

LEARNING FROM BOISE'S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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# COMMUNITY PLANNING PROCESS GUIDE

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## FOR FOSTERING GREATER REFUGEE WELCOME

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WRITTEN BY

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April 2015



**COMMUNITY PLANNING TOOLKIT**

Fostering Community Engagement and Welcoming Communities Project  
is supported by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR/ACF/DHHS)

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While this plan was conducted with refugee resettlement in mind because there had been calls for its curtailment, these approaches are applicable to a broader immigrant community.

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## Dear Reader,

The world is on the move, bringing diverse people to U.S. communities. Global migration provides an opportunity for local communities to welcome new talent and recognize the importance of an inclusive and dynamic approach. Forward-thinking communities reflect upon what these changes mean locally and how to foster a community climate in which all are welcome and can contribute to their fullest potential. The alternative is to respond to demographic changes reactively rather than proactively, which can lead to fear, division, greater misunderstanding, backlash and decline.

Boise, Idaho was a community faced with a choice. Though considered a strong refugee resettlement site for decades, an economic downturn in 2008 gave the community pause as they wondered how they might continue to help new arrivals while also taking care of longer-term residents with growing needs. Rather than approaching their economic challenges with a scarcity mentality, Boise chose an abundance outlook, recognizing a pivotal moment to foster new ideas and new collaborations in order to create more resources for all community members, while at the same time strengthening community vitality and vibrancy. The people of Boise chose a positive vision for the future, and local government, refugee resettlement, community based organizations, libraries, recreation districts, schools and so many others came together to figure out how to help refugees integrate into the community and help all Boiseans benefit from this new opportunity.

We think communities across the country can learn from Boise's approach to building a welcoming community and are pleased to share this planning process guide with you. While the context in your own community may be quite different than Boise's, we believe these approaches can be adapted to suit many different situations. For instance, while this plan was conducted with refugee resettlement in mind because there had been calls for its curtailment, these approaches are applicable to a broader immigrant community. In addition, no planning process is ever perfect. All are challenged to some extent by time, funding and staff capacity. Boise's example is not "the" model, but certainly is "a" model that we can learn from and adapt to a community's unique circumstances.

This guide is designed to be a practical, hands-on approach to community planning. We hope it will be a useful resource to you and that you will share your own experiences with us so that we can continue to learn together how to best create greater welcome.

Sincerely,



**JAN A. REEVES**

Idaho State Refugee Coordinator



**SUSAN DOWNS-KARKOS**

Welcoming America

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I.

# Introduction to Community Planning

WELCOMING



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## ABOUT COMMUNITY PLANNING

Community planning is about creating a blueprint for change. The essence of any community plan is the enumeration of a set of intentional, systematic steps that responds to and moves toward your community's broad vision for the future. Through a series of deliberations and decisions, the vision is translated into actionable and measurable objectives. The vision is the picture in your mind—some of us may see a community of the future in which all children are healthy and thriving; others may envision revived economic vitality. Your vision—your community's vision—will belong to you and will become the guide for all things incorporated into your plan for change. For the purpose of developing this Community Process Planning Guide, we will embrace the vision of our community becoming a place where refugees and immigrants achieve full integration into local culture, with full access to economic and educational opportunity.

In this context, community planning becomes a vehicle for creating a more welcoming and nurturing environment for refugees and immigrants, but no matter what the specific focus of your planning effort may be, the essential point is to solve problems or otherwise create positive change. Community planning is a tested and time-honored strategy for moving a community from “where we are” to “where we want to be.” It will serve to define where your community is going over time, but it will also map out how it's going to get there and how you will know if it has gotten there, or not.

Initiating and sustaining a comprehensive community planning effort takes time and energy that all too often keeps us from getting started in the first place. Why should we commit our limited resources to a long-term engagement that is bound to heap more onto an already overloaded plate? Why jump into a lengthy strategic initiative when we already know what needs to be done? How do we begin to measure the benefits of developing a plan for change and how do we know before we even start if the benefits will outweigh the cost? These may be difficult questions to address empirically. The best answer may come from the urgency of the need for change and the power of the vision of what that change can mean for your community, with some encouragement provided by examples of successful community planning in other locales.

Even the best community planning model will need to be adapted to the circumstances present in your own community and must articulate the basic concepts of vision, mission and purpose; supported by goals, measurable objectives and concrete action steps. This toolkit will provide general guidelines to managing the key elements of a strategic plan. It may be best to use a professional facilitator to work through your planning effort, but the tools and tips offered here will guide you through a meaningful and effective process on your own.

As you will see, there are many variables that offer flexibility in how your community will approach the strategic planning process and multiple pathways that can lead to success. In contemplating your approach, ask yourself, “What is the nature and scope of the change we want to see in our community? What is the culture of leadership and how can we enlist the support of this leadership? What resources can be brought to bear? How will we make decisions? How will we measure progress? How long will we continue to engage in the process?”

These questions and many more will need to be addressed throughout the planning and implementation process, and the answers you come up with will guide you and your community to the goals you seek to achieve. Every community is unique and, in the end, the shape of your plan will be directed by its unique qualities and character.

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### **THIS TOOLKIT'S CONTEXT**

In Boise, community members convened to develop a collaborative plan because of concerns about the city's ability to resettle additional refugees and help them integrate. Community members came together to address this very real challenge, and did so in ways that benefitted all community members. Though the impetus for planning was specific to refugee resettlement, this approach and the lessons learned can be used to help communities develop welcome for all immigrant groups. We encourage you to take an inclusive approach in your efforts. Since the plan's inception, Boise has gone on to develop new approaches to integrating the immigrant community, as well.



## II.

# Seeing the Possible

Vision, Mission, Purpose



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## *Consider who to Involve from the Outset*

Though you may have a strong sense of the reasons to bring the community together and what you hope to accomplish, it's important that others in your community are fully supportive of the vision and mission behind your purpose. The best way to achieve this is to involve other stakeholders from the beginning. While you should have a clear sense of purpose and a starting frame, the work of articulating your vision and defining your mission will involve a broader set of people.

As you'll read below, vision, mission and purpose are inextricably linked, and planning group buy-in may depend on members' ability to shape the foundation of the effort. More detail about finding the right partners, and being a good partner, is outlined in Section IV. However, it's important to consider early on who to have with you at the beginning and how to nurture community interest over time.

## *Vision, Mission, Purpose*

If community planning is the vehicle for making the change you want, then what could be more important to the process than a clear expression of what that change should be? All the time and effort you put into affirming the vision and defining the purpose of your work will pay off in the results you're able to achieve. Never skimp in this phase of planning and never assume that your purpose is obvious to everyone involved.

There should be a clear relationship between the *vision* you have for the future and the *mission* you are aiming to achieve. And both should be aligned with the *purpose* of your efforts, which will keep you focused and on the path to the desired result. So, how then do *vision*, *mission* and *purpose* fit together and move you forward?

### AN EXAMPLE

#### VISION

A community where all people, regardless of background, heritage or culture, will be valued and included.

#### MISSION

We work to create a climate of welcome and encouragement for refugees resettling in our community.

#### PURPOSE

To acknowledge through action the essential thread of humanity connecting all people in our habitat.

