivals; libraries or museums that maintain cultural or historical displays; art, food, music, and such that are unique to the area or to different racial or ethnic populations in the community, historical associations.

Sources:

Flora and Flora (2008); Flora, Flora and Fey (2004); Jacobs (2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d); Flage and Hauser-Lindstrom (2007); Emory, Fey and Flora (2006); Beaulieu, L. J. (n.d.). The Seven Types of Community Capitals.

# Community Capitals Activity

Priority: \_\_\_\_\_



Financial



Political



Social



Built



Human



Natural



Cultural

## Collecting and Recording Data

Priority Area:	
<b>Data Type:</b>	<b>How did the data change over time – Did it go up, down, or stay the same?</b>
<b>Website Source:</b>	
<b>Local Source:</b>	
<b>How does it compare to the state or nation?</b>	<b>Were there any surprises?</b>
<b>What did you learn?</b>	

Priority Area:	
<b>Data Type:</b>	<b>How did the data change over time – Did it go up, down, or stay the same?</b>
<b>Website Source:</b>	
<b>Local Source:</b>	
<b>How does it compare to the state or nation?</b>	<b>Were there any surprises?</b>
<b>What did you learn?</b>	

# SMART GOALS HANDOUT

## Specific

What do you want to achieve?  
Where will you focus your efforts?

## Measurable

How do you plan to measure progress toward the goal?  
How will you know you have arrived at the goal?

## Attainable

Do you have the resources to achieve the goal?  
Are there barriers that might prevent achieving this goal?

