

Community Action Handbook

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Preface

Every community, no matter where it is located, has its own specific set of issues and problems. The nature of the problems will vary from place to place. In one community, it may be hungry children in the school; in another, it may be inadequate housing for the elderly. While the issues may change, the need to deal with them remains the same.

When we talk about community action, we are talking about bringing people together to solve community problems. People have used a community action approach to deal with many specific problems: reducing harmful alcohol use in their community, encouraging healthy eating, and eliminating the use of tobacco products are three of the issues that have been tackled using the community action process.

The *Community Action Handbook* provides practical information for initiating this process. It is based on the suggestions and everyday experiences of people who worked together, as a community, to bring about change.

The handbook describes the community action process. If followed, this approach will lead to the formation of a community-driven community coalition, in which members co-operate, co-ordinate and collaborate in the planning and implementation of health promotion programs, policies and activities. This approach makes maximum use of all skills and resources at the local level, and at the same time, avoids duplication in effort and service. While community action is not the only possible approach, it has worked in many communities, including Cornwall, Halton, London, Port Colborne/Wainfleet, Thunder Bay and Wawa.

There are five steps in the community action process:

- I. Initiating Contact: Finding Out Who Is Interested
- II. Forming a Community Planning Committee: Gaining Commitment
- III. Gathering Information: Listening to People's Views About Their Community
- IV. Expanding the Planning Committee: Gathering Community-Wide Momentum to Take Action
- V. Building a Community Coalition: Forming a Stable, Effective Group

The *Community Action Handbook* shows you how to carry out each of these steps. It provides useful examples from communities that have used the community action process. The handbook discusses who should be involved, how to get them involved and how to identify community needs and resources. It will guide you to the formation of an effective and stable community coalition.

In addition, the handbook will show you how to reach volunteers, day-care providers, police, clergy, teachers, business people and your neighbours, as well as service clubs and organizations, in order to plan community action.

A community action video is available to complement the handbook. This video is divided into two parts. The six minute segment provides a brief overview of the community action process. It is designed for use by community representatives who wish to promote the process to other organizations. The 15 minute segment provides a detailed step-by-step account of the process, and an overview of the resources developed to support community action. It is intended for communities interested in training others in the community action process.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following groups and individuals for their valuable contributions to the development of this resource:

- . The Healthy Lifestyles Coalitions in Cornwall, Halton, London, Port Colborne/Wainfleet, Thunder Bay and Wawa, for their ongoing commitment to and involvement in the community action process.
- . Mary Martin Rowe for taking a lead role in developing this process of community action.
- . Mary Thelander for taking a lead role in developing drafts of the handbook.
- . Graham Gordon for taking a lead role in developing and producing the Community Action Video.
- . The Ministry of Health, Health Promotion Branch for lending financial assistance and its support by reviewing drafts of the Resource.
- . Adele Goldsmith for taking a lead role in editing the handbook.

Introducing Community Action

Community Action and You

Anyone can start the community action process. You may be the parent of a child with migraine headaches, a volunteer with a community or voluntary organization, an owner of a corner store, a social worker or a schoolteacher. You may be worried about the number of young women and teenage girls you see smoking, or about waste disposal in your community. You may have a general interest in reducing parental stress and encouraging family life. If you recognize that there are issues in your community that need to be addressed, you can be the one who encourages your community to take action.

What Community Action Is

Community action is a process through which people who share a common problem work together to solve it. Community action involves everyone in the community - neighbours, merchants, teachers, day-care providers, tellers and clerks, and community-based agency representatives. It uses the resources within the community to bring about necessary changes. As well, by working together as a community-based coalition, the community can make more effective use of other resources outside the community.

What Community Action is Not

Community action is not a program imposed on the community by an agency or organization. It is not a needs assessment by outsiders. Community action is not a professional telling community members what they should be doing, nor is it taking someone else's idea and seeing if it works in your community.

Why Community Action?

Community action is a way of solving community problems. Since community action is owned by the various groups in your community, it is they who decide what needs to be done. The community controls the changes that occur. It gives it the chance to try new things. Working together and sharing resources - ideas, time, space, programs - usually results in lasting change. Specific activities will occur as a result of community action.

What You Can Do

You can start the community action process. First, you need to clarify the problem in your own mind; then start telling people about it. You need time and energy more than anything else. This handbook will help you get started. You can use the examples from this handbook and adapt them to fit your community.

What Problems Can You Work On?

Almost any community problem can be improved through this approach. Solving one problem may have a "spill over" effect on other issues. For example, the community action process is now being used to promote better health in many communities. Better health can mean anything from healthier eating habits and safer streets, to building positive personal feelings in teenagers, and having cleaner neighbourhoods.

Risks and Challenges

You may start the community action process, but it quickly takes on a life of its own. It seldom runs smoothly. It may take longer than you think it should, or it may suddenly snowball. You can go from struggling to get started to being in the middle of one project, while at the same time, starting a second.

To the community...

A community has many powerful members; some are individuals, some are organized agencies or associations. The more sophisticated your community and the more community structures there are, the more people and organizations there are to become involved. They may not always agree about goals, priorities and methods. Part of the challenge of community action is to make sure everyone has a chance to take part and to draw on the many resources in your community. People will come and go as the issue and the need for action changes.

To the individual...

The greatest risk for anyone who gets involved in community action is fatigue. There will be heavy demands on your time that will affect your family and your personal life. In the beginning you have to convince yourself you can do things you may have never done before. You have to believe you have the capability to bring about change. Once you start, you also have to share that belief with many people.

You will learn when to push people to get on with the job, and when to sit back and let them talk through an idea or an issue and find the answer themselves. You may get

caught between the priorities you, as an individual, think are important and those of an agency or group to which you belong. For you personally, it may be hard to pass the leadership on to others. Your issues may not be the ones that the community coalition chooses to work on at that time.

To organized groups and agencies...

Established and high-profile agencies and associations that decide to join a community coalition may wonder if they will lose their identity. In fact, being a part of a community coalition brings greater visibility. Being a coalition member means more community involvement and awareness of organizations. Organizations have a chance to work with others in the community and can make sure that their resources are being used to deal with local problems. At times, an agency's established or proposed programs may not match the issues that are appropriate to the community.

Resources and Supports

The most important resource you need is people's time. You need to get people to agree to set aside time for talking, exchanging ideas and information, and organizing the efforts of the coalition. To get started, you also need some very practical support: meeting places, use of telephones, access to computers and printing. You may also need a place for volunteers and any paid staff to work.

You need to become known. Although word of mouth is the best way for people to hear about community action, you need to attract media attention, particularly local community newspapers, local radio shows and cable television. Again, you have to talk to people. Call the newspaper and radio station. Send out news releases. By gaining the support of your local media, your community action will reach a broader audience.

There is a point in the development of community action when the group may want to get the support of local municipal leaders and others who are considered important in ensuring the long-term and lasting success of the community coalition. You may have to work closely with politicians to gain political support for your activities.

Money does not guarantee success, but you will need money. You can get people to donate some of the things you require. Explore local resources, including corporate donors or sponsors for events. Seek the support of local merchants, associations and service clubs that share your concerns. Another source of support is "contributions in kind", in which businesses give the coalition access to services such as printing, food, secretarial assistance and publicity.

Skills

Part of the success of community action comes from developing or gaining access to certain skills, which encourage people to work together. You need to be able to represent the community, and negotiate on its behalf. That, in itself, is a skill. The ability to present issues clearly and to your advantage is vital to your success.

