

REGIONAL FOUNDATION

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Neighborhood Planning: Strategies for Success

Neighborhood planning processes that are resident-driven support the development of a community roadmap that is rooted in the historical context, contemporary reality, and lived experience of those residing in the neighborhood. These roadmaps are living documents that weave together intersecting priorities related to place-making and place-keeping, quality of life, social determinants of health, infrastructure, and other elements that influence how residents feel about their neighborhood, and their ability to thrive.

Comprehensive planning processes generally include the following stages and activities, which may take place sequentially or concurrently. Neighborhood planning efforts, however, may also be narrower in scope in a defined geography, and may utilize other tactics to map a path towards more equitable, healthy neighborhoods. For example, if an organization is in a smaller neighborhood or in a more rural area, they may be focusing on only a few community change areas and have a smaller scope of work; the foundation welcomes these types of plans. Regardless of scope, planning efforts-- from pre-planning to evaluation-- should have a strong emphasis on building community leadership by deeply involving residents in processes and decision-making.

The Regional Foundation provides its grantee partners with technical assistance support throughout the life cycle of the grant. Grantee partners can anticipate engagement with [Reinvestment Fund](#), [Community Wealth Partners](#), [Policy Map](#), and [Success Measures](#)—these organizations will provide customized support in program delivery and evaluation.

Planning processes should consistently utilize a DEIAB lens (diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility and belonging). The foundation is committed to supporting grantee partners as they build equitable, accessible plans and projects that are inclusive and supportive of all community members, especially those who have been most harmed by forms of systemic oppression. The Regional Foundation's DEIAB journey is one we share with all our partners, as we work together to build more whole, just communities.

Major Planning Phases and Activities*

Pre-planning

- Plan leadership coordination: inclusive of major stakeholders in the neighborhood and meaningful resident leadership. These groups are often referred to “steering committees,” “advisory councils,” etc.
- Identification of key partners, stakeholders, resident associations, and leadership who should be involved in the process to support long-term buy-in.
- Assessment of local political will and local and state resources to support the planning process and long-term plan implementation.
- Selection of a lead organization that is best positioned to coordinate a 12-18 month planning process. Characteristics of “best positioned” organizations may include: a trusted position in the community, experience managing complex projects, staffing and structures in place to move the project forward, and/or other factors deemed critical by stakeholders.
- Determination of preliminary geographic boundaries for the plan.



Data Gathering

- Assessment of neighborhood assets to support project planning (e.g. schools, community-based organizations, parks, businesses, health care institutions).
- Assessment of neighborhood physical conditions: where appropriate to the planning process, documentation of the exterior condition of lots, buildings, sidewalks, and streets. This will support planning with respect to housing, infrastructure, commercial corridor, and related planning priorities.
- Initial (baseline) assessment of resident perceptions of the neighborhood through a broad-based, systematic process with surveys like those offered through Success Measures. Organizations should also draw upon other research and evaluation measures or existing data to inform and supplement this initial assessment phase.
- Outreach and meetings to connect with residents, local elected officials, community leaders, and business owners. Meetings are a first step for community input as plans are also developed to build long-term resident leadership. To the best possible extent,

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involve residents that represent neighborhood demographics accurately. Taking an inclusive intergenerational, multi-racial, cultural, ethnic, language, and class approach is an encouraged best practice.

- Exploration of regulations: examination of zoning codes and other locale-specific rules and regulations.
- Big-picture assessment: consideration of local and regional trends as they relate to real estate, economics, employment, population demographics, and safety.

Typical Plan Components

Assessments

- Use of additional data from partners like Reinvestment Fund to pinpoint specific challenges and opportunities with respect to the geography of the neighborhood.
- Analysis of resident survey and public meeting feedback to summarize the neighborhood's strengths and challenges, determine residents' top priorities, common viewpoints, and topics most likely to generate disagreement.
- Provision of historical background of the community for context for the plan's priorities and strategies, including the abandonment or successful implementation of prior neighborhood plans.
- Identification and prioritization of human needs, such as family social services, job training, affordable housing, and social needs like preservation of cultural identity, community-building, and safety.
- Prioritization of economic development needs of local businesses and commercial corridors, where relevant.
- Consultation with community members about neighborhood history across multiple generations; determination of pathways and challenges to support neighborhood healing and health through lens of the past, present, and future.

Outcomes, Goals, and Objectives

- Identification of desired community level outcomes per residents, and other assessments as it relates to long-term, successful implementation of the plan. Outcomes often include people, places, and neighborhood systems. For example, long-term outcomes may be, "create greater community cohesion and sense of belonging," or, "a thriving, vibrant commercial corridor that meets the needs of the neighborhood."
- Development of specific goals and objectives that directly address the challenges and priorities identified during pre-planning and assessment, which will move the neighborhood toward shared outcomes that are achievable within a 5 -10-year time frame.
- Identification of performance measures -- milestones and quantifiable goals to be reached, primary and secondary data indicators for the outcomes.

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Cohesive strategy

- Development a document which outlines practical strategies that build on the neighborhood's identified strengths and resources to move from current conditions toward the stated outcomes.
- Explanations of potential barriers to implementation (putting the plan into action) and how they will be overcome or managed.
- Vetting of strategies with residents and other stakeholders to ensure the voices of the community are reflected, and revision of the list of strategies as needed.
- Identification of implementation partners and key residents / resident groups and details regarding their roles and how resident leadership development will be supported over time.

Implementation

- Development of timeline with discreet, phased steps followed by timeline vetting with stakeholders.
- Estimation of costs, with professional guidance (e.g. a consultant or partner) if needed, and outlining of a plan to fund implementation for the short and long term.
- Assignment of responsibilities for the lead organization and other partners.
- Outlining goals for the first five years with projected roles and responsibilities for partner organizations and other stakeholders.
- Development of resident-centered plans to shift the steering committee/community action team from a planning committee to a long-term advisory group tasked with overseeing and supporting the long-term implementation of the plan. Payment of residents for their time and on-the-ground expertise encouraged. Development of equitable, shared decision-making structures. Engagement with resident leadership training support provided by the foundation to strengthen these efforts.

Evaluation and Ongoing Engagement

- Assignment of responsibility for monitoring different components of plan implementation.
- Development of plan for long-term, meaningful resident participation and leadership development. Adaptation of goals and strategies to changing circumstances.
- Presentation of plan to appropriate municipal planning departments and other stakeholders, first and foremost, the community in which the plan will be implemented.
- Development of implementation plan for steering committee / board / advisory group.
- Creation and implementation of an evaluation plan that has clear measures for short-, mid- and long-term outcomes. Vetting of outcomes with committee and other residents to ensure it reflects the priorities and strategies set during the process.

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