

Assignment 1 Discussion Page

Online Learning. OL 241 Writing Your Local Climate Action Plan:

<https://training.csd-i.org/climate-change-action-plan-global-warming-climate-challenges/>

Center for Sustainable Development: <https://training.csd-i.org/>

This week's resources:

Class Home Page 241

Download Class Documents

Assignment One Discussion

Assignment One Homework

Magee Example Project Assignment 1

A Field Guide to Community-Based Adaptation.

Field Guide 10.1. How to Do a Participatory Needs Assessment - Workshop Lesson Plan & Illustrations.

Chapter One. Community Needs Assessments and Project Outline. This is Assignment 1.

Getting Started. You might be taking this course as a representative of any number of types of organizations or communities. You might be a:

- member of a small town community interested in learning how to write a climate action plan
- member of a nonprofit organization that specializes in climate action planning
- member of a local government
- member of a tribal nation
- an individual interested in training in climate action planning to improve your chances of getting a job

So, just to simplify my writing and your reading, I'm going to pretend that you work for a nonprofit that specializes in climate action planning. So don't get worried if you see me referring to "your nonprofit" or "your organization" in these discussions. I will know who you really are when I read your assignments and offer comments.

Assignment 1. What's the real problem?

Developing a Climate Action Plan Based upon Participatory Needs Assessments

The goal of the first assignment is to determine community need based upon the vantage of community members. Why is this important to do? As donors or nonprofits—and as human beings we are all guilty of assuming that we know what is best. But what is best for us may not be what is best for another person from another town, county, or state. We need to understand and acknowledge their perception of their needs and challenges.

What is a community?

A community is the group of people that you plan to work with. A community could be the members of a small town, an association of cattle ranchers, or the members of a tribal nation.

What is a project?

After your Climate Action Plan is written and finalized, when you launch the plan, it will become a project. A project is a group of solution-oriented activities that you have theorized will provide long-term, sustainable solutions to community identified need. Your organization might focus on one specialized type of activity – such as agriculture, the environment, or water related issues. Or your organization might combine clusters of activities into more complex, multifaceted projects.

Why Participatory Needs Assessments?

There are several very positive reasons for encouraging your community to participate in:

1. The process of defining their needs/problems,
2. prioritizing their needs,
3. and choosing the solutions to be used in addressing their needs.

Let's look at a few of the reasons why inclusion is important:

1. Community members may have a greater depth of knowledge about their problems than we do, and so will be better able to identify both their challenges and important underlying causes for the challenges they face.
2. If they are engaged in the process of needs identification, and feel their voice has been heard, then they will have a sense of ownership for the process and the outcomes; this leads to long-term project sustainability.
3. Working with a community to address their needs will develop trust on their part in working with your organization on future projects or activities.

How to proceed

For the purposes of this course we are going to suggest a very simple Climate Action Plan concept. Once you learn the system you will be able to expand into more complex needs assessments and climate action plans.

In the Download Class Documents page you will see Field Guide 10.1. How to Do a Participatory Needs Assessment - Workshop Lesson Plan & Illustrations. This is a very simple, quick explanation of how to facilitate a participatory needs assessment.

This technique is very straightforward. As you read through the guide you will discover suggested activities that make it easy to facilitate.

First, we need to develop a relationship within the community.

Let's say you are planning to work in a small rural town. The first step is to meet with community members, or civic or business leaders and discuss your idea for writing a plan. With their support, you will be able to meet community members interested in participating in the Climate Action Plan.

Communities are diverse and we need to be sure that we are working with a representative example of its members. Each subgroup of community members will have their own set of needs; some members may even be self-serving. Plus, there are many stakeholders in the planning process: your organization, your donor, the local government, business leaders and of course the community members. Each stakeholder has their own mission. You can begin to see that with all of the different stakeholders involved, it can be difficult to assess and prioritize real community need. You will need to choose which groups will be the most representational of overall community need.

We also need to exercise some critical self evaluation

In an ideal setting, you would start your climate action plan by visiting a rural town, developing relationships, and then engaging community members in the needs assessment process. However, even your own organization will complicate this process by coloring it with its own set of circumstances. For example:

1. Your organization has a specialty. Let's say that you focus on agriculture. How do you balance your organization's specialization with needs defined by the community that aren't agricultural in nature?

Potential solutions: You could partner with another nonprofit on the set of needs that doesn't fit your specialization. Or, you could decide to expand your organization's capabilities and receive training in a new specialty.

2. You already have a grant award which was designed to fund specific activities, and the activities don't exactly match the needs that the community defined.

Potential solutions:

A. You could partner with another organization who does have funding for meeting the community-defined needs.

B. You could see if your donor would let you 'pull' some of the community identified need into a component of the grant funded project – or exchange one set of activities for another.

C. You could seek additional grant funding for a second project that will address these needs.

3. What if the community comes up with a top-priority need that you don't think is important, or don't think it will do any good?

Potential Solution: You will need to weigh the costs and time investment of their priority against building goodwill and trust between your organization and the community.

4. What if you are already working in a community and have an established relationship and an ongoing project with them:

Potential solution: A community needs assessment at this point may be an excellent idea. It can give your organization qualitative feedback about your programming. Remember, this is all about long-term sustainability; if your community isn't buying into your current programming, it might not last very long after you leave. So, a needs assessment will offer your organization two things: feedback for fine-tuning existing projects, and ideas for the Climate Action Plan.

Getting started

The Assignment One Homework will guide you through a simplified needs assessment process.