**Social Planning**

Sometimes, the impetus for community health and development efforts comes from social planners and policy makers. For instance, data on the level of diseases or educational outcomes may be used to raise issues on the public agenda. This section discusses how social planning approaches can inform change efforts.

**WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SOCIAL PLANNING AND POLICY CHANGE?**

Social planning is the process by which policymakers - legislators, government agencies, planners, and, often, funders - try to solve community problems or improve conditions in the community by devising and implementing policies intended to have certain results.  These policies may take the form of laws, regulations, incentives, media campaigns, programs or services, information - a wide range of possibilities.  A community or state Board of Health that adopts a regulation banning smoking in particular places, for example, is trying both to protect the public from second-hand smoke and to reduce smoking in general.

There is a long history in the U.S. and elsewhere of social planning. Traditionally, this has meant that policymakers decided what they thought was good for a community or a population, and imposed policy that was meant to bring about the results they wanted.  At best, this has meant programs that benefited large numbers of people - Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, Head Start, various public health programs.  At worst, social planning has been used largely for the benefit - economic or political - of the policymakers and their friends and supporters.

In other cases, well-intentioned planning has led to negative consequences. Urban renewal in the 1950s and '60s, for instance, by clearing "slum" neighborhoods, was meant to make cities into better places to live - safer, more attractive, and economically healthier. In fact, it often had that effect only for the people who moved into new housing and businesses after the original population had been displaced, and given nowhere else to go.  In many cases, it destroyed vital, unblighted communities.

Perhaps the most famous instance of this was the leveling of Boston's West End, an immigrant and first-generation neighborhood profiled in The Urban Villagers, a well-known sociological study by Herbert Gans (ironically, first published in 1962, two years after the neighborhood had disappeared).  Gans showed how this urban neighborhood functioned like a rural village, with social structures and institutions that made for a strong sense of community, even in the midst of a large, 20th Century city.  Generations of immigrants, particularly Italians and Eastern European Jews, had become Americans there, while retaining their cultural and family ties.

Far from being blighted, although it was composed largely of tenements, the neighborhood was a true community with a colorful and lively street life, beloved by its residents.  It was knocked down and replaced by a luxury apartment complex bounded by highways and surrounded by a chain-link fence.  A sign next to the apartment complex, meant to be seen by people stuck in traffic on one of the highways, reads "If you lived here, you'd be home now."  The residents of the West End had been "home now."  The fact that, 50 years later, those surviving still publish a newsletter and hold reunions demonstrates just how out of touch the planners were with what was "good for" them.

Social planning, however, doesn't have to take a wholly top-down form.  Starting in the 1960's, many social programs carried requirements for community participation in planning and implementing programs and initiatives. (The Model Cities Program, a cornerstone of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, is a prime example.) While these requirements were often honored more in the breach than in the observance, they acknowledged that social initiatives work better, and generate better policy, when those affected by them are involved in creating them.

**Importance of Social Planning:**

* **Ignorance of the community, and of the fact that what works in one community may not work in another.** Community social patterns, history (especially past attempts to deal with the issue in question), or economics may work, individually or in combination, to create a unique situation. That situation has to be understood before the creation of successful policy can follow.
* **Ignorance of the lives of those at whom the plan is aimed.** The cultural assumptions of immigrant groups, or those from particular ethnic or racial backgrounds, may be totally foreign to those engaged in planning for them.  Even if the division between the policymakers and the population at whom their policies are aimed is solely economic, there may be vast differences in the ways they see the world, as well as vast differences in the worlds they inhabit. If policymakers don't understand the culture and assumptions - and real needs - of the people they hope to affect, their policies are doomed to fail.
* **Unintended consequences that are not apparent initially.**  Sometimes, a plan or policy that seems positive on its face has results that are profoundly negative. The public housing complexes erected in the U.S. after World War II were meant to be clean, safe, comfortable residences for low-income citizens.  Instead, their institutional character and isolation from the mainstream life of their communities bred alienation and despair in their residents, and led to crime and horrible living conditions.
* **Policymakers' lack of experience in the field.**  Practitioners - especially those who also have academic credentials - know that the difference between theory and reality can often be vast.  When logical, best-possible-scenario initiatives or interventions come up against underfunding, street culture, political maneuvering, substance abuse, mistrust of outsiders, and turf battles, they don't always work the way planners think they should.