**VISION** is about *the possible*, the ideal that hasn't yet been realized. Irish Playwright George Bernard Shaw is famous for the lines he wrote in *Back to Methuselah*:

.....  
*"You see things; and you say, 'Why?'  
But I dream things that never were;  
and I say, 'Why not?'"*  
.....

Vision is about the future we dream, the future that embraces "the things that never were." It provides the inspiration to continue on the path to change, in spite of the challenges, barriers and setbacks that inevitably get in the way.

**MISSION** is about *what* we do and *for whom* we do it. Our mission will define how we create the change that will lead to the realization of our vision.

**PURPOSE** addresses the *why* of what we do. A statement of purpose speaks to the fundamental reason why our vision is valid. Purpose is at the very core of what we are attempting to accomplish. It is the easily understood drive that will push the effort forward and that will guide us to the change we envision. Without a compelling purpose, we risk losing the drive to continue down the path when challenges arise.

.....  
*Your passion is ignited by your purpose.  
Your mission and vision enable you to apply that  
spark to change the world (or your community).*  
.....

The purpose of your initiative must be clearly stated and must accurately reflect the vision for change that you and your community partners share. Only by clearly and precisely defining your purpose and the expected outcomes to be achieved will you be able to stay focused on the prize. In the example provided here, the focus on the common thread of humanity will be at the heart of everything we do.

### ***Formulating Your Vision***

Ask yourself and your planning partners how you want your community to look—how you want it to be—five years from now. Keep the community in the forefront of your thinking. What is the central problem or condition you want to change and, most importantly, how will this change be manifested? Think visually—what is the "picture" of the future you want for your community? Is there an ideal that your vision embraces?

**HERE ARE SOME TIPS ON ARTICULATING THE VISION:**

- Think broadly and expansively at first; do not limit possibilities
- Brainstorming can be a useful activity to keep an eye on the big picture
- Prioritize the key descriptors that bring life to your vision
- Finally, narrow the focus to create a vision statement that paints a clear picture of the aspect of your community that everyone in your planning group will embrace as the answer to "where we want to be."

### ***Creating a Mission Statement***

A clear and meaningful mission statement will include (a) what you do or will be doing, (b) who you are doing it for and (c) a concise summary of core competencies of the individuals and organizations involved in the planning effort.

- Find examples of mission statements that contain these elements and see how you might adapt them to fit your needs
- Keep it concise: A single sentence may be best; use two sentences at most
- Everyone in your planning group should be able to recall the mission statement when asked.

### ***Defining Your Purpose***

Think about why you value the vision you have formulated and why the newly created vision holds value for the community. What is the true purpose that it serves? Is it to change attitudes, end conflict, or improve some aspect of the human condition? In our example, the purpose is to value all humanity. Whatever your true purpose, if it's not at the heart of your mission and vision, you just might be on the wrong path. Your purpose should ultimately energize stakeholders to focus on the shared vision.

- Use value statements. What are the common core values of your group?
- Make a list of the values inherent in creating your vision
- Prioritize the value statements and use the top two or three to clearly define your purpose.



### III.

# Laying the Groundwork

Time for Self-Assessment



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Just as every community is unique when it comes to visualizing change, every community is at a different starting point from which to launch the journey toward realizing the vision. The first step in developing a plan to achieve the future change you want is to assess where you are now. It's important to look critically at the existing state of affairs in your community to establish a baseline for action.

.....

*You have to understand where  
you are in order to know how to get to  
where you want to be.*

.....

Take inventory of the people, the programs, and the resources in your community in addition to identifying the deficits that you intend to address. Make special note of any existing relationships among stakeholders.



**BOISE, IDAHO.** The Boise experience in community planning was fast tracked by the existing collaborative relationships among the various refugee resettlement stakeholders, which had developed a network charter and consensus driven model of governance. When the need for community planning became clear, the network was ready and willing to work in concert to support the vision of a more coordinated response to the economic impact of the Great Recession.

PHOTO CREDIT: Becca Alexander, New American Pathways

### **ARE THERE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS ALREADY IN PLACE OR DO THEY NEED TO BE DEVELOPED?**

If you already have productive relationships with multiple community partners that have been nurtured over time—as many refugee resettlement networks have—your planning process will be a step ahead. If you are just beginning to develop the collaborative relationships you need, the community planning process may be the best opportunity and impetus for relationship building and partnership development. Either way, it's the quality of these relationships that will bring the needed people to the table—ready to go to work to achieve the purpose and realize the shared vision. This is also the time to move outside your comfort zone and beyond the people you typically work with to engage new potential allies. Section IV, “Convening the People You Need” will provide some tips for relationship building that may help you get started.

## WHAT IS THE MAIN IMPETUS FOR BEGINNING A COMMUNITY PLANNING INITIATIVE?

Sometimes it's a crisis that brings people together to begin community planning, and sometimes it's a more proactive approach to a changing environment. Many communities have recognized, for instance, the need to attract more immigrants in order to help revitalize neighborhoods and expand entrepreneurship. Others have recognized that in order to be globally competitive, they need to brand themselves as welcoming cities in which opportunity is open to all.

Define the specific set of conditions or problem that you want to address through a community planning process. What stands in the way of realizing your vision? If your vision is a community where all people are included and connected, what is preventing inclusion and connectedness? Is it cultural and linguistic isolation that prevents social interaction? Is it a weak and inefficient support system that does little to create greater opportunity for people to develop the skills and assets they need to contribute to society? Whatever the core problems you intend to address, it's important to clearly identify them in order to develop the plan to implement the change you want.



**DAYTON, OHIO.** Feeling the impact of a declining population and sputtering local economy, the Welcome Dayton plan was created to help attract more immigrants to the community and to help long-term, receiving community members feel that they were part of a vibrant, growing community.

PHOTO CREDIT: Welcome Dayton, City of Dayton

## WHAT DATA CAN YOU GATHER TO MAKE YOUR CASE?

Think about ways that you can use factual evidence to support the validity of your problem or opportunity statement. Can you document the situation in order to establish a baseline of data from which to measure progress? Are there existing community assessments that can contribute to your data gathering? Many community stakeholders perform assessments: United Way, the YMCA, school districts and hospitals, to name a few. These types of assessments can help you get started. In the case of refugee integration, look to your state refugee office or state refugee coordinator to provide information. Universities may also have an interest in studying refugee integration. You may create an opportunity to partner in a study or research project that can help you in your community assessment. Remember that qualitative data can be very important to your assessment, especially where quantitative data is sparse or lacking. To the extent possible, you should combine quantitative and qualitative data to make your case.



**CLEVELAND, OHIO.** The Refugee Services Collaborative of Greater Cleveland partnered with Chmura Economics and Analytics to study the Economic Impact of Refugees in Cleveland

<http://rscscleveland.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ClevelandRefugeeEconomic-Impact.pdf>

PHOTO CREDIT: Refugee Services Collaborative of Greater Cleveland

## WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT THE INITIATIVE?

Assuming you already know what you want to accomplish through a community planning initiative, you will need to identify the resources available to further the development of a community planning process and its implementation. These resources may be both financial (actual money for expenses incurred) and human (time and effort of project partners). A few things to consider:

### WHAT ARE THE NEEDS FOR ACTUAL CASH OUTLAY?

How much of the work can be done pro bono or as in kind contributions? Many stakeholders may be able to participate as part of their paid jobs.