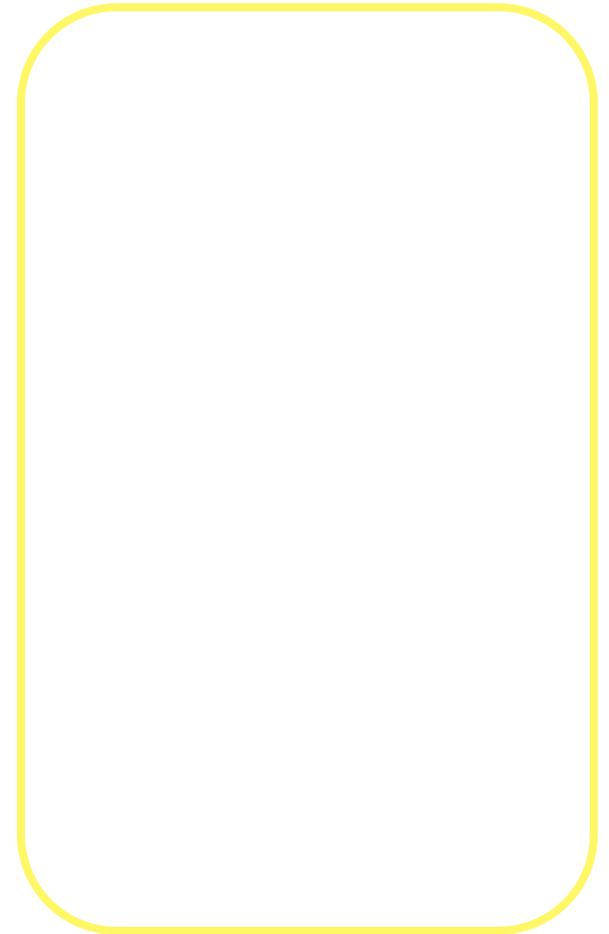
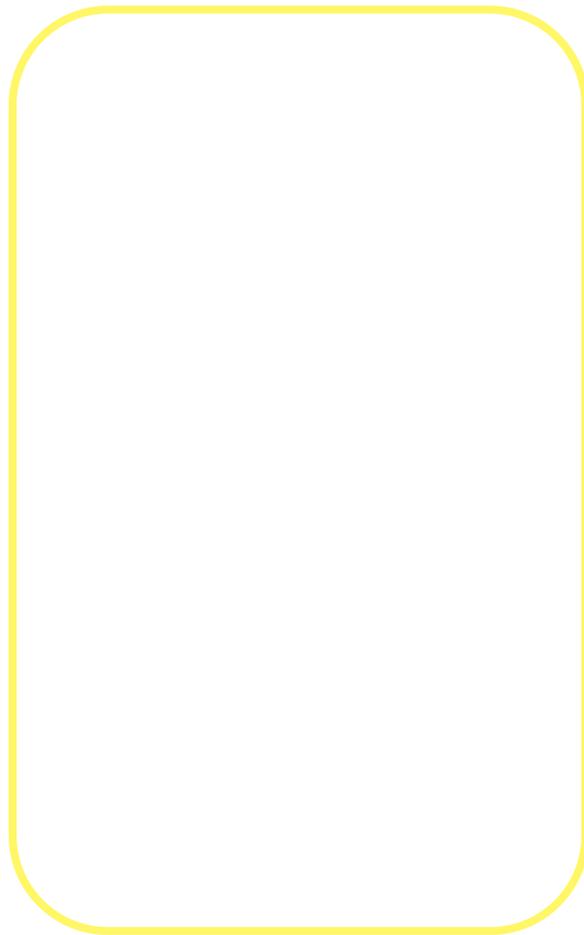
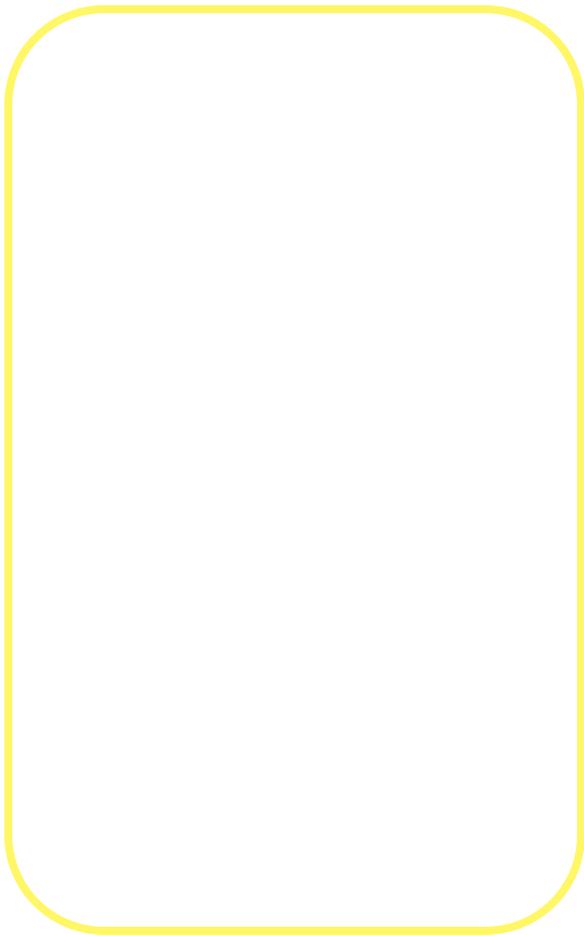
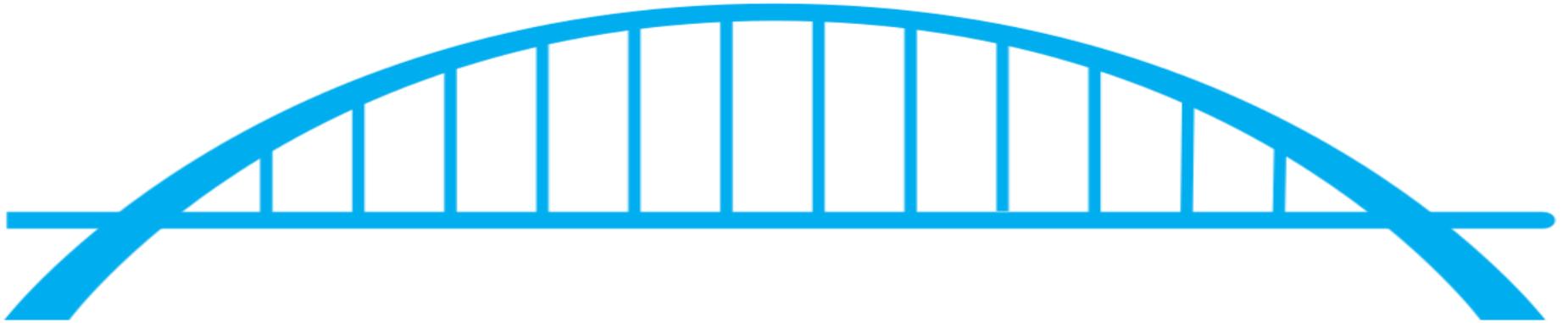
## Relevant

Is this important for your community?  
Does this matter or bring benefit?

## Time Framed

When do you want to achieve your goal?  
What is the target date for accomplishing the goal?