Other skills that are important to the community action process include:

- . Program planning and design: the ability to identify components of a program and plan for them.
- . Coalition building and networking: the ability to ask questions of others. Listen to other people's opinions and attitudes. Learn to put your own interests aside, and listen with an open mind to different points of view. Find and keep in touch with people who share common values and interests, and who may be helpful in achieving your goals.
- . Communications: the ability to develop and present messages that can be readily understood and accepted by the public.
- . Evaluation: the ability to assess whether or not the goals of a particular program or activity have been achieved.
- . Working independently: the ability to work independently, particularly at the beginning of community coalition building. You will need to set your own tasks and timelines. You will need considerable self-motivation.

Values

The value that is at the heart of community coalitions is respect - for the community's knowledge, its skills, and its ability to direct its own future. For any coalition to be successful, it must recognize and accept the community's right to address its own problems. You can support that value by: a) involving others; b) coaching others; and c) mediation. Your role is not to help, fix, direct or take over. Perhaps your most important role is asking questions and listening to the answers. Community coalitions are not built on authority, but on consensus and agreement. It is almost impossible to reach consensus unless members respect each others' viewpoints. The people who become involved in community coalitions frequently report the personal benefit from being part of a group in which what they say and do is valued. Because coalitions involve and touch so many people in the community, you need to be especially sensitive to cultural, linguistic, educational and socio-economic differences. Your experiences are not the same

as everyone else's. You have to listen, and you have to ask questions when you don't understand the positions that other people are taking.

Steps Along the Way

There are five steps in the community action process. Each is covered in a section of this handbook.

- I. Initiating Contact: Finding Out Who Is Interested**
- II. Forming a Community Planning Committee: Gaining Commitment**
- III. Gathering Information: Listening to People's Views about Their Community**
- IV. Expanding the Planning Committee: Gathering Community-Wide Momentum to Take Action**
- V. Building a Community Coalition: Forming a Stable, Effective Group**

The work of a local coalition requires ongoing attention. There are other resources available that can help you continue the growth and development of your coalition. Two of these guides are:

- * *Community Health Promotion in Action*; and,
- * *Social Marketing in Health Promotion: A Communications Guide*.

Community Health Promotion in Action is a guide that outlines a full planning process for addressing health issues. *Social Marketing in Health Promotion: A Communications Guide* helps communities develop communications activities to support their community action projects.

Both *Community Health Promotion in Action* and *Social Marketing in Health Promotion: A Communications Guide* are available from:

Health Information Centre
Communications and Information Branch
Ontario Ministry of Health
8th Floor, Hepburn Block
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1S2

Telephone: (416) 327-4327 or 1-800-268-1153
Fax: (416) 327-4389

Section I

Initiating Contact: Finding Out Who Is Interested

The Need

Success in bringing people together starts with you and your ability to convince other people that there is a problem in your community. The best way to get started is by talking to others and letting the message spread through word of mouth. The strength of community development comes from the people who choose to work together. The more people who come together, the stronger and better the work they can do. People like to be asked to help, but they also like to be asked their opinion about what needs to be done.

Tasks

There are a number of steps that you, as an individual, can take:

1. Understand your purpose. Clarify the problem in your own mind. Decide what you want to do about it.
2. Find the right people. Identify local contacts (perhaps about 10 people) who you think will be interested in the problem and who might be willing to get involved (See Example #2, page 30).
3. Contact those people, and explain to them what you are trying to do.
4. Organize a meeting. At this meeting, it will be important to:
 - a) Explain the reason for the meeting - why you have brought people together.
 - b) Assess their interest - what motivated them to come to the meeting and what is their particular interest.
 - c) Assess their commitment - explain your understanding of the community action process and determine their degree of willingness to become involved.

- d) Discuss potential resources for office supplies, refreshments, postage, and other items that the group will require.
 - e) Identify other interested individuals who might be willing to join you. You will need people with a variety of experiences, backgrounds and skills who are interested in becoming involved.
 - f) Clarify the size of the community with which you are dealing.
 - g) Consider the implications of forming a planning committee and discuss possible next steps.
5. Take minutes of the meeting. These should be distributed to everyone who attends. Minutes will help you keep track of decisions and steps you have taken, and will help you inform new members as they join the group.

Decisions

The group, as a whole, will have to make a number of decisions at this initial meeting, prior to holding its first formal planning meeting.

1. What is the group's goal? The members must agree on their reasons for working together.
2. How should the group proceed? Come to an agreement about forming a planning committee, and about following the community action process.
3. Decide who should be on the planning committee. Identify those who should attend the first meeting. By developing this list, you will be establishing some boundaries for your community. Membership on the planning committee may be decided by where potential members live, their experience with the issues or their past involvement with community efforts, or by any other criteria determined by the group. The membership of the committee and the boundaries of the community will emerge and change as the group works together. (See Example #3, page 31).
4. Confirm that you want to hold a larger planning meeting. Decide on an agenda. (See Example #4, page 32). Decide who will lead, or chair, the meeting. Decide who will take minutes.
5. Decide when and where the planning meeting will be held. When choosing dates, allow lots of time. Take into account the time needed to make arrangements, send out invitations, and

- follow up with people. Determine if there is potential conflict with other events, holidays, school professional development days, or religious holidays.
6. Determine how the invitations will be sent out. If you are sending a letter, get the full names, correct titles, and complete addresses of those who are to be invited. Decide who will write the invitations, who will sign them and who will follow up with those invited (See Example #5, page 33).

Tracking Your Progress

By the end of the first meeting, you have a much clearer idea of the problem to be addressed. You will have a better sense of how to present the problem to other people so they will understand the issue. You will have more people to share ideas, information, and the workload. Your community is starting to be defined - its physical boundaries, the people and groups that fit together, and who, in the community, will be interested in participating in your plan. You will be starting to identify sources of funding. And, you have a list of activities for people to work on before your next planning meeting.

Section II

Forming a Community Planning Committee: Gaining Commitment

The Need

Commitment and motivation grow by sharing work. Bringing people together means bringing together more ideas, more hands to help with the work, and more sources of information. Planning starts with everyone understanding and agreeing on the final goal. One of the hardest parts of planning is learning how to work together so that everyone feels that their ideas and efforts are valued. It may be necessary to give up some things, such as a favourite project or idea, in order to keep everyone working in the same direction.

One of the first jobs of the planning committee is to learn more about itself and its community. Talking with key people in the community will give you more information about current activities and who is involved in them. The planning committee will want to think about an activity, or perhaps a campaign, that it can launch quickly and carry out successfully. Community events such as a dance, a concert or a picnic will bring their own rewards. People in the community will be talking about your event and you will benefit from any media attention. Starting and finishing an activity increases your momentum, and encourages you to take on more ambitious projects.

Tasks

1. Hold a community planning committee meeting. There will likely be several people at this meeting that were not part of your first group. You will need to explain, once again, the community action process and your reason for bringing people together. You will also need to determine their level of interest and commitment.
2. Take minutes at the meeting. Keep a record of the community planning committee's decisions (See Example #7, page 35).
3. Find out if any other communities have dealt with issues similar to yours. (The Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse will be able to refer you to appropriate community groups. Call 1-416-408-2121 or 1-800-263-2846).
4. Explore possible sources of funding. You might be able to get funding from the government. Consider applying to the Ontario Ministry of Health, Healthy Community Grants Program for funding. To do so:

- a) Contact your local district health council for an application form and specific guidelines, and for information on local priorities and deadlines.
 - b) Contact the district health council also about Healthy Community Grants which may be available to support community action relevant to health promotion issues. Grants are based on local needs and resources. Local district health councils make the decisions about which activities to fund, based on local health promotion priorities.
5. Publicize the activities of the community planning committee:
- a) Organizations and associations frequently publish newsletters that contain information about community events. Ask them to include information about your community planning committee.
 - b) Contact the local media and tell them about your activities.
 - c) Other communities involved in the community action process have promotional materials that will serve as examples of how to publicize your message. *Social Marketing in Health Promotion: A Communications Guide* (see page 5) also offers helpful guidelines and examples.
6. Develop a package of background information about your community, including the services, resources, businesses, major employers, regular community events and sponsors.
7. Talk to community leaders. Tell them what you are doing and ask for their support (See Example #6, page 34).