In addition, social planning can be used to further goals that have nothing to do with the welfare or advancement of those who are affected by them.  Such goals may be intended to benefit friends or supporters of powerful politicians, or merely to generate political capital.  In these cases, they are likely to be badly planned and administered, and to have little effect.  On the other hand, the goals may be appropriate and praiseworthy, but aren't effectively addressed because of a lack of skill or will on the part of those assigned to carry them out.  Citizen participation can help to prevent the social planning process from failing in these ways.

The Community Tool Box sees social planning and policy change as a partnership between the community and policymakers to create policy that brings about positive social change.  As a result, we will look at social planning and policy change from two angles:

* a.  From the **policymaker's** perspective, i.e., how to use the social planning process to create policy that achieves its goals with the best positive results for everyone in the community, as well as policymakers themselves.
* b.  From a **grassroots** perspective, i.e., how to approach policymakers at the beginning of the process, so that those in the community affected by the policy change can participate in planning and implementing it.

**WHY SHOULD POLICYMAKERS ENGAGE IN A PARTICIPATORY SOCIAL PLANNING PROCESS?**

We've already mentioned that many federal and other grants stipulate community participation as a requirement for funding.  We've also mentioned, however, that determined politicians can bypass that requirement by appointing "community boards" that merely rubber-stamp whatever policy the politicians put forth.  In addition, community participation, as we will discuss later in this section, is a process that demands time, commitment, organization, and a good deal of work from everyone concerned.  Why, then, is it worth it to policymakers - who usually have the ability to impose their own plans - to involve the community in social planning and policy change?

There are, in fact, a number of compelling reasons, both short- and long-term:

* **Community participation makes it more likely that you'll come up with policy that's effective.** Without the knowledge of the history and social structure of the community that community members can contribute, there's a risk of serious error.  Attempting to repeat something that didn't work in the past, or assuming that particular groups will work together, when actually they've been at odds for years, can undermine a community development effort before it starts.  Furthermore, community members can inform policymakers and planners of the real needs of the community, so that the most important problems and issues can be addressed.
* **Community participation leads to community ownership and support of whatever initiatives come out of a social planning effort.** When people have a hand in planning and decision-making, they feel that whatever plan is implemented is theirs, and therefore they'll strive to make it work.  The same is rarely, if ever, true about plans that are imposed on a community from outside.
* **Policymakers - particularly elected officials - can gain politically from involving the communit**y. They will be seen as respecting their constituents, and will also gain respect and credibility if initiatives they sponsor prove effective.  If they can help improve the quality of life for community members, their political capital will increase.
* **Community members can inform policymakers about changes in circumstances that demand changes in policy over time.**  What is effective or appropriate today may not be in five years.  Community participation puts eyes and ears in the community to pick up changes that policymakers may not be aware of, and to keep programs and initiatives from becoming outmoded or stale.
* **Community participation can create community relationships and partnerships among diverse groups who can then work together.** By involving all sectors of the community, it can bring together groups and individuals who would normally not have - or might not want - contact with one another, and help them understand where their common interests lie.
* **Community participation helps keep community building going over the long run.** By placing planning and decision-making power partly or wholly with the community, the process assures that those who started the effort will remain interested and involved, and not be distracted by other issues, or by changes in the political climate.
* **Community participation contributes to institutionalizing the changes brought about by changes in policy.** Community members are far more likely to buy into policy that's been created with the participation of all sectors of the community.  Their support over time will lead to permanent change.
* **Community participation energizes the community to continue to change in positive directions.** Once community members see what they can accomplish, they will be ready to take on new challenges. Community participation can change their attitude about what is possible - probably the single most important element to creating change.

WHY SHOULD THE COMMUNITY ENGAGE IN A PARTICIPATORY SOCIAL PLANNING PROCESS?

While it would might seem obvious that communities and grassroots groups would want to participate in planning and carrying out policy, that's not always the case.  They may feel it's someone else's problem, or that they simply don't have the time or energy to be involved in a planning effort.  People who haven't had the opportunity to be decision-makers often find the prospect intimidating.  Because they haven't had experience in functioning in meetings, planning, and other similar activities, they feel awkward, and find it easier to let others make the decisions.  They may also feel that they have little to contribute, or that they won't be listened to even if they are at the table.

It can take time and effort to make it possible for community members to contribute. They may need training and/or mentoring in order to become comfortable with the procedures and assumptions of a [participatory process](http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/analyze/where-to-start/participatory-approaches/main). They may have the skills to participate, but need to be motivated to do so. Establishing trust in the process and the policymakers may require a lot of community organizing - door-to-door canvassing, personal conversations, small meetings in people's houses - before the community is ready to take on the risk or the burden of participation.