# Bridge Building Template



## Action Planning Chart

WHAT needs to get done?	WHO will take responsibility	WHEN will the task be finished

# Measurement Plan Template

**Your Strategy:**

**People/Groups with which You Plan to Work:**

What you want to measure	What information you need	Who has the information	How you will get the information	How often/when you will get the information
<b>Attitude, Knowledge, Skill</b>				
<b>Behavior</b>				
<b>Condition</b>				



## Telling My Story: Writing a Needs Statement

Use the boxes below to help shape your needs statement as the first part of your story.

- **What is the need you would like to address?**

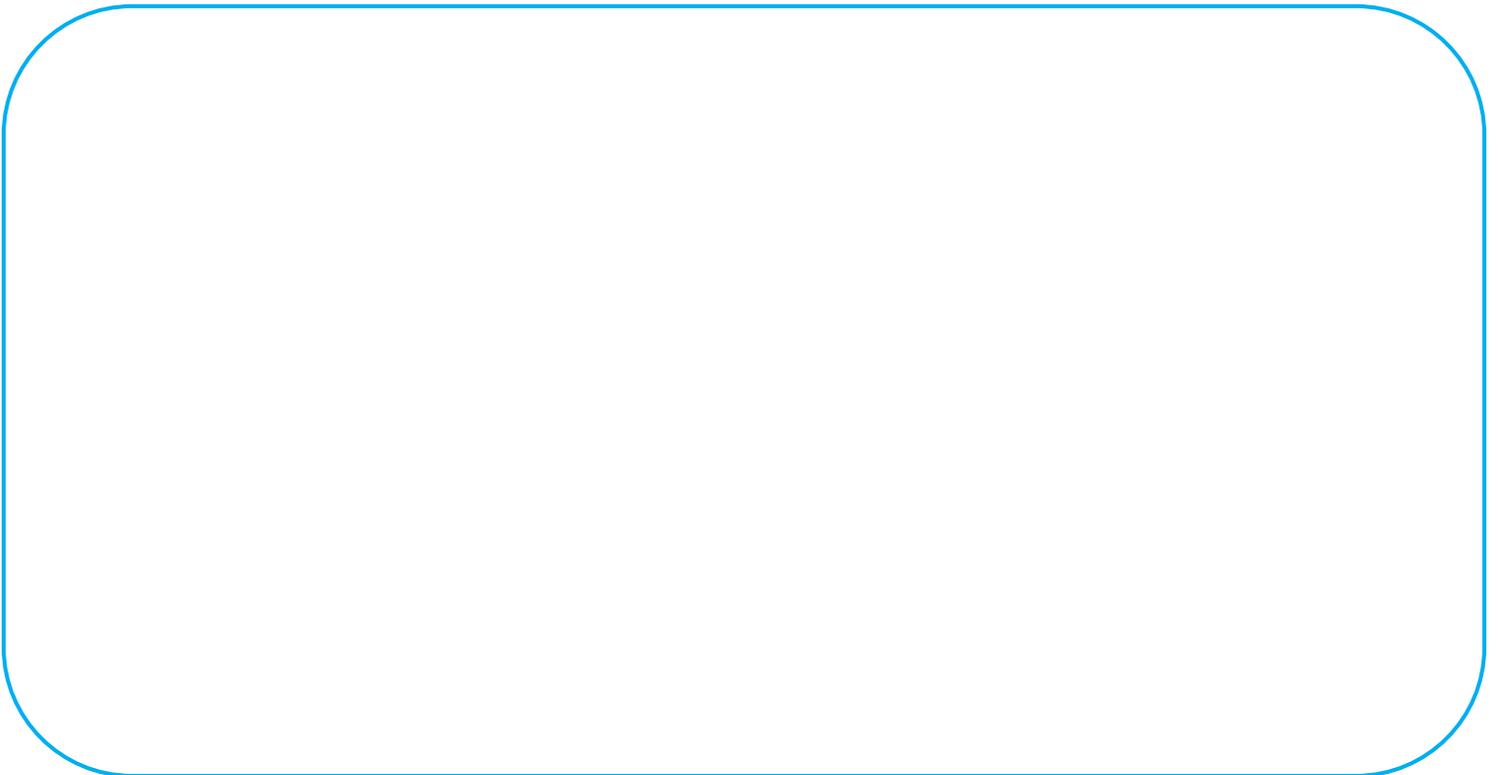
- **Who will be listening to your pitch? What is important to them? Some data will work across audiences, but at other times, you'll need to tailor your message.**

- **Which data will you use to describe the need?**
- **What are the 1-3 key points you want to make?**

- **What example can you give of someone affected by this need?**



- **How would you communicate this need in one minute or less?**
- **Write what you would say.**



# Resource List

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