### HOW CAN YOU ENCOURAGE REFUGEES AND OTHER IMMIGRANTS TO PARTICIPATE THROUGH FINANCIAL INCENTIVES?

*(see Section V: Strategies for Engaging Refugees)*

Most people have to volunteer their time to participate in a community planning process.

### THINK ABOUT WAYS TO SHARE THE COST AMONG PARTNERS.

Reach out to existing and potential partners to see how they may be best positioned to support the work.

### IF AT ALL POSSIBLE, ENGAGE A PROFESSIONAL FACILITATOR TO GUIDE YOU THROUGH THE PLANNING PROCESS AND KEEP YOU FOCUSED ON THE TASKS AT HAND.

A facilitator will speed up the process, saving valuable time for everyone involved; will keep traction on the wheels to keep them from spinning; and will provide an objective and realistic assessment of progress toward the goal. The money spent will be well worth the investment.

## THE BOISE MODEL

The Boise planning process has been supported by cost sharing between the Idaho Office for Refugees and the City of Boise to pay for a plan facilitator and implementation coordinator.



..... PHOTO CREDIT: Becca Alexander, New American Pathways

### ***Online Self-Assessment Tools***

The internet is full of useful resources that can help you organize your approach to community assessment. In fact, the sheer volume of instructions, advice and helpful tips can be daunting. It's important to take away the "doable" and avoid getting hung up on the more complex, intensive and potentially expensive processes you'll come across. Think creatively, but expansively, about how you might adapt the tools you find for your particular situation. To help you focus your search, here are a handful of internet resources that could serve to get you started:

- The ***Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas*** has developed a comprehensive Community Tool Box. The Tool Box is a free online resource for people working to build healthier communities and bring about social change. The chapter on Assessing Community Needs and Resources can be found at:

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources>

- ***Rotary International*** has published a guide called Community Assessment Tools intended to be used in conjunction with Communities in Action: A Guide to Effective Projects.

[http://www.rotary.org/ridocuments/en\\_pdf/605c\\_en.pdf](http://www.rotary.org/ridocuments/en_pdf/605c_en.pdf)

- The ***Community Action Partnership*** in Washington DC has an online assessment tool that supports the development of comprehensive community needs assessments.

<http://www.communityactioncna.org/>

- The ***Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services*** has developed a community assessment process with a focus on creating "aging-friendly" communities, but this process could easily be applied to a wider range of assessment needs.

<http://www.dads.state.tx.us/services/agingtexaswell/initiatives/catoolkit/community-assessment-toolkit.pdf>



## CHECKLIST OF STEPS TO GET STARTED

*Once you have clearly defined your vision, mission and purpose, you can follow a series of steps to set you on the path to plan development. The following checklist will help you determine if you're ready to get started.*

- HAVE YOU TAKEN INVENTORY OF, DOCUMENTED AND PRIORITIZED...**  
the strengths and needs identified in the community self-assessment?  
.....
- HAVE YOU IDENTIFIED THE STRATEGIC PARTNERS...**  
that are likely to be ready to collaborate?  
.....
- HAVE YOU REACHED OUT TO POTENTIAL NEW PARTNERS...**  
who haven't been involved but who might be willing to be engaged?  
.....
- HAVE YOU IDENTIFIED THE DATA SOURCES...**  
that you can tap into or develop in order to approach the process with  
as much empirical evidence as possible?  
.....
- HAVE YOU TAKEN INVENTORY OF THE RESOURCES AT YOUR DISPOSAL...**  
or potentially available to support the planning effort?



## IV.

# Convening the People You Need



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In the previous section, *Laying the Groundwork*, we talked about the importance of cultivating relationships and developing strong, mutually supporting partnerships to build the foundation for an effective planning process. Doing this early on in your process will help you build lasting support for the mission and vision of the effort.

Before jumping to the selection and engagement of your planning group, let's talk briefly about the principle of building strong working partnerships. Without a doubt, the single greatest barrier to building partnerships and developing networks is finding the time to do it.



*ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI.* St. Louis Mosaic is a community-wide immigrant attraction effort, with partners across local government, business and the nonprofit community. One key member is the International Institute, which provides an array of refugee and immigrant services. By working in partnership with these other community actors, the International Institute of St. Louis is able to accomplish far more than it ever could alone.

PHOTO CREDIT: Wayne Crosslin, International Institute of St. Louis

### *To Have a Partner, You Need to Be a Partner*

**IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP.** The relationships you build with everyone around you are the means for achieving your goals. Relationship building occurs one-on-one. You can only build trust by proving yourself to be trustworthy. Even working on relationships with those who don't readily share your vision will have an impact on your ultimate success.

**TRUST IS ESSENTIAL.** Building trust takes time, but whenever you work together with others, you can only accomplish your goals together through mutual trust. When trust is missing, you will have a tough time functioning cooperatively. Communicate openly so that your partners understand that you're always shooting straight with them and find time for one-on-one conversations. If there are turf issues or other sensitive relationship considerations, these will have to be dealt with before trust can be strengthened.

**LEARN WHAT YOUR PARTNERS NEED AND WANT.** Ask questions. Get to know the people in the organizations who might be open to sharing or supporting your purpose. Find out how you can help them accomplish their goals and offer your support to them. Follow through with your commitments.

**BE THERE WHEN THINGS GO SOUTH.** Be ready to back up your partners when the going gets tough. Loyalty is essential to keeping relationships healthy. When relationships can successfully weather a crisis through mutual support, they will only get stronger when the situation improves.

**BE IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL.** The best time to build relationships is long before you need to call on your partner for support. Start now. Reach out. Show your interest. Somehow, find the time to invest in relationship building, partnership building and collaboration.

Now, it's time to get specific about the skill sets, subject matter expertise and perspectives that will be needed to push your plan forward. The ultimate composition of your planning group will depend on how you structure your process, but answering a few key questions can help you get started.

#### **WHO DO YOU WANT TO HAVE AT THE TABLE?**

These are typically the friends and associates who share your vision and have the will to see it achieved. They may bring significant expertise and financial resources to the work. But don't yield to the temptation to include all like minds and kindred spirits. Diversity of opinion is crucial.

#### **WHO DO YOU REALLY NEED AT THE TABLE?**

There's a difference between "who you want" and "who you need." Thinking beyond your like-minded cohort, ask yourself, "who would bring new insights, alternate perspectives or a dose of reality?" Consider who might even challenge your vision of the possible. Diversity of opinion will strengthen the outcome, even as it creates tension in the process. It's important to consider a variety of perspectives and to come at this work with a spirit of listening and understanding.

#### **WHAT ROLE DO YOU EXPECT YOUR PLANNERS TO PLAY AND HOW CAN THIS ROLE HELP YOU SELECT STRATEGICALLY?**

We'll address the question of roles in greater depth, but it's important to recognize that role definition will have a huge impact on the strengths and skills you want to attract to the process. Be especially clear up front and throughout the process what the expectations are around participation.