The rewards for the community, however, can be great. Many of the reasons for the community to embrace participation are reflections of the reasons why policymakers would want it.  Some of them are:

* **Participation provides the opportunity to educate policymakers to the community's real needs and concerns.**  As we've discussed, when policymakers plan a vacuum, their plans usually fail, because they don't account for the realities of the situation and the real needs of the population they're aimed at.  Community members can help policymakers understand their lives - the difficulties they face, the strengths they bring, and what they feel must be addressed.
* **Participation allows community members to help create policy that really works to meet their needs.**  By participating in their development, community members can see policies put in place that actually improve their lives, rather than having no effect or imposing added burdens on them.
* **Participation affords community members the respect they deserve.**  Rather than being seen as victims or nuisances, community members engaged in a participatory social planning process are seen as colleagues and concerned citizens working to improve their community.  They are respected both as human beings - as should always be the case, but often isn't - and for the skills, knowledge, and effort they contribute to the process.
* **Participation puts community members in control of their own fate.**  The participatory social planning and policy development process results in citizens deciding what policies will work for them, and gives them the opportunity to change those policies if they're not working.  It puts into practice the motto of the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council in Chicago, founded by legendary organizer Saul Alinsky: "We, the people, will work out our own destiny."
* **Participation builds community leadership from within.**  Those who take part in the process both learn and exercise leadership skills, and also start to see themselves as having the capacity to be leaders.  The most important step to leadership, and to taking action to influence events that affect you, is to believe that you have the ability to do so.
* **Participation energizes the community to take on other issues or policy decisions in the future, and to see itself as in control of its future.**  Thus, the community development process will continue over time.
* **Participation leads to long-term social change.**  As community members take more control over more areas of their lives, as a result of the skills and attitudes gained from the participatory process, they will create and institutionalize changes that improve the quality of life for everyone in the community.

"Community participation" can mean different things to policymakers and to community activists.  As discussed briefly above, policymakers can pay lip service to community participation while getting around it or ignoring it.  There are, in fact, levels of community participation, and each might be appropriate at different times and in different circumstances.

**WHEN IS SOCIAL PLANNING AND POLICY CHANGE APPROPRIATE?**

Unlike locality development and social action, the other two types of community organizing discussed in this chapter, social planning originates with policymakers or their contractors.  From a policymaker's point of view, social planning is appropriate when:

* The community asks for it. A community problem may have reached the point where the community feels something needs to be done, and doesn't feel it knows what that is, or that it has the resources to do it. It may ask policymakers or an outside source for help.
* An issue or problem has reached crisis proportions, and it's obvious to everyone that something must be done.  It sometimes takes one or more specific events - the riots in many American cities in the spring of 1968, for instance, or the 9/11 terrorist attack - to set a social planning process in motion.  In other cases, however, the process may be a response to an ongoing condition ( e.g., rising unemployment, or increasing youth crime).
* There is a long-standing major issue - poverty, violence, housing, hunger, etc. - that has attracted policymakers' attention. Because of media publicity or public opinion, elected officials, agencies, or others in a position to do something about it feel the need to respond.

Extreme poverty has always existed in the U.S., but President Johnson's War on Poverty was spurred in part by the 1962 publication of Michael Harrington's book *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*.  The book shocked many Americans, who had been unaware of how serious the problem was, and forced the government to take action.

* There are resources made available to address the issue.  The federal, state, or local government may decide to appropriate funds for a specific purpose, for instance, or a large foundation might turn its attention - and financial resources - to a specific issue.

The Gates Foundation is currently putting huge amounts of money into eradicating various diseases in the developing world, a fact that makes it necessary to create structures for evaluating research, distributing medication, teaching prevention techniques, and otherwise spending the money effectively.

* A powerful figure - a president or prime minister, a leader in Congress or Parliament, a governor, a mayor - is concerned about a particular problem, issue, or population, and determines to do something about it.
* A strategic or economic planning process that policymakers engage in determines that a particular issue must be addressed, or that particular communities or populations need some kind of assistance.
* It becomes apparent - on the municipal, state or provincial, or federal level - that there is a general economic, social, and/or environmental downhill slide that needs to be stopped.

Social planning can be appropriate from a community perspective at all these times as well.  If the community has not already initiated some action - either to address the problem or to get help in doing so - it may need outside assistance in order for anything to happen.

