

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES **TOOL**
Nutrition & Physical Activity **KIT**



I. Community Assessment

**COMMUNITY
CAPACITY**

TOOL HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

KIT Nutrition & Physical Activity



✓ Lessons learned

Community leaders from the cities of Moses Lake and Mount Vernon and project partner staff involved in the Healthy Communities Project share the valuable lessons they learned developing their action plans. They share their experience with other communities embarking on this challenging and exciting work.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT: COMMUNITY CAPACITY

- To be successful you need the backing of community leaders; the people who are influential and are the movers and shakers.
- There needs to be some kind of shared vision; in other words a vision of a community where people are healthier and feel proud of what their community has to offer (such as a safe and beautiful trail or a walkable, vibrant downtown area).
- Identify a group of citizens invested in improving their community; people who are willing to commit their time and energy.
- “It’s a bit of magic to find the right project, the right people, and the right timing”
- This work can only be started and continued if there is almost a religious fervor among community advocates. Will power alone does not lead to success. Advocates need to realize that there will be disappointments along with successes.

Community Building: What Makes It Work

A Review of Factors Influencing Successful Community Building

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This chapter provides an overview of the twenty-eight factors we identified that influence the success of community building. Based on our analysis of the research, the more these factors are present in a community, the more likely the success of a community building effort.

We have divided these factors into three categories:

1. *Characteristics of the Community.* These are the social, psychological, and geographical attributes of a community and its residents that contribute to the success of a community building effort.
2. *Characteristics of the Community Building Process.* These are factors that make up the process by which people attempt to build community, such as representation, communications, and technical assistance.
3. *Characteristics of Community Building Organizers.* These factors are the qualities of those people who organize and lead a community building effort, such as commitment, trust, understanding, and experience.

A brief description of each of the twenty-eight factors follows. In-depth descriptions of the factors, along with examples and practical applications of the factors, appear in Chapter Three.

1. Characteristics of the Community

1A. Community Awareness of an Issue

Successful efforts more likely occur in communities where residents recognize the need for some type of initiative. A community building effort must address an issue that is important enough to warrant attention, and which affects enough residents of a community to spark self-interest in participation.

1B. Motivation from within the Community

Successful efforts more likely occur in communities with smaller geographic areas where planning and implementing activities are more manageable.

1C. Small Geographic Area

Successful efforts are more likely to occur in communities with smaller geographic areas where planning and implementing activities are more manageable.

1D. Flexibility and Adaptability

Successful efforts are more likely to occur in communities where organized groups and individuals exhibit flexibility and adaptability in problem solving and task accomplishments.

1E. Pre-Existing Social Cohesion

Other things being equal, the higher the existing level of social cohesion (that is the strength of interrelationships among community residents), the more likely a community building effort will be successful.

1F. Ability to Discuss, Reach Consensus, and Cooperate

Successful efforts tend to occur more easily in communities that have a spirit of cooperation and the ability to discuss openly their problems and needs.

1G. Existing Identifiable Leadership

Successful community building efforts are more likely when there are at least some residents who most community members will follow and listen to, who can motivate and act as spokespersons, and who can assume leadership roles in a community building initiative.

1H. Prior Success with Community Building

Communities with prior positive experience with community building efforts are more likely to succeed with new efforts.

2. Characteristic of the Community Building Process

2A. Widespread Participation

Successful efforts occur more often in communities that promote widespread participation.

2B. Good System of Communication

Successful community building efforts tend to have well-developed systems of communication.

2C. Minimal Competition in Pursuit of Goals

Successful efforts tend to occur in communities where existing community organizations do not perceive other organizations or the leaders of a community building initiative as competitors.

2D. Develop Self-Understanding

Successful efforts are more likely to occur when the process includes developing a group identity, clarifying priorities, and agreeing on how to achieve goals.

2E. Benefits to Many Residents

Successful efforts are more likely if community goals, tasks, and activities have clear, visible benefits to many people in the community.

2F. Focus on Product and Process Concurrently

Community building initiatives are more likely to succeed when efforts to build relationships (the process focus) include tangible events and accomplishments (the product focus).

2G. Linkage to Organizations Outside the Community

Successful efforts are more likely to occur when members have ties to organizations outside the community.

2H. Progression from Simple to Complex Activities

Successful community building efforts are more likely when the process moves community members from simple to progressively more complex activities.

- 2I. Systematic Gathering of Information and Analysis of Community Issues**
Successful community building efforts more likely occur when the process includes taking careful steps to measure and analyze the needs and problems of the community.
- 2J. Training to Gain Community Building Skills**
Successful community building efforts more likely occur when participants receive training to increase their community building skills.
- 2K. Early Involvement and Support from Existing, Indigenous Organizations**
Successful community building efforts tend to occur most often in situations where community organizations of long tenure and solid reputations become involved early.
- 2L. Use of Technical Assistance**
Successful efforts more likely occur when community residents use technical assistance (experts providing consultation or hands-on training in their area of knowledge) to help residents gain competence in a particular area.
- 2M. Continual Emergence of Leaders, as Needed**
Successful community building efforts more likely occur when the process includes the means to produce new leaders over time.
- 2N. Community Control Over Decision Making**
Successful community building efforts more likely occur when residents have control over decisions, particularly over how funds are used.
- 2O. The Right Mix of Resources**
Successful community building efforts occur when the process is not overwhelmed by too many resources or stifled by too few, and when there is a balance between internal and external resources.

3. Characteristics of Community Building Organizers

3A. Understanding the Community

Successful community building efforts tend to have organizers who have a thorough understanding of the culture, social structure, demographics, political structure, and issues in the community.

3B. Sincerity of Commitment

Successful community building efforts more likely occur when organized by individuals who convey a sincere commitment for the community's well-being.

3C. A Relationship of Trust

Successful efforts are more likely to occur when the organizers develop trusting relationships with community residents.

3D. Level of Organized Experience

Successful community building efforts more likely occur when the organizers are experienced in the many facets of working with communities.

3E. Able to be Flexible and Adaptable

Successful community building efforts are more likely when the organizers are flexible and able to adapt to constantly changing situations and environments.