Decisions

When you are forming a community planning committee, a number of decisions have to be made, including:

1. What is the goal (or goals) of the group?
2. How will the group work together?
3. Where and when the group will meet?
4. Who will lead the group now, and who will take the lead in the future?

5. What activity will the planning group organize? What steps are involved?
6. Which community leaders should be contacted? Who are most likely to be interested in your activity?
7. Who will lend secretarial and administrative support?
8. How will you approach the media; how will you get the publicity you need?

Tracking Your Progress

Forming a community planning committee is a big step. You are collecting more information about your community. You are identifying your community's leaders, and meeting them. You are identifying the major employers and service groups, and finding out about community events that are already receiving support. More people are learning about your efforts now that you are publicizing them. You know what your first activity or event will be, and people are working on it.

The way in which the planning committee will work is clearer. You have clarified the roles people will play and the different responsibilities they will have. You know who will manage the funds and you have decided on a contact person for coordinating and organizing the committee's activities. You have decided how you will obtain the resources you need. You have approached local service organizations and gained the support of the local politicians.

Section III

Gathering Information: Listening to People's Views about Their Community

Part 1: Planning the Information-Gathering Session

The Need

The more people who own the issue and the solution, the more likely it is that the community action will be successful. Remember, people like to be asked their opinions on issues, and like to have a say in how the problems should be addressed. The more people you ask, the more likely you will be to get the complete picture. Sharing different viewpoints helps everyone better understand the problems and possible solutions.

Holding information-gathering sessions is one way to hear from the community. Community meetings give you the opportunity to hear from people from every part of the community, including different cultural groups, businesses, service organizations, professions, and your neighbours. The people who come to your meeting will be the ones who will make use of the programs or activities you will be offering, and their viewpoints will be helpful to your planning. Another benefit of these meetings is that you will find people who are interested in providing or supporting your activities. The opinions and suggestions of all these people are important because they help clarify the issues. They give a better understanding of how existing resources or programs in the community are viewed, and help to determine the activities and programs people feel are needed.

The information-gathering sessions also give you a chance to expand your planning committee. Following the meeting, you can invite interested participants to join the committee and help with the planning and support that is so necessary to the community action process.

Tasks

Planning and holding an information-gathering session involves a number of steps.

1. Find out who else has held an information-gathering session. Ask them how they went about it. Their input may help you avoid some pitfalls. Other communities

that are already involved in community action for healthy lifestyles can give you the benefit of their experience.

Contact:

Cornwall:

The Mayor's Task Force for Healthy Lifestyles - (613) 932-6252

London:

London Good Food Project - (519) 660-1611

Port Colborne/Wainfleet:

Port Colborne/Wainfleet Healthy Lifestyles Coalition - (905) 835-5663

Halton:

Halton Healthy Lifestyles Coalition - (905) 842-2120

Thunder Bay:

Thunder Bay Healthy Lifestyles Coalition - (807) 345-1375

Wawa:

Wawa Healthy Lifestyles Coalition - (705) 856-1867

2. Assign responsibilities to the members of the planning committee to make sure that all the tasks are covered. (See Example #9, page 38).
3. Grouping people with similar interests or backgrounds will encourage a healthy exchange of opinions and ideas, and help the participants feel more comfortable with each other. If you are planning to hold three sessions, you might want to plan them as follows:

Session i. Business and political leaders.
Session ii. Health professionals, social service representatives and education representatives.
Session iii. Service clubs, community associations, clergy, day-care providers, teachers, neighbours, and interested individuals.
4. Develop an invitation list. Identify possible participants who reflect the make-up of the community. You will need a mailing list for each session so you can send out the invitations and background information on your issue and process. Plan to have about 30 people at each session. (See Example #10, page 40).
5. Pick the dates and times for the sessions. Find out what time of day is best for them. Often, Session iii, for community representatives is best held in the evening. Session i, for business and political leaders, might be most effective if held in the morning. Session ii, for service providers, should be held in the afternoon.

6. If at all possible, arrange for child care for the participants.
7. Select a site for the meeting. Enlist the help of the planning committee to find a large meeting room, free of charge. Look for a site that has:
 - * Adequate space for the number of people you expect
 - * Free parking
 - * Wheelchair access
 - * A coat room
 - * Refreshment facilities

Always see the meeting space before you agree to use it. Is the room layout suitable for your purpose? Can the tables and chairs be arranged in such a way to encourage discussion (perhaps in a circle or U-shape)? Is the space suitable for dividing into smaller groups if you decide to do so?

8. Prepare the invitations. If you have representatives from community agencies on your planning committee, you could ask to use their logo on the invitations. Decide on who will sign the invitations. Send out the invitations well in advance of the meeting. Participants need time to make their own plans to attend, and to respond to the invitation (See Example #11, page 41).
9. Follow up the invitations with a personal telephone call to everyone who has been invited. Personal contact in other communities has increased attendance by 60 to 70 percent. Split the list of participants to be called among the planning committee so that members call their own friends, business contacts or local merchants. Find out who needs day care or a ride to the meeting.
10. Identify media people from community newspapers, radio and television stations who should know about the information-gathering sessions. Determine who, on the planning committee, will be your contact for the media. Many communities have prepared news releases about their information-gathering sessions, but a news release must also tell the media who they can contact for more information.
11. Plan refreshments. Ideally the sessions will last about two hours. Coffee, tea, juice and a healthy snack will be appreciated.
12. Collect the materials for the session. Make sure you have flip charts and extra paper, felt pens, and masking tape to hang the flip chart sheets around the room. Provide pens and paper for participants.
13. Assign responsibility for tasks to the planning committee.

- * Who will greet participants, register them at the door, and confirm the names and addresses of people who want to get more involved?
(See Example #13, page 43).
 - * Who will record the meeting? During the meeting all comments should be written down on flip charts under the headings on the agenda. Who will be responsible for this job?
 - * Who will chair the meeting, make the introductions, thank the speakers, and keep the meeting running smoothly?
 - * Who will lead the discussion?
 - * Who will take more detailed minutes?
14. Prepare summaries of the discussions that took place, following the meetings. These summaries will have to be compiled into a full report that can be distributed, as required. (See Example #16, page 46).
 15. Hold a "dry run" of the information-gathering session. Before the public information-gathering session takes place, have a practice session just with the members of your planning committee.

Decisions

Deciding on the agenda for the information-gathering session is extremely important. Asking the right questions will help you uncover the information you need for more effective community action. (See Example #12, page 42).

1. What are the issues? Everyone attending an information-gathering session should have the opportunity to state his or her opinion on the issues or problems facing the community. It is important, however, to clarify the exact nature of the problem. For example, lack of day-care for school age children is not a problem; the problem is school age children who are left unattended.
2. What are the community's resources and strengths? Identify and discuss the strengths of your community and the resources that are currently available.

3. What is the history of the community coming together to solve problems? Identify the organizations, associations, merchants, service clubs and councils that have worked together in the past to solve problems.
4. What are the barriers and challenges faced by the community? Clearly identify the social, financial, geographical, political, generational and other problems that must be recognized and addressed. Barriers, such as lack of education, or lack of volunteer time, stand in the way of people solving their own problems. Lack of suitable space may stand in the way of a local church housing a day-care centre.
5. What advice can be provided to the planning committee about possible solutions to the problem? All possible solutions should be discussed and considered. Some solutions may seem too complicated, some too easy, but every idea may be helpful in one way or another.