#### **WHO WILL ADD VALUE TO THE PLANNING EFFORT?**

It goes without saying that you'll be looking for value added from everyone involved, but obviously, not everyone involved in the process will contribute equally. Still, try to consciously and strategically consider the contribution you expect from each person invited to participate and see how they might like to be involved.

#### **WHO WILL BE BEST ABLE TO MOVE THE PROCESS FORWARD WITH ENERGY AND DRIVE?**

These people, too, are ones you "really need at the table," but think especially in terms of acknowledged leadership, ability to bring resources to the effort and the degree of community influence a person offers. If you have any of these qualities combined with a passion for the vision in the same person, you have a goldmine.



..... PHOTO CREDIT: Becca Alexander, New American Pathways

The key message here is to be strategic in identifying the people you want and need to be involved; then, appeal to their interest in the process and, most importantly, to their stake in the potential outcome.

Establish clear and reasonable expectations and clarify roles for participants. As we've seen, there are roles for those directly involved in planning, those who will provide key information to the process, those who will review the plan document, and those who will authorize the document, and so forth. Each participant should understand the overall direction of the process and her or his role in working toward the eventual outcome. You should also recognize that while participants begin with the best of intentions, most have significant limitations on their time. Be sure to honor their effort by making good use of the time they do have available to contribute. Should their participation wane, it's important to understand why and think of alternative ways for them to be involved.

## SECTOR CHECKLIST OF POTENTIAL PLANNING PARTNERS

*It may be helpful when thinking about potential partners to review the following list of organizations and institutions that exist in most communities. You may need to prioritize based on the current or potential roles these entities play in addressing your goal areas:*

- EDUCATION** K-12 public schools, adult education providers, higher education, early childhood education
- GOVERNMENT** Local elected officials, department staff, local municipal leagues, state government officials, state government departments
- BUSINESSES** Small businesses, mid- and large-size area employers, Chambers of Commerce, ethnic owned-businesses
- LEGAL** Law enforcement and public safety, legal services
- IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS**
- ETHNIC COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS**
- ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS** Community organizers, other advocates
- HOUSING & TRANSPORTATION PROVIDERS**
- FAITH BASED & CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS**
- HUMAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS**
- HEALTH CARE** Hospitals, clinics, public health organizations, mental health providers
- MEDIA** Local reporters, public relations and marketing firms, ethnic media
- OTHER?**

## *What's at Stake?*

Another way of looking at the question of convening the people you need is to consider who has the most at stake when it comes to realizing your vision. We often use the word “stakeholders” to mean “interested community organizations” without fully realizing the importance of the concept that something very important is “at stake.” We also may think of “high stakes” ventures, a phrase that implies something very close to what we’re talking about here. Bringing social change to your community will be uncomfortable, to say the least, for some stakeholders heavily invested in the status quo. Here are some additional questions to consider:

- *What is the potential impact of change? And who will be impacted?*
- *What are the tradeoffs between large scale and incremental change?*
- *How far will the change you seek reach into the larger community?*
- *How will the change alter the equilibrium and what does that alteration mean for your community partners or other community interests?*
- *Will there be perceived winners and losers? How can you prepare to change the perception of loss?*

As hard as it may be to acknowledge that your vision will not be readily acceptable to all, you must consider the impact of change on those with the most at stake and consider inviting them to participate. Open forum and the principles of public participation should not be overlooked or ignored.

## *The Importance of Defining the Planning Structure*

The structure of the planning process itself and the variety of roles that your planning partners will play at different levels will also help you decide who will be on your invitation list. In the case of the Boise Refugee Community Plan, four distinct levels of planning emerged and continue to play important roles in the implementation of the Plan.

**THE PLANNING TEAM** Small team consisting of representatives from the Idaho Office for Refugees and the Boise City Mayor’s Office, plus the jointly funded facilitator of the planning process. The Planning Team is responsible for setting agendas, scheduling regular and ad hoc meetings, approving Steering Committee membership and subcommittee assignments.

**THE STEERING COMMITTEE** High level representation from community, regional and statewide agencies, organizations and institutions. The Steering Committee provides overall Plan direction and strategic focus. Members are also expected to promote the goals and objectives of the Plan within their organizations and to assure that staff of these organizations are fully informed about refugee community issues and involved at an appropriate level in planning and implementation.

**SUBCOMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUP** The Boise Refugee Community Plan includes seven working committees, ranging in size from six to 20 members, depending on the group. These are comprised of the “worker bees” that develop the nuts and bolts of the Plan document and make recommendations as to its content. These subcommittees maintain a strong role in Plan implementation. During the Plan development phase of the Boise Refugee Community Plan, this combined group met regularly to flesh out the content of the Plan.

**THE IMPLEMENTATION TEAM** Once the Plan was fully developed, the Implementation Team formed to guide its execution and track progress. This team consists of seven subcommittee chairs and co-chairs, Planning Team members and the directors of the local resettlement agencies (who actually serve as co-chairs of several of the subcommittees). The Implementation Team is responsible for assuring that the objectives of the Plan are accomplished and for making recommendations for Plan revisions over time.

**THE FACILITATOR/IMPLEMENTATION COORDINATOR** Although the neutral facilitator does not constitute a discrete level of planning, this role has been indispensable in driving the plan to completion and needs mentioning here. This is a paid position charged with meeting facilitation and record keeping, coordination of the various planning groups and engagement with all planning divisions.

This structure offers an example of how different individuals involved in the planning process will assume different roles and fulfill diverse responsibilities vis-à-vis the vision for change and the day-to-day execution of Plan itself. Understanding these differences should become the first step in developing a comprehensive list of stakeholders and community partners to be involved in your planning process.

### ***Common (Typical) Planning Roles***

Although you will want to develop your own role definitions to guide your strategic decision making about who to engage at which level of planning, these generic “job descriptions” can help guide you along the way. Your planning structure may not include the same functional layers and divisions of labor that were used in the Boise Plan, but you are likely to want to engage a variety of people with specific and specialized roles. Let’s try to summarize these roles for more general use:

#### **VISIONARIES, THOUGHT LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS**

These are the visible, widely respected and listened to leaders of your community, district or state. They may be elected officials, successful community-oriented business people, academics, religious leaders, TV news personalities or community advocates. It’s important to have these folks on your team; even one influencer can make a big difference in the outcome of your planning effort and the speed with which change can be achieved.

*Job Description:* Communicate the vision; use the bully pulpit to further the agenda for change; use influence to convene the people you need. The Steering Committee will be the most appropriate place to use this role effectively.



### **STRATEGISTS**

These are the people who understand how to make things happen, how to make the most of your resources, how to take an idea and bring it to fruition. Strategists may be CEOs of community-based organizations or political operatives; urban planners or communications professionals; board members or born strategic thinkers. Whatever the source of your strategic resource, this is obviously a key skill you will need in your planning group.

*Job Description:* Create coherent mission statement, goals and objectives; help keep the group focused on converting vision into action (your facilitator must be a strategist, also); articulate and defend the process used in strategic planning; identify resources that can be used to further the Plan. You'll want strategists on your Steering Committee, but you also want them involved in day-to-day planning.