**(Start here) WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN SOCIAL PLANNING AND POLICY CHANGE?**

Again, social planning is different from both locality development and social action. In locality development, all sectors of the population in a town or area - rich and poor, young and old, male and female, all races and ethnicities, etc. - should be represented in the effort.  In social action, the necessary participants are only individuals and organizations that represent the particular population that is working to gain power.  The number and character of the important participants in a social planning process fall somewhere between these two extremes.

For social planning to work well, both policymakers and all stakeholders should at least be invited to participate; the more are actually represented, the better. "Stakeholders" is a term that includes all of those directly affected in some way by the potential policy changes or by the issues under discussion. Some examples of stakeholders include:

* Those whom a policy is meant to benefit.
* Those whom a policy is meant to control in some way. Land use policy, for instance, may place restrictions on developers, so they should be represented in discussing and creating it, although their voice should not dominate.  They are one interested party among many.
* Those who will have to administer or enforce the policy.
* Those who work with or serve a population that is directed affected by a policy. This category may include health or human service workers, educators, clergy, etc.
* Organizations or businesses that stand to gain or lose revenue or other resources, or will have to alter their mode of operation because of a potential change in policy.
* Policymakers and public officials.

Although policymakers are usually public officials, that is not always the case. A large corporation develops and implements internal policies that may affect thousands of people. Individuals or organizations that own large tracts of land or important buildings may institute policies about their use that have an impact on whole municipalities.

HOW CAN POLICYMAKERS ENGAGE EFFECTIVELY IN SOCIAL PLANNING AND POLICY CHANGE?

As a policymaker, you may have concerns over and above the outcomes of whatever policy you establish. You probably have to keep an eye on costs, deadlines, political fallout, and other factors that influence policy, but don't necessarily relate to whether a particular policy is workable, or whether it benefits or harms those it's aimed at.  It may be tempting to skip community participation entirely, and simply create a plan and impose it on the community.

As tempting as it is to save time and be "efficient," it usually makes more sense to spend the time necessary to have everyone involved enthusiastically backing - or at least accepting - any new policy and willing to support it when it is put in place. You're likely to be most successful if you think and behave more like a community organizer, and less like an expert who knows what's good for the community.

Community participation is an important goal for almost any community organizer, and community participation starts one person at a time. In the previous section, we describe the process for making contacts, building trust in the community, and ultimately involving all sectors in community assessment and in the planning, carrying out, and evaluation of activities and policies aimed at improving the quality of life.  Policymakers, if they're serious about community involvement and participation, should engage in that process as well.

As a policymaker, you have advantages and disadvantages in this process. You're a known quantity, so people are not likely to be confused about your involvement, but since you're a known quantity, with a reputation in the community that may not always be positive, you may be distrusted from the start. You'll have to overcome that, and convince people of your good will in order to get anything going, which may lead them to fear contact with anyone official.

For these reasons, and because you're coming into a community with an idea of what area you're going to address, the process of organizing is a little different than it might be for either locality development (Section 2 of this chapter) or social action (Section 4).  Something is going to go forward; the organizing task here is to involve the community, and particularly stakeholders, as much as possible in every phase of the effort, and to be guided, to the greatest extent feasible, by their knowledge and needs.

There's a fine line here.  The fact that people are community members doesn't mean that they necessarily have good answers to all their problems, or to the issues facing them.  It does mean, however, that they generally have the best perspective on what their lives are like in relation to those problems and issues, and on what actually happens in the community.  If you want the community to run the effort completely - and community-run efforts can be extremely effective - you may have to sponsor or provide some training for those participating.  This depends greatly on the community, but if the one in question includes many low-income residents, or many immigrants whose language or culture is significantly different from that of the general population, you may find that a lot of people need some support in order to participate fully.

Once people become relatively sophisticated about what is possible and about dealing with the various systems - political, financial, social and otherwise - they're more likely to be able to find their own solutions.  A community that's already had experience in this area is probably ready to undertake an effort on its own, and might need only financial and/or political support.  One that's never had the experience, or even been offered the opportunity, will need much more.

It's absolutely crucial to be respectful and to treat community members as partners, but that doesn't mean sacrificing best practices or your past experience, any more than it means ignoring the community.  It's a delicate balance, but if you can strike it properly, both you and the community will be pleased with the process and the results.