Tracking Your Progress

You have organized your information-gathering sessions. Invitations have been sent, the media has been informed, and planning committee members know what is expected of them. You have developed the agenda for the sessions and know who is going to lead them. You have held a "dry run", and are now ready to hold the actual event.

Part 2: Conducting an Information-Gathering Session

The Need

You have already identified the need to conduct information-gathering sessions. The event has been well planned and the responses to the invitations have been very positive. Now you are faced with conducting a session.

Tasks

The following steps are a guideline to running an orderly, effective information-gathering session, and providing the necessary follow-up:

1. Introductions:
 - * Welcome the participants.
 - * Identify the people that have already become involved.

- * Describe the community action process and its benefits.
 - * State the purpose of the session - identify the issues or problems in the community that have brought you together.
 - * Tell participants what the planning committee has accomplished to date.
 - * Explain the possible next steps, including the formation of an expanded planning committee which will involve more people.
2. Encourage participation:
- * Remind participants that all ideas are good ideas and will be considered.
 - * Tell participants that you will be checking back with them to confirm that you understood their points.
3. Identify the issues in more detail:
- * Give examples of the kinds of problems you have heard people raise in the community.
 - * Ask participants what they see as the problems.
 - * Clarify what the participant said if the point is unclear. Repeat the point in your own words, or ask for more information and examples.
 - * Review the list of problems. Make sure everyone has had a chance to participate.
4. Find out which issues are most important to the group as a whole:
- * Review the list.
 - * Combine issues or problems that are related.
 - * Ask participants to choose the issues that they think are most important on the list.
 - * Hold a vote. To rate the importance of issues, people may vote more than once. Each person should have a minimum of three votes and a maximum of five, depending on the number of issues. (See Example #14, page 44).

- * Record the vote.
 - * Confirm with the group that, based on their votes, they have decided which issues are of highest priority.
5. Discuss the history of the community coming together:
- * Give some examples of when the community has worked together, in the past, to solve problems.
 - * Explain how different groups or segments have worked together.
 - * Explain how groups coordinate their efforts. Give examples of partnerships between community agencies or groups.
 - * Ask the participants if they know of other examples.
6. Discuss the community's strengths and resources:
- * Identify the organizations, groups or individuals who are involved in community issues.
 - * List the community's characteristics of which people are most proud. For example, residents might be proud of the quantity of park land, the mix of housing, or the sense of neighbourhood.
 - * Discuss where voluntary or non-profit organizations go to obtain support or practical assistance.
 - * Review the list; ask participants if they can think of any others.
7. Discuss the barriers and challenges:
- * Acknowledge that barriers prevent people from solving their problems. Give some examples.
 - * Review the barriers that were identified earlier. Look at the reasons that services are not being provided.
8. Determine possible courses of action:

- * Discuss suggestions that have been given for ways that the community can address its problems.
 - * Discuss the best way for the participants to work together.
 - * Find out what advice the group wants to give to the planning committee.
 - * Determine who else should be involved in the process.
9. Conclusion:
- * Thank the participants for coming.
 - * Summarize the next steps. Let the participants know that they will be receiving a copy of the report from the session.
 - * Ask participants to indicate their interests in becoming involved in a larger planning committee by putting a check beside their name and address on the participants' list.
10. During the session, record people's comments or suggestions on flip charts. Write clearly and number all flip chart pages. Check with participants to verify that you are recording their points accurately. Avoid writing comments that could be misinterpreted. It is not necessary to write participants names next to their comments: the issues belong to the group, not the individual. Fill in any short forms immediately after the session. The recorder should sign his or her name to the flip chart in case questions arise after the meeting.
11. Develop a summary of the information-gathering session. (See Example #16, page 46).

Tracking Your Progress

Your information-gathering sessions are over. You had a good turn-out and many people volunteered to participate on a larger planning committee. You have held a debriefing session with other committee members, and thoroughly discussed the meetings. (See Example #15, page 45). You now feel ready to move to the next step.

Section IV

Expanding the Planning Committee: Gathering Community-Wide Momentum to Take Action

The Need

The expanded planning committee is the bridge between where you are now as a planning committee and the formation of a stable community coalition. Moving to an expanded planning committee means having broader and more formal involvement from the community. Involving more people allows you to set up working groups which can take on specific responsibilities. Up to this point, the planning committee has probably been a collection of individuals, some of whom are attached to various agencies, schools, businesses or government. They came to help, but not necessarily to act as representatives of organizations. As the planning committee expands, invites new members and works through its purpose, plans and structure, the organized groups and agencies will be asked for a higher level of commitment. They will be asked to make a long-term commitment, to provide resources and to lend the authority and credibility of their organizations to the committee. They will be asked to share their identities with a larger coalition and to work for the plans and projects of the entire group.

Achieving unity and consensus can be an unpredictable and frustrating process that takes time and many meetings. Tensions may exist between the local people who volunteered in order to get things done and the organized agencies and groups who are interested in clarifying and setting goals before they do anything else. If the expanded planning committee can make some key decisions about its goals, its structure, its resources, and how to define and work on the issues the community has identified, the coalition will succeed.

Tasks

1. Expand the membership of the planning committee.
 - a) Involve those people from the information-gathering sessions who want to help; contact all the participants who have indicated an interest.

- b) Identify other organized groups and/or individuals who the planning committee believes are key to the coalition. Contact them by phone or in person, to explain:
 - * The purpose of the expanded planning committee.
 - * Why the individual or organization is needed.
 - * The coalition-building process that is already underway.

- 2. Plan and conduct several expanded planning committee meetings.
 - a) Convene the first expanded planning committee meeting to:
 - * Review the focus and efforts of the planning committee to date.

 - * Discuss the composition of the expanded planning committee. Ask those attending to consider who else is affected by the issue, who has a vested interest, who has resources that could be contributed, and who they think should be at the table.

 - * Discuss the selection of a chairperson. A rotating chairperson may be desirable to encourage ownership of the issue and the process, and signal that all organizations and agencies will have an opportunity to lead.

 - * Work toward an agreement on the purpose of the expanded planning committee.

 - b) Discuss the summary report of the information-gathering sessions including:
 - * The issue that is highest priority.

 - * The activities that can be undertaken to deal with the issue.

 - * For whom programs should be planned, e.g., teenagers, seniors, new arrivals.

 - * Where the focus of programming should be. It could be the home, school, recreation centre, or a broad focus that will include many different sites.

 - * The definition of community, including the geographic boundaries that will be used in establishing programs.

- * The best use of the community's resources.
 - * What additional information is needed?
3. Establish how the expanded planning committee will work. Set up a structure that will help the expanded planning committee accomplish its tasks. Decide on:
- * The roles and responsibilities of members.
 - * The need for working committees.
 - * The deadline for accomplishing activities.
 - * The frequency of meetings.
4. Pick an activity or activities that can be completed successfully by the working committees. You don't need to develop a new activity. There may be other activities currently taking place in the community that you could join in, or in some way support. If you decide to initiate your own activity, however, pick a project that people are enthusiastic about. Choose a project that can be completed quickly and with a minimum of resources. (See Example #19, page 52).
- You can call the Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse at 1-416-408-2121 or 1-800-263-2846 for examples of other communities' activities/projects related to your issue.
5. Talk about your expanded planning committee and its activities. Spread the word about what you are doing through the members of the expanded planning committee. Make contacts at the community newspaper and let them know who you are, what you are doing and what you have planned.

Decisions

The planning committee will have to make some important decisions at this stage:

1. Who will be on the expanded planning committee? Decide who is affected by the issue, who has a vested interest in it, and who has resources to contribute.
2. What is the expanded planning committee's priority? On which issue will it focus its efforts?