### **PRACTITIONERS**

This broad category includes most of your "worker bees," from those who have frequent direct involvement in refugee and immigrant services (staff and volunteers), to community members who play support roles in resettlement (librarians, teachers, police officers, housing providers, medical staff, mental health workers, etc.), to interpreters, neighbors and community volunteers. The main role of practitioners is to inform the Plan with an eye towards the day-to-day needs and opportunities they are seeing on the ground.

*Job Description:* Provide subject matter expertise regarding day-to-day issues facing refugees as they resettle and adjust to life in America; assess strengths and gaps in resources available for effective resettlement; brainstorm solutions to problems of resettlement and adjustment; implement action steps identified in the Plan.

### **REFUGEES AND FORMER REFUGEES**

Most often, the refugees able to participate effectively in an ongoing planning and plan implementation effort will be "former refugees," for several practical reasons, but regardless of the length of time in the U.S., the perspective of refugees is indispensable in creating a community plan in which they have the most at stake. There will be more about engaging refugees later in this section.

*Job Description:* Voice refugee perspective; contribute to planning effort in manner commensurate with skills, abilities and expertise.

### **FACILITATOR**

A skilled neutral facilitator is a necessity for moving things forward and lending credibility to the process.

*Job Description:* Drive plan to completion; facilitate meetings; keep records; coordinate various meetings of planning groups; promote engagement within all planning divisions.

## *Strategies for Engaging Refugees and Other Immigrants*

It goes without saying that the people with the most at stake—that is, the ones most likely to be affected by the change you're striving to make—are the very ones who should be first at the table to participate in your planning process. In this case, we're talking about refugees, former refugees and other immigrants similarly situated. Despite our best intentions and repeated efforts, however, newcomers are often underrepresented or sometimes entirely absent when critical information is being collected and decisions are being made.

Although there's no apparent easy answer to remedy this frequent underrepresentation, there may be some strategies for engagement that can work for you. First, however, you will need to do your best to understand the barriers to participation, while being careful not to overgeneralize and certainly not to stereotype.

### **FACTORS TO CONSIDER**

**Refugees have jobs and family responsibilities.** It may be awkward or financially disadvantageous for them to ask for time off work.

**Most non-refugee community stakeholders get paid as part of their jobs to go to meetings and planning sessions.** Refugees usually don't, unless they work at jobs with refugee service providers or other involved partners.

**Refugees may have little or no experience in strategic planning;** those who have experience may have an entirely different cultural context for problem solving and creating change.

**Some refugees may be so anxious about or preoccupied** with their own circumstantial issues that it can be hard to see the bigger picture.

**Language is almost always an issue.** Use of interpreters can be effective in certain forums, such as focus groups and one-on-one discussions, but English competency is a must in fast-paced planning sessions. You'll need to select refugees using English language ability as a criterion in these situations.

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*Refugee Leadership academies have shown promise in helping people develop the skills for greater civic engagement. A few examples include:*

#### **INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC LIFE**

Omaha, NE

[iplomaha.org](http://iplomaha.org)

#### **CENTER OF INTERCULTURAL ORGANIZING**

Portland, OR

[interculturalorganizing.org](http://interculturalorganizing.org)

#### **IMMIGRANT LEGAL RESOURCE CENTER**

San Francisco, CA

[ilrc.org/policy-advocacy/inspiring-immigrant-leadership](http://ilrc.org/policy-advocacy/inspiring-immigrant-leadership)

#### **REFUGEE WOMEN'S NETWORK**

Decatur, GA

[riwn.org](http://riwn.org)

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Having listed some of the potential barriers to engaging refugees and other immigrants, it is equally important to note that many will be highly motivated to participate *if they can see some benefit to themselves and their community and if the talk results in real change*. Too often, refugees and immigrants are invited to voice their opinions only to find that nothing changes after they have spoken.

Inviting refugees, former refugees and immigrants to participate in your planning effort may be just the beginning of a longer term process of engagement. Developing a habit of inclusion should be the goal for everyone working to develop a more responsive service delivery system and a more universal welcome for newcomers.

**Go to where the people are.** Seek out times and locations that are convenient for refugees and immigrants. Many refugee organizations and less formally structured communities meet on weekends, frequently on Sunday, because that's the best time for the most people. You'll almost always be more successful by meeting refugees at places and times they select. Look at housing complexes where many refugees live as resources for engaging them. Many have common areas that can be used for meetings.

**Provide ample opportunity for refugees to participate.** Even if you can't always meet refugees on their own turf, you can schedule meetings at times that most refugees are available. Find out when the best times are and make a point of letting people know that you are arranging the schedule to accommodate them because you especially value their participation.

**Provide transportation to reduce a major barrier to participation.** In Boise, school buses are used to transport large groups of people to the annual refugee conference and the World Refugee Day celebration.

**Cultivate relationships with ethnic leaders.** Seek out both formal leaders and informal leaders. Informal leaders, in particular, can provide tremendous insight into the perspectives of many group members. Be wary of self-appointed leaders who may not always represent the best interests of the people they claim to represent. As with any leader, look behind the scenes to see if there is widespread respect among the members of the community. When you have a strong relationship with a respected ethnic leader, you will gain participation.

**Cultivate leadership skills among refugees.** This is a long-term strategy, but can have a very positive effect on newcomers' ability to contribute meaningfully in a professional group environment. Some organizations have been successful in developing leadership programs and academies for refugees. It may also be effective to include refugees in existing leadership programs in your community. Specific training on public speaking and serving on boards and commissions can serve the same purpose. The Office of Refugee Resettlement's Ethnic Community Self-Help program can provide an excellent opportunity for leadership skill development.

These strategies may assist in overcoming the multiple barriers to effective engagement of refugees in a strategic planning process, but they all require continuous effort if they are to be successful.

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### *Miscellaneous Tips and Hints for Convening the People You Need*

- Be conscious of who is missing from your planning initiative; continuously evaluate participation and be prepared to bring in new membership. Who are the untapped resources in your community?
- Assess what resources prospective participants may be able to bring to the effort.
- Learn to appeal to the interests of your community partners. Show them how participation in your planning initiative will help them accomplish their own goals. Remember, to have a partner, you need to be a partner.



# V.

## Ready, Set, Go:

Organizing and Developing the Plan



WELCOMING



▲ *Building a Nation of Neighbors*

Once you've laid the groundwork and selected the people you need for your planning initiative, the real work is ready to begin—that of translating your vision into concrete, deliberate steps that will begin to move your community in the direction you want. This phase of planning will yield specific products that, in the aggregate, will formulate your blueprint for change. It will also provide an opportunity for your planning partners to establish a common language and generate more intentional, informed involvement in refugee resettlement and integration into your community. The creation of the blueprint will help solidify the relationships you've built.

You will be bringing together many people across the community who are engaged with newcomers at some level—either directly or indirectly—and it's essential to be absolutely clear about what you are asking them to do and what the intended outcome of their efforts will be.

### *Final Preparation for Planning*

At the time of your first meeting to begin developing the elements of the plan, you should be able to clearly define the process that the group will follow. It is important for your planning group to know up front how much influence they will have on the process itself. Even if the process is well defined before it starts, there will still be many decisions that the group is charged with making. It will help to provide as much advance information as you can to the planning group to help them prepare for an initial productive session.

