

Brief - Goal Setting

The goal-setting process that your neighborhood association uses will be unique because your group is unique. In its most basic form, goal-setting is a discussion among persons representative of your neighborhood (ethnic, occupational, age, etc.) about your neighborhood's needs and ideas on how to address those needs. Whatever the process used, it should enhance participation and build consensus while providing enough structure that effective discussion and results occur.

Most goal-setting processes start with the "big picture" and work down to the details. To give you an idea of what can be involved, a common type of goal-setting process is described below. It encourages a high level of participation by using small groups (up to 8 people), some basic rules, referees and a facilitator. The referees primarily keep discussion from bogging down in details too early in the process and prevent domination of the discussion by a few individuals. The facilitator ensures an open flow of ideas, helps clarify and summarize points, and generally keeps the group on track. The process occurs in stages, each building on the previous stage.

Set Up Your Targets

The group identifies broad areas of community concern such as education, land use, etc. It is useful to write these on a chalk board or paper so everyone can see them.

Prioritize

Next, the group names "burning" community issues that fall within the broad concerns. Now the group can narrow their focus to just a few issues. It's often helpful to point out how issues are inter-connected (i.e., housing stock might suffer because of a school closing or a street widening).

Define

Before the task of goal-setting, be sure to define the difference between goals, objectives and tasks. Goals are broad statements of purpose and objectives are more specific statements of purpose. Both goals and objectives should be measurable. Tasks are the actions undertaken to achieve the goals and objectives. For example, a goal could be improvement of landscaping in the neighborhood park, an objective could be replacement of old landscaping around the playground in the park and a task could be planting new shrubs and perennial flowers around the playground.

Listing Goals

Next, the group breaks into small groups, each appointing a moderator and a referee. Each small group will list 2 or 3 goals for each broad concern. To encourage greater participation, each person should write down their ideas (on 3x5 cards, for example) to share within their small group.

Prioritize Groups' Goals

Now, the moderator will present his/her small group's goals to the large assembly. The facilitator will help clarify goals if necessary and the assembly can vote for the top 3 or 4 goals for each broad concern.

Developing Objectives

Each small group will be assigned to a broad concern (education, zoning, etc.) with its top 3 or 4 goals. Each member of the small group will be given the opportunity to present 3 objectives relating to the goals and to justify them. Each group should end up with no more than 2 or 3 objectives per goal.

Prioritize Groups' Objectives

Each small group moderator presents the objectives developed in his/her group to the large assembly. The facilitator helps clarify the objectives if necessary. The whole group assigns priority levels to the suggested objectives, ranging from high (critical) to low (not a 6 factor). For the higher priority objectives, the small group process is used again to develop and list group tasks that will lead to accomplishment of the group's goals and objectives.

Developing and Prioritizing Tasks:

Once again the small groups and the group as a whole work together to identify and prioritize tasks that will accomplish the goals and objectives. When deciding what to do and when, the group needs to evaluate the resources available – time, money, and energy.

No matter what goal-setting process your neighborhood uses, it is important to stay flexible. Issues, resources and membership can and will change. To be a responsive neighborhood association, you will need to reflect those changes in your tasks, objectives and goals.