3. How will the expanded planning committee move toward building a community coalition? Decide on a chairperson, the organizational structure, process and time frame.
4. How will the community be defined? Decide on the geographic borders, the scope of activities to be undertaken, who the target group will be and what resources will be needed.
5. Where will activities occur? Will they take place in the home, in the school or at some other location within the community?
6. What activities can be completed successfully and quickly?
7. How will work be done? Decide on whether there is a need for working committees and paid staff.
8. What funding and other resources are needed?
9. Who will be the contact and prepare information for the media?

Tracking your progress

The emergence of the expanded planning committee is key to establishing community action. At the table will be the key organized groups, agencies and volunteers who are making a long-term commitment to act on issues identified by the community. They have all made the decision to work actively together to achieve solutions. The expanded planning committee ultimately defines the community so that community action can proceed. The expanded planning committee puts into place the working groups that will begin to make things happen. These working groups, each with its own membership, goals and objectives will take responsibility for one aspect of the larger issue. Some small, well-publicized activities will promote the success of these groups.

Section V

Building a Community Coalition: Forming a Stable, Effective Group

The Need

Moving from an expanded planning committee to a community coalition is like going from school to a permanent job. There is a sense of permanence that was not there before. You now have a stable and committed base from which to plan, develop and coordinate action. The mandate and goals, the membership, the activities, and the working committees will change to keep pace with the changing issues, but the coalition and community action will be sustained.

The community coalition builds on itself by continuing to develop its goals, establishing long-term funding, and determining how it will work as an organization. It must establish its structure, its planning and operating procedures, and determine how it will carry out and evaluate its community activities. It will be important that it publicize its successes. The coalition's strength comes from the community and the participation of the people who live in it. A major task for the coalition is to remember that it must continue to ask people in the community what they consider to be the important issues. It must continue to seek out community opinion about the problems, as well as the solutions.

Tasks

The newly formed community coalition will need to:

1. Establish the mandate, work plan and goals for the community coalition. Schedule regular meetings and maintain communication during the process of goal setting and work planning. Set reasonable goals, taking into consideration the people, money and time available.
2. Establish long-term funding needs and sources. Consider sources of funding, including dues for member agencies, in-kind contributions of services or space, and grants from the federal and provincial governments. You may need to plan local fund-raising events and promotions. Regardless of how funds are obtained, it will be important to identify the agency that will receive and manage the coalition's financial resources.
3. Agree on structures, responsibilities, procedures and policies for working together.
 - a) Sign a letter of agreement or contract between organized groups and members.

- b) Confirm the community's size and involvement: regional, municipal, local, neighbourhood.
 - c) Establish the working structure of the community coalition. Determine the planning and operating committees that need to be in place to support its work. Set out the procedures for planning, organizing and making decisions; these procedures will ultimately determine how the coalition will operate.
4. Develop a work plan for the activities the coalition would like to complete over three, six and twelve months.
 5. Plan ongoing marketing and publicity. Explore ways in which the work of the community coalition can be featured regularly in community newspapers. Establish contacts with local media and send news releases whenever the community coalition starts an activity or takes another step. (See Example #20, page 53).

Decisions

The decisions that the community coalition must make will be similar to those made by the expanded planning committee.

1. What activity is the community coalition going to initiate? What tasks are involved in carrying out this activity? Who will take responsibility for these tasks? What money is needed? Where will the money come from? Who will manage it?
2. How will the community coalition continue to gather information from the community? How will it encourage people to help develop and organize activities?
3. What structures and procedures will the coalition need?
4. What will each member contribute to the coalition?

Tracking your progress

The maturing of the community coalition will be marked in part by the development of a recognizable organization, which has meeting schedules, procedures, responsibility charts and working committees devoted to different activities. Establishing the coalition is the end of one set of activities. It is only one step, however, in the ongoing dialogue with the community. Ongoing consultation with the community is essential at this, and every stage in the life of a community coalition.

Continuing Community Action

You have reached the end of this process, but this is just the beginning of the changes you will bring about in your community. The well-being and quality of life of the people around you can be changed by the efforts you and your community make. Community action works as long as you remember that the more people you get involved, with their different skills, interests and experiences, the stronger and more lasting the impact of your coalition will be. If you stop and track your own progress from time to time, you will be able to recognize and enjoy your achievements.

Community Involvement

A large group of people in your community now know what you are doing and why. You have a core group of committed individuals, agencies and associations that are working together in a way they never have before.

Community Issues

The problems people are working on are the ones the community identified. The community owns the issues and will work to bring about changes. As long as you continue to ask people what the issues are, and listen to their answers, they will keep working for their community.

Community Planning and Co-ordination

You have planned the information-gathering sessions, set goals, built a recognizable organization, developed working procedures, established responsibility charts and working committees, found resources, and held community events and activities. You have planned and co-ordinated community action.

Community Resources

You have found the resources you need in your community to carry out this action. The people, the services and the funds are there. You can continue to use these resources as long as you continue to show how you are meeting your community's needs.

Community Successes

Keep track of all your successes, the big ones like breakfast programs for hungry children, and the little ones like the float in your community parade. They will chart the history of your success. Write down and share all the events, activities and programs you have planned and carried out with the community.

Lasting Community Action

Community action does not end with a particular program or a special event. You continue to do the things you have already done: talk with people, ask what the community issues are, invite and involve as many people as you can to be a part of the action, plan and carry out programs, events and activities. Then you start again. There are other resources available that can help you continue the growth and development of your coalition. (See page 5).

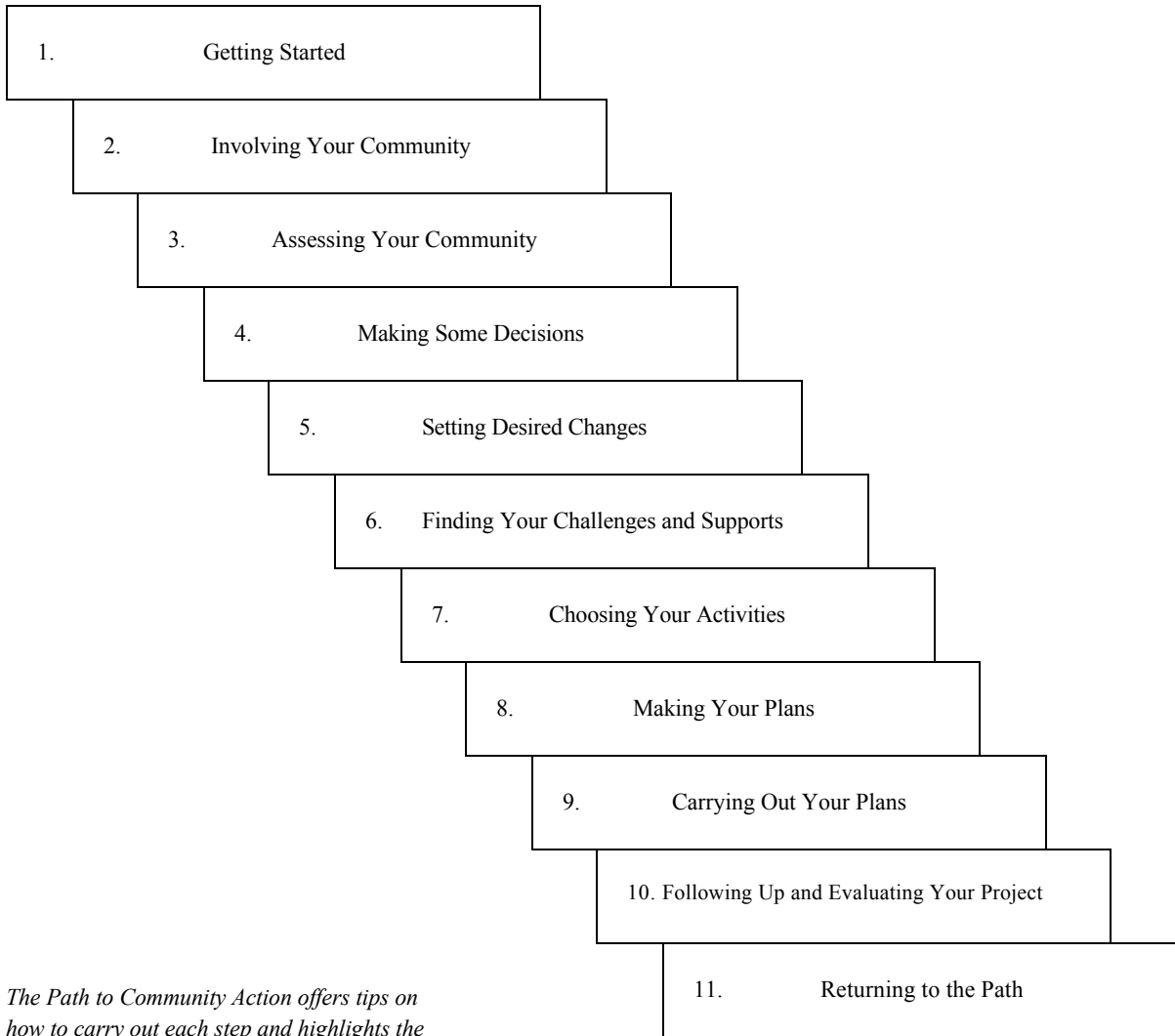
Community action is an ongoing process. But, it is also a process that can result in a healthier, safer community for you and everyone else who lives there.