**BE SURE ALL THE PARTICIPANTS HAVE ACCESS TO THE BASICS OF STRATEGIC PLANNING;** share a draft agenda prior to the sessions, along with any relevant reading materials that will help create a common understanding of the process.

**AT A MINIMUM, SCHEDULE AT LEAST TWO THREE-HOUR SESSIONS TO GET ORGANIZED.** Provide plenty of notice to your prospective participants. Secure a space that is comfortable and facilitates open thinking for all. The seating arrangement should be egalitarian, such as a large “U” shape or round table.

**SERIOUSLY CONSIDER USING AN INDEPENDENT FACILITATOR, EVEN IF IT MEANS FINDING SOME WAY TO ABSORB THE COST.** There are usually key stakeholders that would be willing and able to finance a small part of the overall planning effort. The advantages of trained facilitation are several:

- You are better assured of professional meeting conduct;
- An impartial leader with no vested interest in the outcome will lend credibility and efficiency to the process;
- All other stakeholders will be free to contribute as participants without the constraints typically placed on the facilitator.

If you choose to take on this task as a shared responsibility among participants, be aware that the facilitator plays a much different role than the other participants and must remain neutral and impartial. Select people with facilitation experience, not necessarily content expertise. You may be able to engage a volunteer facilitator if payment for services is an issue. Local colleges and universities, mediation associations of civic organizations may be in a position to assist on a pro bono basis.

**FINALLY, CONSIDER WAYS TO EVALUATE YOUR SESSIONS.** The most basic result will be your completed plan document, but think about ways to evaluate other features of your process, such as effectiveness of communication or the productivity (output) generated at each session. A simple evaluation form filled out by participants can serve as a measure of participant satisfaction.

## A Set of Deliberate Steps

In the introduction to this section, this process guide provided a set of concrete, deliberate steps to be taken to provide the structure for your planning process. These steps begin where the foundational work described in the previous sections of the guide leave off. They assume that you have articulated your vision; that your purpose is clear; and that you have a good sense of “where you are” as the result of an intentional effort to understand the people, programs and resources present in your community. The following outline can serve as your guide to organizing and developing your own community plan:

1. **ASSESS STRENGTHS, NEEDS AND RESOURCES.** An important part of the group process will be to tap into the brains of your subject matter experts and to identify areas of strength and the availability of community assets that your plan can build on; unmet needs within your community that are limiting the achievement of its full potential; and resources that either have the potential to promote the execution of your plan or that need to be developed in order to overcome a potential roadblock.
2. **ESTABLISH GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.** Based on your detailed assessment of strengths, needs and resources, you should set priorities for action. These priorities will lead you to establish your goals and objectives. *Goals* come first: they are high level overarching principles that represent an ideal, or something close to it. *Objectives* support the goal with tangible, measurable outcomes. Many people get confused and use “goals” and “objectives” more or less interchangeably. Assure that your planning group understands the difference and the relationship between the two.
 

*Goals* are mainly long term propositions, the big picture “ends” that we seek and which correlate to our stated purpose. Examples of goals might be equal access to resources or the elimination of gender-based wage disparity.

*Objectives* are the specific “means” we have to achieve the “ends.”

Since goals are broad general statements and objectives are more narrowly defined tactics, there will be a whole set of objectives identified to accomplish each goal. It’s likely that some of the objectives will be relatively easy to accomplish (“low-hanging fruit”), while others may take considerably more effort and time. It can be helpful sometimes to prioritize the low-hanging fruit for relatively swift accomplishment in order to gain momentum out of the gate.
3. **DESIGN ACTION STEPS FOR ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES.** Just as every goal will be supported by a number of objectives, every objective will be accomplished by taking a well-defined set of action steps. These action steps will need to be assigned to specific individuals who are willing to assume responsibility for their implementation. Specificity, clarity and transparency in setting expectations for the implementation of action steps will begin the accountability process.
4. **MEASURE PROGRESS AND EVALUATE OUTCOMES.** Although tracking outcomes and measuring success are really continuous elements of your planning process, most of the focus on outcomes will be at the end of the planning process. This step brings the entire process back to the beginning (full circle) in that outcomes relate inextricably to the goal. The outcome becomes the indicator of goal achievement. Without completion of this step, the planning process (vision, purpose, goals and objectives) are left dangling and without closure.

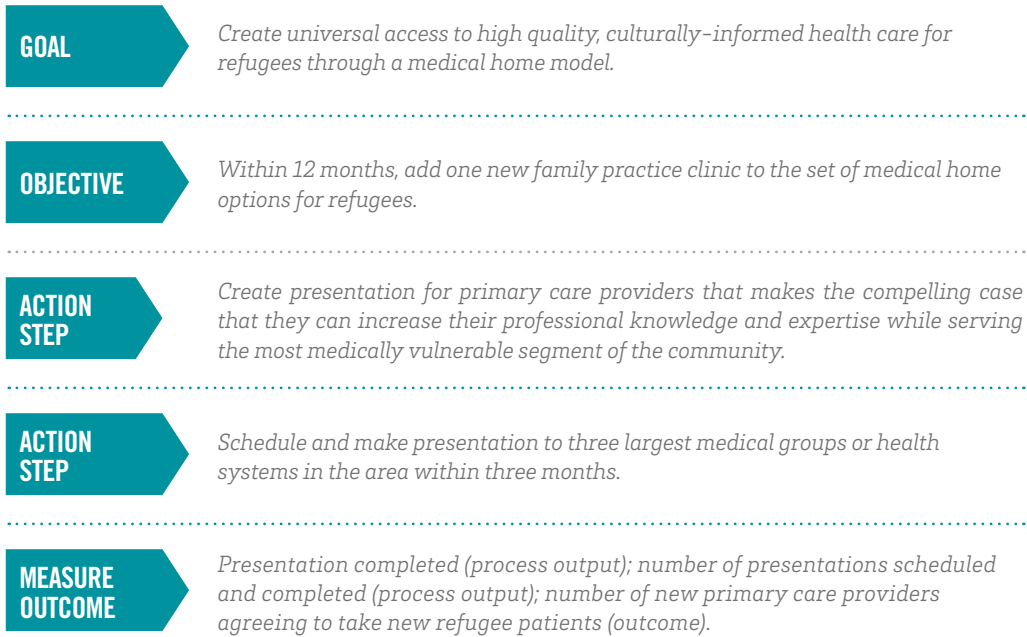
### GOALS

Overarching principles that guide decision making. They are broad, general statements of intent and are often intangible and abstract.

### OBJECTIVES

Specific, measurable steps taken to achieve the goal. Objectives are narrowly defined, precise, tangible, concrete and measurable.

Let's look at an example of how these steps might play out:



This example is obviously incomplete in that the single objective will not by itself achieve the stated goal, although it should certainly contribute to its eventual achievement. Likewise, many more action steps will be needed to achieve the objective. The example does, however, illustrate the relationship of the set of the four deliberate steps that will provide the necessary structure to your planning process.

## Getting Started

Your first two meetings with community stakeholders should focus on developing, organizing and refining the structure of your actual plan. The scope and magnitude of your vision will be the best guide to determining the plan content; and your community self-assessment will serve to better define that content.

### THE BOISE MODEL

The Boise Refugee Community Plan was structured around six domains that were known by the planning group to constitute essential resources for effective refugee resettlement and integration: *Education, Employment, Health Care, Housing, Transportation and Social Integration.*

If you have already identified the areas of greatest need within the community—issues not being addressed strategically or not being addressed all—your next step will be to prioritize them for action. If these needs have not yet been clearly identified, now is the time to do it. Establishing small groups and tasking them with brainstorming specific categories of focus will help move things along. Don't forget to consider the existence of assets and areas of strengths where they are known to exist.

Identify people who will become leaders (Team Leaders or Committee Chairs) for each area of focus. These will be people who have skills and expertise in their fields, who have demonstrated understanding of the planning process and possess group leadership skills. These leaders will be responsible to see that each work group categorizes its work and plans further development and refinement of each objective and action step.

At the end of the second meeting, your planning group should have a clear picture of and consensus on what the next steps will be. A comprehensive planning process will require several follow-on sessions, at a minimum, with the smaller focused work groups reporting back to the larger planning group periodically to report progress and gain direction for further plan development.

As work progresses, there should be a conscious effort in these smaller work groups to narrow the scope of the objectives to a manageable number of achievable actions toward resolving the most critical needs. Define specifically the intended outcomes for each area, ensuring all who will work together have the same focus for their efforts. State the goals clearly in such a way that they are understood by a broad audience. It is important to narrow down and define the areas of focus for closing the resource gaps. It works best within the committee structure to have at least one person in each working group who ultimately has authority to make strategic decisions. This would normally be the organizer and convener of the group, or committee chair.



## Documenting Your Work

While we should all be able to agree that community planning is most importantly about creating a vision for change and realizing the vision through deliberate action, there is an indispensable role for conscientious record keeping of all that transpires during the process, especially group decisions and group action items to be accomplished. Words are important and wordsmithing will serve a key function in the accuracy, quality and clarity of your record keeping and messaging, both internally within your planning group and externally within your community.

Liberal use of flip charts and other media for note taking, always utilizing an assigned note taker or recorder, timely transcription and editing of the record to capture information while it's fresh, and prompt distribution to all members of the planning group are essential to a well-organized process and retention of your planning group.

As you begin to formulate your plan, you will want to decide on a document format that fits your process. There are many variations of such documents in use and you should easily be able to adapt one of them for your own style. We have included a sample document below that is quite simple to use.

## Sample Plan Format

### EDUCATION

*Sample Goal: Refugees of all ages will have access to and participate in formal and informal education opportunities.*

OBJECTIVES	ACTION STEPS	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY	PARTNERS	OUTCOME EXPECTED
	A. CONTACT . . . B. CREATE . . . C. COORDINATE . . . D. TRAIN . . .	Identify the lead entity responsible for completing each action step	Identify others who should be involved in completing action steps	Include dates, specific outputs, outcomes in terms of the objective

This format can be easily completed with goal statements, objectives and action steps to organize and revise your plan over time. It can be expanded indefinitely if needed. But regardless of which plan document you decide to use, the most important components of any plan document are as follows:

- a well-articulated goal for each domain addressed by the plan
- objectives that declare concrete, time-specific results directed toward the goal
- action steps that describe how the objectives will be achieved
- identification of organizations, individuals and resources that are essential to successful pursuit of objectives and action steps
- metrics that allow you to measure and evaluate the results of action steps in terms of outputs and outcomes.

### ***Sample Process Methodology***

The process document defines the unique scope and definition for each goal that you decide to include in your plan and outlines the discussion approach to help work group leaders and members understand expectations in terms of time commitment, methods and outcomes.

#### **WORK GROUP TEAM ROLE**

- Identify and prioritize critical needs and opportunities
- Identify existing resources to address them
- Identify resource gaps and potential barriers
- Draw key conclusions based upon the needs, resources, gaps and barriers
- Develop recommendations on short term and long term goals

#### **WORK GROUP EXPECTATIONS**

- Meet 2-4 times to brainstorm and discuss issues and opportunities related to providing service and welcome to refugees, both upon arrival and continuing throughout the resettlement process.

#### **WORK GROUP MAKE UP**

- Include people who work at the service level in the community providing direct care, service and support to people in the community.
- Include service providers from refugee resettlement agencies, employers, landlords, teachers and education administrators, health care direct and indirect service providers and coordinators, etc.

### **CONSIDER A LOGIC MODEL**

Logic models help you ensure that there is clarity among the planning group about what you want to achieve and how you will achieve it. Many funders appreciate logic models, too. It may be easier to keep people engaged in the plan if they see how the logic flows from the specific activities you will undertake to the anticipated short- and long-term outcomes. This tool from the Kellogg Foundation is one resource to help you learn more about logic models:

[www.smartgivers.org/uploads/logicmodelguidepdf.pdf](http://www.smartgivers.org/uploads/logicmodelguidepdf.pdf)

Develop projected timeframes for the completion of the work that reflects understanding and preparation for an extended period of time for each team to complete their work. Readiness is the key to efficiency of the effort at this point. Flexibility is the key to success as each team must adapt to the availability and needs of the team members.

Finalize goals and objectives and create a plan document that will serve as the blueprint or roadmap for achieving the stated purpose. It is a framework for community involvement and successful implementation.

### *Transition to Implementation*

Completion of the comprehensive plan document, which is sure to include multiple goals and appropriate and actionable objectives for each, will be a moment for celebration. It will represent a culmination of intense work performed by many stakeholders and partners over a significant period of time. Congratulations are certainly in order! But momentum is crucial, so don't hesitate before moving solidly into the implementation phase of your process.

Keep in mind as you sense the satisfaction of completion of a meaningful process that “the proof of the pudding is in the eating.” In this case, the implementation of the plan will determine its quality. If you've done the job well, your plan will be ready to implement; in fact, many of the action steps may have already begun. It makes sense that many of the people involved in the work groups that hammered out the details of the plan will become your implementation partners, as well. Still, the transition to implementation is an excellent time to revisit the composition of each team and assure that the people best positioned to move the plan forward are adequately engaged. A few considerations:

- When you identified responsible parties and appropriate partners, did you invite them to be a part of the planning process? Are there any that need to be drawn in who haven't already been involved?
- How will completing the action steps differ from defining them? What does this difference mean in terms of team composition?
- Who will oversee implementation and maintain the big picture?
- Who will track progress and accomplishments?
- How will you communicate the impact of the plan when it is being implemented?
- Will you need to revise it over time? How will you manage that?

These considerations—and others—are the topic of the next section of this process guide.

### **INVOLVING LOCAL MEDIA**

Members of OneMorgan County intentionally invited a local newspaper reporter to serve on their planning team when they began creating their immigrant integration plan. This reporter wrote a series of favorable articles based on his experience and served as an important voice for the immigrant experience in Fort Morgan, Colorado.

## *Communicating about the Plan*

How you communicate about the development and implementation of the plan, both internally with your stakeholders and externally with the broader community, should be considered from the outset of your work. Some communities have chosen to include local media as key stakeholders in the process—increasing the likelihood they will serve as key champions for the work as it unfolds. You may want to establish a communications work group that will help develop key messages that describe the work and a dissemination strategy for when the plan is released.