APPENDIX

Examples for Community Action

Example #1:

Path to Community Action



The Path to Community Action offers tips on how to carry out each step and highlights the resources you will need (for example, information, people skills, funding, and so on) at each step along the path.

Source: *Community Health Promotion in Action*, Ministry of Health. To obtain copies, call the Health Information Centre (416) 327-4327, or 1-800-268-1153
Fax: (416) 327-4389

Example #2:***Getting Started: Attendees for the First Planning Meeting***

In getting started, you as a member of your community must informally seek the support of several individuals, organizations and agencies that are involved with, or interested in, the problem you have identified. Every community's first planning meeting will have different people attending. Who comes will depend on who is interested in the problem and which agencies or organizations are already working in your community.

Consider inviting representatives from the following:

- Public health department
- District health council
- Community health centre
- Social planning council
- Associations and agencies involved with or interested in the problem you have identified
- Interested professionals and lay people

If you are concerned about health problems such as cancer and heart disease, the invitation list for your first meeting might include representatives from:

- Canadian Cancer Society
- The Lung Association
- Heart and Stroke Foundation
- Public health department
- Parks and recreation

Your invitation list might include quite a different group, if you are interested in food and nutrition issues. Then, invitees might come from:

- Community kitchen
- Public health department
- Community health centre
- Food banks
- Supermarkets
- Corner stores
- Farmers
- Chefs

Example #3:***Potential Planning Committee Members***

The list of possible members for a planning committee could include community organizations and associations (eg. the parent-teacher association), the district health council, and the local family service agency, as well as interested and committed individuals. The local clergy, pharmacist, librarian, or police are all potential committee members.

If your community is large and has a number of agencies and organizations that might be interested in becoming involved you can invite a wide range of participants. For example, the planning committee might include representatives from:

1. Regional council
2. Local hospital foundation
3. Local hospital administration
4. Parks and recreation
5. Public library
6. Local community college
7. School board
8. YMCA
9. Volunteer centre
10. The Lung Association
11. Public health department
12. District health council
13. Community health centre

Membership on the committee may change as community action changes.

A smaller, less diverse group of organizations interested in reducing smoking might include:

1. Addiction Research Foundation
2. Community health centre
3. The Lung Association
4. Public health department
5. Local Interagency Council on Smoking and Health
6. District health council
7. Canadian Cancer Society
8. Heart and Stroke Foundation

Example #4:

Agenda for Planning Meeting

The agenda for a planning meeting should cover:

1. An introduction of participants and their interests.
2. A description of who has been involved in the process to date.
3. A description of the issue that is prompting action, and the reason you are meeting now.
4. A description of the community action process.
5. An opportunity for open discussion.
6. A decision on whether there is enough interest to proceed; if so, discuss the next steps, including the next meeting, its organization and attendance.

Example #5:

Letter of Invitation to First Planning Committee Meeting

The following letter asks people to come together to discuss the possibility of starting the community action process.

Dear _____:

I am writing to invite you to an informal meeting about community action. I am concerned about *(state problem)* in our community and would like to talk about how we might deal with this problem. I would like your opinion about the possibility of starting a community action program in *(community name)*.

The meeting will be held on *(date)*, at *(time)*, in *(place)*. Please let me know if you are interested and can attend. My telephone number is 555-5555.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Example #6:

List of Community Leaders

Your list of community leaders should be broad. Don't just think about those involved directly in health; consider all groups and individuals who might be interested or who would benefit in any way. For example:

Individuals

Principals
Teachers
Day-care operators
Council members
Mayor
Chief of Police
Lawyers
Local sports heroes
Actors, musicians, writers
Publishers
Owners of businesses
Clergy

Representatives from:

Local unions
Local business associations
Chamber of Commerce
Clubs and auxiliaries
Community colleges
Housing authority
Boards of education
Children's Aid Society
Guides/Scouts
Community newspapers
Anti-poverty groups
Shelters
Food banks
YMCA and YWCA
Real estate firms
Local radio and television stations

Example #7:

Minutes of Planning Committee Meeting

The following example of minutes from a planning committee meeting is given to help you understand how a meeting should run, how to record decisions and how the workings of the committee should be recorded.

MINUTES

PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

Held on (date)

(Place of Meeting)

Present: (list those attending, such as)
Chair, Public health department
Secretary, local association
The Lung Association
Local school
Community health centre

1. Business Arising from the Minutes:

The Chair introduced new committee members.

The minutes of (date of previous meeting) were approved.

continued...

Example #7 continued: Minutes of Planning Committee Meeting

2. Business Arising:

a. Review of sample letter

The Chair requested committee members' feedback on the sample invitation letter for an information-gathering session, which had been circulated at the previous meeting. It was agreed that all participants should sign the letter and each organization would decide on a representative.

3. New Business:

a. Approaches for community action.

The Chair briefly outlined the approaches that other communities have used to heighten awareness of their projects.

b. There was considerable creative brainstorming on possible titles for the project. It was agreed that (name of project) would be the project name and a symbol will be decided on at a later date.

4. Date of the Next Meeting:

(Date, time and place of next meeting)

Example #8:***Promotional Activities of Planning Committee***

Some communities have their own marketing committees as part of their community action. One committee developed the following helpful marketing ideas:

1. Help guarantee coverage of meetings that are not attended by media.
 - a) Send media a short news release covering major points of the meeting.
 - b) Mail out reminders of the meeting at least a week in advance.
 - c) Once a year have a social evening to which the media are invited for conversation, not for coverage.
2. Make sure the name of the committee is before the public often.
 - a) Attend home and trade shows.
 - b) Have monthly information booths in malls, concentrating on different subjects handled by the committee.
 - c) Take advantage of newspaper columns. Write a monthly column for the local paper, providing tips and information about the committee, or the topics it addresses.
3. Introduce individual members of the committee to the public.
 - a) Run thumbnail sketches of all committee members in the local paper.
 - b) Arrange to have similar sketches aired on the radio.
 - c) Make sure that photos are taken at various activities, using different members each time, so that the public sees who is involved.
 - d) Provide business cards for all committee members so that they can introduce themselves in a professional manner.
4. Planning committee members can also promote community action by:
 - a) Having T-shirts made with the name and logo to be distributed as prizes at local events.
 - b) Arranging to have qualified members of the committee go into local classrooms and area schools to talk to the students.
 - c) Arranging a monthly show on local cable TV with advice and general information about the committee and what it is doing.

Example #9:

Responsibilities of Planning Committee

Responsibilities of the Local Planning Co-ordinator

1. Become familiar with the community action process.
2. Meet with the local planning committee as often as necessary and chair these meetings.
3. Keep in regular contact with the local planning committee by telephone.
4. Be responsible for administrative duties; that is, ensure that minutes are taken, mailouts are sent.
5. Assist in other planning details.

Responsibilities of the Local Planning Committee

1. Members should familiarize themselves with, and disseminate information about, the community action process.
2. Provide liaison with the community, its citizens, the providers, consumers, grassroots, business and political leaders.
3. Encourage local participation in community action.
4. Advertise community action; for example, wear buttons, distribute program material where possible.
5. Help plan information-gathering sessions.
6. Identify participants for the three information-gathering sessions who equitably represent the community (approximately 90 people, 30 at each session).

Example #9 continued: Responsibilities of Planning Committee

7. Develop a mailing list of participants and maintain ongoing communication.
8. Categorize the guests according to their professions. For example, business and political leaders; health professionals, social services, education; service clubs, community associations, religious leaders, multicultural representatives.
9. Extend an invitation according to category of guest; for example, invite all business and political leaders to one session.
10. Conduct a telephone follow-up of the guest list to encourage attendance.

Example #10:***List of Attendees for Information-Gathering Sessions***

All of the communities that have successfully formed coalitions have held information-gathering sessions. Using the following groupings - business, grassroots and service providers - some of the participants might include:

Business

Trucking company
Insurance broker
Bank
Brewing company
Local restaurant
Local manufacturer
Retail association
Regional council
City newspaper
Auto manufacturer
Car dealer
Store owner
Corporate manager
Service station owner
Human resources director

Grassroots

High-school students
Consumers
Tenant associations
Ratepayers' associations
Community centres
Parent-teacher association
Neighbourhood Watch
Volunteer associations
Faith groups

Service Providers

Parks and recreation
Heart and Stroke Foundation
Physician
Local Inter-agency Council on Smoking and Health
Employee assistance program
Public library
Day-care agency
Canadian Cancer Society
Children's Aid Society
Children's mental health centre
Police
Victorian Order of Nurses
Hospital
Addiction Research Foundation
Multicultural council
St. John Ambulance

School board
Public health department

Example #11:***Letter of Invitation to Information-Gathering Sessions***

An example of a letter to invite people to information-gathering sessions follows. Your letter should outline the purpose of your sessions as well as giving the date, time and place. Your planning committee may want to use the logo it has developed for promotion of your project or incorporate the logos of the organizations on the planning committee.

(Date of letter)

(Name and address used by the planning committee)

Dear _____:

We have formed a planning committee to *(state purpose: for example, "promote healthy lifestyles in our community")*. We would like to see community programs started that *(state focus: for example, "focus on maintaining and optimising health rather than treating disease")*.

We need your help, knowledge and experience to determine which projects our community needs to develop. We are sponsoring three information-gathering sessions in *(month)*, to hear your concerns, experiences and ideas for improving the health of our community. We need only two hours of your time on *(date, time, and place)*.

We hope that you will set aside time to meet with other interested people to discuss the *(state community action)* of our community. Please let us know if you can be a part of this group meeting by calling *(contact name and telephone)*. If you would like more information, please call *(contact name and telephone)*.

We look forward to meeting you on *(date)* at *(time)* at *(place)*. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

(Signed by members of the planning committee)

Example #12:

Agenda for Information-Gathering Sessions

The agendas for information-gathering sessions are roughly the same. All of them include:

- Date:
- Place:
- 1. Registration
- 2. Introduction of people and the potential area of community action
- 3. Why we are here:
 - a) What is the shared interest in an issue?
 - b) Determine what the community thinks about this issue.
 - c) Form a coalition to address this issue.
- 4. Information-gathering sessions. Areas for discussion:
 - a) What are the issues/problems in our community?
 - b) What is the history of the community coming together to solve problems?
 - c) What are the strengths/resources of the community?
 - d) What are the barriers/challenges the community faces?
 - e) What advice can be provided and what can be done?
- 5. Next steps

Example #13:

Registration Form for Information-Gathering Sessions

Name: _____

Name of Organization: _____

Phone: (Res.) _____ (Bus.) _____ (Fax) _____

Address: _____

City _____ Province _____ Postal Code _____

Example #14:*Determining the priority of issues*

The following example, taken from an actual community information-gathering session, shows how straightforward the recording is. There were 25 people in attendance at the meeting. Each was given the opportunity to vote for the 3 issues that they considered most important. There were 75 votes cast in all, on 13 different issues.

1. Community Issues/Problems - Group 1 - morning session

<u>Vote</u>	<u>Problem</u>	<u>Description</u>
16	Nutrition	Nutritional content of fast food, cafeteria, junk food in schools
15	Fitness	Time/commuters
11	Smoking	Girls (14-18), non-smoking laws
11	Alcohol abuse	Driving, age, families, more men
8	Stress	In family, home
4	Education and media	No support from media, image for women is tall and thin, nutrition education for adults
4	Drug abuse	Teens and adults, in workplace
2	Professional responsibility	
2	Poverty	Income, lack of health education, written form of health education
1	Prescription drugs	Many prescriptions filled unnecessarily, case management (elderly)
1	Moderation	Substance, how to manage stress
0	Eating disorders	
0	Age group adjustments	For lifestyles, age 40+

Example #15:

Debriefing Questions about Information-Gathering sessions

Debriefing Questions

- 1) What happened?
- 2) What improvements could be made to the information-gathering sessions?
- 3) What are the major issues/problems, strengths/resources. barriers/challenges?
- 4) How did the three sessions differ?
- 5) What groups have special needs?
- 6) What are the potential themes? (Positive - use as slogan and focus: for example, healthy families; healthy communities; youth empowerment)
- 7) How can we use the advice?
- 8) What are the next steps?

Example #16:***Hints on Developing Summaries of Information-Gathering Sessions***

Summaries are a synthesis of the recordings made on the flip charts during information gathering sessions.

There are two approaches to developing summaries: individual summaries of each of the three information-gathering sessions, or a single report that summarizes all sessions. The advantage of individual summaries is that they contain the views of a particular group or sector of the community. Alternatively, a single summary compiled from all three sessions provides a snapshot of the priorities and issues of the entire community. The way summaries are developed is the same; how they are to be used in planning may mean choosing one approach over the other.

Determining the priority of issues

When summaries are developed for each session, the issues are listed in order from most to least votes received (See Example #14). The four or five issues that received the most votes are recognized as priorities of the group. Sometimes the number of votes received is also recorded. For clarification, issues that were not seen as priorities should also be listed, with or without the numbers of votes received.

If a single summary is done, the issues that are assigned highest priority are those listed most frequently in all three information-gathering sessions. The other issues should be listed as well and, where they are similar, combined into categories. The frequency with which these issues were mentioned should also be recorded.

Summarizing the information

The information gathered about the history of the community, strengths and weaknesses, barriers and challenges, as well as advice from the participants, should also be recorded. It will be useful in planning. In developing the summaries of information-gathering sessions, review the flip chart lists to see how the information can be combined into categories. Your categories might be, for example, inter-agency co-operation, use of volunteers, efficient use of resources. Putting the information into categories will help you develop plans and activities in the future.

Example #17:***Summary Report of Information-Gathering Sessions***

An example of a summary report of information-gathering sessions is set out on these pages. It is helpful to see how recording and summarizing are done. Your report will be different from this one because it will reflect your community.