In Boise, the planning group engaged a local marketing firm to help with branding the effort and messaging. This included communications on: (1) the initiative itself, who we are, what we do and why; and (2) encouraging the public to meet their neighbors and get involved in the refugee integration process.

One critical task for the communications committee is to consider who the key audience is for your messaging. This will be very much driven by the goals you hope your plan will accomplish. The communications strategy and messaging should be built upon the interests of these key audiences you want to influence.

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### **MESSAGING TOOLKIT**

Welcoming America's Reframing Refugees Toolkit provides a number of suggestions for how to effectively communicate about the positive contributions of refugees in ways that resonate with the broader, receiving community. [www.welcomingrefugees.org](http://www.welcomingrefugees.org)



VI.  
Keeping the  
Plan Alive



WELCOMING



▲ *Building a Nation of Neighbors*

Now that you've invested literally years of man-hours in the planning effort, the last thing you want to see is the plan document stuck in a drawer or sitting on a shelf. Maintaining vitality during implementation will almost certainly take the same level of effort as creating the plan in the first place, but now you will have the benefit of seeing it all come to fruition! The more successes—large and small—you're able to accumulate, the more momentum you will create, and the more enthusiasm you will build for eventual possibility of realizing the vision.

### *Positioning for Opportunity (and Crisis)*

Economic ups and downs, changing demographic flows and unexpected local events are inevitable. Just when a community learns how to more deeply engage newcomers, refugee resettlement may begin for a new ethnic group that receiving communities may not have experience with. The changing nature of the political, social and economic environment also makes predicting needs challenging.

Keeping the planning effort active, effective and relevant will be your ace in the hole when additional partnership opportunities arise, as well as your insurance policy against the damaging effects of future crises. As tempting as it may be to conclude that “our work is done” and to disband committees and working groups when a comfortable level of change has been achieved, the existence of an active effort will come in handy when you least expect it or when problems arise. There are inevitable unforeseen events and circumstances that will arise and make you thankful that your collaboration is in place and ready for a new challenge or opportunity.

Even in the absence of emerging crises that call for a concerted community response, the existence of an active planning team and extensive community network can be a tremendous asset when presented with opportunities for funding or collaborative program development. At a minimum,

- Partnerships can be sustained by maintaining frequent contact and communication. Take as many opportunities as you can to “be a partner” to keep the collaboration alive and fresh.
- Commitment to common cause is an important asset in maintaining relationships. Look for opportunities to share in new efforts that draw on the passion that went into your own community planning effort.



PHOTO CREDIT: Becca Alexander, New American Pathways

### *Keeping the Team in the Game*

Maintaining momentum also requires you to ensure that the infrastructure remains in place for the duration of the plan's existence. Planners and implementers need to be constantly reminded of the relevance and importance of the work they're doing. It's critically important to continue to hold regular meetings of the various teams involved in the planning and implementation effort.

- Schedule meetings in advance and consider scheduling standing meetings for certain parts of the team, such as the Steering Committee. Quarterly meetings, for example, scheduled for an entire year give people an opportunity to develop a habit of attendance.
- Make sure the agenda is relevant and engaging. Ask what people want to talk about and make sure it's part of the meeting plan.
- Steering Committee members, in particular, must feel that they completely understand their role and that their participation is meaningful for the group and for themselves. A Steering Committee that doesn't feel needed or connected to the effort will steadily die off.
- Revisit your plan document at least once a year to affirm continued relevance and to make revisions where needed—when circumstances change or when objectives are met, continue the planning process by assessing the need for new objectives.

Work group leaders should keep their committees active through meetings and regular communications to ensure ongoing completion of work to fulfill objectives and action steps of their respective plans. These regular meetings are also valuable to share information, to identify continuing challenges or gaps in plan implementation and to reach agreement on responses to those challenges. Meeting regularly (monthly or bi-monthly) with their full work teams for 1-2 hours is essential for continuous planning, process improvement and identification of new areas to be addressed.

## ***Focus on Accomplishment***

Don't underestimate the importance of tracking and reporting your success. One way is to develop a regular process of reporting implementation activities and accomplishments. In the Boise Refugee Community Plan, there is a formal quarterly progress reporting requirement developed and completed by the work group leaders. Reports are posted online and accessible by all involved in the planning effort and to anyone else visiting the public website. This process ensures ongoing implementation and accountability; provides feedback to the planning community; and identifies successful outcomes, areas needing priority focus, and opportunities to engage everyone involved in the implementation effort.

The Steering Committee will decide how often to meet to keep active and current, but quarterly meetings could be the norm. These will be opportunities for them to evaluate progress, give feedback for the continuing process, discuss issues and opportunities and provide leadership and support to the vision that inspired the planning effort.

Finally, for sustainability, there needs to be someone in charge of pushing the plan forward. There is an ongoing planning-implementation-planning cycle that will never do well on its own. The investment in a network or implementation coordinator will pay great dividends in terms of progress and positive evolution of the community plan.

Specifically, the implementation coordinator's role could include the following activities:

- Key contributor and member of the planning team
- Convener, facilitator and recorder of work groups and other team meetings
- Organizer of progress and outcome documentation
- Keeper of the timeline and accountability manager

## ***Determining the End Game***

When we talk about the sustainability of our effort to effect change, we tend to ignore the possibility that we'll accomplish our goals and that our vision for the future will become reality. No question, this would be the perfect end game—to see the change become the new status quo. But our pragmatic nature tells us that we may very well be faced with baby steps forward into the foreseeable future. Some community planning efforts, by their nature, cannot know the end game. If our vision is indeed *“a community where all people, regardless of background, heritage or culture, will be valued and included,”* then we may need to be working at it for a very long time. So, keeping the plan—and the vision—alive well into the future becomes the ultimate goal and the measure of our success.



**Boise's Refugee Resource Strategic Community Plan**  
*Participating Agencies/Organizations*

ACHD Commuter Ride	College of Western Idaho	META
Ada County	El Ada Community Action Partnership	Pacific Western Training
African Community Development	English Language Center	St Alphonsus Regional Medical Center
Agency for New Americans	Family Medicine Residency of Idaho	St Alphonsus Medical Group
Big Brothers Big Sisters	Global Gardens	St Luke's Boise Medical Center
Boise City/Ada Country Housing Authority	HMS Host	Somali Bantu Zigua Community
Boise Housing/Community Development	Idaho Department of Health and Welfare	Terry Reilly Health Services
Boise State University	Idaho Department of Labor	Tidwell Social Work Services
Boise Police Department	Idaho Office for Refugees	The Learning Lab
Boise School District	Idaho Housing and Finance Association	The Salvation Army
Boise to Bukavu	Idaho Legal Aid Services	Valley Regional Transit
Catholic Charities of Idaho	Idaho Transportation Department	Women's and Children's Alliance
City of Boise	International Refugee Community Assn	World Relief - Boise
Community Action Partnership of Idaho	International Rescue Committee	Working Solutions
Create Common Good	Jesse Tree	Valley Ride
Crossing Points	Living Independence Network Corp	United Way of Treasure Valley