(name of community action planning group)
(community name)
(date)

Information-Gathering Sessions
Summary Report

Background

Three information-gathering sessions were held in (community) on (date) at (place). These sessions were sponsored by (name of community action planning group). The purpose of the session was to bring together interested people and organizations in the community (*state purpose: for example, "to identify issues/problems in the community."*) A total of 64 people attended the three information-gathering sessions. There were 21 people in the morning session from the business and political sector and 20 in the afternoon session for service providers from community agencies and organizations. The remaining 23 people attended the evening session, and included consumers, parents, adolescents and seniors.

General summary

The agenda for each information-gathering session was the same. Each group was presented with the following questions:

1. What are the issues/problems in our community?
2. What is the history of the community coming together to solve problems?
3. What are the strengths/resources of the community?
4. What are the barriers/challenges the community faces?
5. What advice can be provided and what can be done?

Each group also had an opportunity to pursue issues or directions that they wanted to discuss more fully.

Example #17 continued: Summary Report of Information-Gathering Sessions

There was no single issue that was a high priority for all the groups; however, their concerns were similar. The issues that were the same are listed below:

1. Use of alcohol and alcohol consumption.
2. Family life issues, including single parents and the problems they face, mothers in the work force, lack of parenting skills.
3. Nutrition issues, including poor eating habits in various age groups, fast food consumption, eating disorders.
4. Increase in poverty seen through homeless people, hungry people.
5. Substance abuse by all age groups.

All groups also pointed to the strong support and co-operative efforts that they have seen in the community.

A summary of each of the three information-gathering sessions follows.

Summary of business and political sector

This information-gathering group had both business and political representatives from the community, including business owners, corporate executives, occupational health managers and municipal politicians. The participants talked about all items on the agenda: issues, strengths/resources, barriers/challenges. Four main points summarize the discussion:

1. Barriers identified were the competing interests of different sectors, confusion about what each sector is doing, and conflicting messages about the same issue from provincial, municipal governments, service providers and organizations.
2. Grave concern was raised over family issues, including family breakdown and the subsequent fall-out. This includes poor nutrition and substance abuse.
3. The community has numerous resources in its agencies and community centres to provide information and support to projects.
4. The cost of a new initiative and the need to plan for funding should be considered before starting a large-scale program.

Example #17 continued: Summary Report of Information-Gathering SessionsSummary of service providers

The second information-gathering session was for service providers and included representatives from education, hospitals, social service agencies, public health and volunteers. This group raised some of the same points as the first group.

1. The need for planning before starting programs.
2. The need for co-ordination and communication between groups, whether government, political or service, to reduce mixed and competing messages.
3. A good record of collaboration between agencies in the community when there is a need; there is a strong network of organizers and providers to draw on.
4. Growth in the number of single parents; this is raising issues for providers who see children with multiple needs.
5. Poor nutrition and reliance on fast foods.
6. Isolation of families and individuals; people seem to be disconnected from families and communities.

Summary of consumers and community members

This information-gathering group included parents, consumers, adolescents, and seniors. It focused quickly on the issues of most concern to them. The five issues that came up repeatedly were:

1. Alcohol abuse - particularly drinking and driving.
2. Poor parenting - especially unavailability of parents and parents lacking solutions to difficult problems.
3. Poverty - a sense that many people cannot provide themselves with the basics.
4. A rise in drug use.
5. Poor nutrition - fast food is cheap and filling.

Community response and commitment

The list of collaborative efforts that have taken place in the community was long. People felt that the community had pulled together in many ways and could do so again. The barrier seemed to be communication and keeping messages straight and clear. Of the people attending the information-gathering sessions, half (32) said they would help by serving on a committee or organizing activities to support the community action.

Example #18

News Release Following Information-Gathering Sessions

A news release can be issued following your information-gathering sessions. It should be double-spaced and contain brief but accurate information. For more detailed information on how to write a news release, consult *Social Marketing in Health Promotion: A Communications Guide* (see page 5). An example of what a news release might say follows.

(date)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(name of the community action planning committee)

**A new community action group is looking at *(state purpose: for example,*
"improving health and well-being") in *(community name)*.**

On *(date)*, *three information-gathering sessions were held for business people and politicians, service providers, and helping organizations, and members of the general public.*

(State the issues identified as priorities: for example, "Three issues were identified as priorities by all three groups: parenting, nutrition and alcohol consumption.)

more...

Example #18 continued: News Release Following Information-Gathering Sessions

A planning committee has been established. Its members include (*name planning committee members and their organizations, if applicable*).

The committee will look at current problems in the community, identify existing services, and develop a plan of action to address the specific areas of concern.

This is a community-owned project designed to help people improve the quality of their lives.

*(contact name
address
phone number)*

Example #19

Activities and Events

In selecting the first activities for your community, it is important to look at the activities already taking place. Find out what people like to do. Decide on activities that are relatively easy and fun, both for the organizers and the participants. You may be able to build on the successes and experiences of others and work together. Promote your event through a variety of channels (eg. media, community bulletin boards, word of mouth). The following suggestions will help a working group of the committee choose and initiate an activity.

- 1: Activities to promote the planning committee and its goal in the community require sites and events that are highly visible and attract many people. Three examples are:
 - a. Market Display: If your community has a local open-air market or a community fruit and vegetable market that attracts crowds, consider setting up an information booth or counter to distribute information. If possible, co-ordinate activities and handouts with local merchants to deliver information or to tell people about your project.
 - b. Mall Walk: Organize a walk in a local mall that is considered a hub of activity. Link the planning committee with a local association interested in your community concern, to help organize the event.
 - c. Sidewalk Sale: If your local merchants are having a sidewalk sale, ask if you can set up a display.
- 2: Each working group may choose activities to support its objectives. Depending on its objectives, the activities may be directed towards particular people and places. For example, a working group on parents and youth may want to provide social support, information, and skills on parenting teenagers. The working group may choose setting up courses for parents at the local high school as its activity.
- 3: A working group with an objective to reduce drinking and driving may choose to work with a popular local tavern owner to set up a designated driver program.

For more ideas, consult the "Ideas for Action" guides available from
Health Information Centre
Communications and Information Branch
Ontario Ministry of Health
8th Floor, Hepburn Block

Toronto, Ontario M7A 1S2

Telephone: (416) 327-4327 or 1-800-268-1153

Fax: (416) 327-4389

Example #20

Community Coalition Promotional Materials

You will need to develop your own way of promoting your committee's vision, programs, and activities. Your approach will be tailored to your community. Some ideas that you might follow are listed below. Other ideas and help can be found in *Social Marketing in Health Promotion: A Communications Guide*, available from the Health Information Centre of the Ontario Ministry of Health (see page 5).

Brochures:

Brochures are one way to promote community action and the efforts of the planning committee. The brochure might state the vision as follows:

"Our community planning committee is taking action to improve this community's well-being. The committee is made up of approximately 100 volunteers representing different sectors of the community. The committee is seeking public opinion on important community issues and developing activities to address these issues. Through various partnerships and consolidated efforts, we hope to eliminate substance abuse, promote healthier eating habits, particularly for seniors, and develop healthy activities for our children and adolescents."

The brochure might also highlight the membership and objectives of its working groups, describe the community action process, the committee's activities, and how long it has been in operation.

Newsletters:

Once you have established your community action, you may want to start a newsletter to keep your membership, community agencies, and the community at large informed about your activities. You can mail out your newsletter and/or distribute it through libraries or community agencies.

Participation Certificates:

One of the promotional items you might consider using for community action activities is a certificate of participation. When you are planning an event or activity in your community in which many people may be involved, consider providing them with a certificate that they can display. It will help them remember the event and their participation in it, and advertise your community coalition.