You may be working through one or more local organizations, or through a government or other agency that has a presence in the community.  Your credibility may depend on that of the organization or agency, so choose carefully.  If the only consideration is political, you may end up with a process that has no concern for community participation, or even active opposition.  (Chicago's Mayor Richard Daley got around the community participation requirement in the Model Cities Program by appointing a "community representative" board of political hacks that answered only to him.)

The bottom line is that people have to believe you're serious about including them, and you have to be serious about it. If you promise community involvement and don't follow through, or provide only token participation, whatever trust-building you've done will probably evaporate, and you'll have start over again. Once again, see[**Tool #1**](http://ctb.ku.edu/node/1550)for a full discussion of the levels of community participation, what they imply, and how and when they might be used.

HOW-TO STEPS FOR POLICYMAKERS TO INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY:

The steps below refer to policymakers as "you."  The "you" here might be the policymaker herself, or whoever has initiated the social planning process.  The actual people doing the "organizing" might be employees of a public agency, the staff of a community-based organization funded to help develop local policy on a particular issue, local officials, etc.

* **Make contact with agencies, organizations, and individuals that know the community well, and use their knowledge and credibility to ease your way in.**  They can help you to avoid making the kinds of tactical errors that your lack of familiarity with the community can easily lead to.   They can also introduce you to the people whose opinions matter to those whom you want to involve, as well as to potential participants.  
  + The same caution applies here as applies for all community organizers: make sure you're getting all sides of the story and making contact with all the people you need to.  Community leaders, for instance, may not want, at least initially, to work with gang leaders on ending youth violence, but if the gang leaders aren't involved, it's unlikely that the effort will go anywhere.  Spread your network wide, and use all your contacts to make sure you're reaching everyone, not just those that your initial contacts want you to.
* **Make your goals and process clear in small meetings that lead up to a larger one.**  Meet both with formal groups - clubs, fraternal organizations, sports teams, faith-based groups, participants in health and human service programs, unions and other workers' groups, classes - and with families and groups of friends in people's living rooms or similar informal settings.  Take a trusted community member with you, or make sure one is hosting or attending the meeting, to vouch for you.
* [Hold a community meeting](http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/leadership/group-facilitation/main)**to explain your purpose and start recruiting community members to participate in assessment and planning.** Encourage as many of the people you've talked to as possible to attend, and plan to ask for a commitment from people who are willing to be involved in the process.  It might make sense for a someone local to convene and run the meeting - a respected community leader or community member, or a particularly good facilitator.
  + The meeting should explain clearly the issue or problem that needs to be addressed, and the participatory process by which you intend to address it. The audience should have an opportunity to ask questions, and should be asked for their thoughts on the issue, on what kinds of outcomes they'd like to see, and on how the process might take place. This is the time to recruit members of the planning group, and to ask people to pull in others they know.  Ideally, you've already gotten a train of support through the smaller meetings.  With this large meeting, the goal is to get the community at large on board and agree to be involved.
* **Schedule the next community meeting, and start the planning process.** You should continue to hold community meetings at regular intervals to inform those who aren't directly involved in the planning about what's happening.  At the same time, a planning group, representing all the sectors and groups that will be affected by the policies they come up with, should begin to meet to hash out logistics (meeting times and places, a timeline), procedures (how decisions are made, how and by whom the process will be coordinated), and define their task.  Part of the groups' job at the beginning is to determine what kind of support it needs. Will members need training? Are there things that they should know (best practices, for instance, or the results of research on the issue)?  
  + The composition of the planning group is important. It should be truly representative of all stakeholders, and that may mean you or members of the group have to recruit or persuade others to join.  People opposed to the process should be included, even though that may seem like a bad idea.  If the group establishes proper ground rules at the beginning, it should be possible to conduct productive discussion, and for those with opposing ideas to feel that the process is fair and inclusive, even if their ideas are not adopted.
* **Provide whatever training or support is necessary.** Depending on the people involved, you may want to pair less-educated or low-income folks with mentors from health or human service agencies, or simply to provide training in meeting skills, strategic planning, conflict resolution, and/or other areas to everyone, to avoid singling out any individual or group. Training and support serve at least two purposes: to make sure all involved have the intellectual and social tools they need for the task at hand; and to ensure the continued involvement of all the groups affected, not just those who are educated and used to participating in meetings and social processes.
  + Depending upon the scope of the change you're concerned with and the level of community involvement you're aiming for, you may not need to go through all these steps.  In some cases, just keeping the community informed - through regular meetings, the media, an e-mail list - may be enough.  In others, one or two public meetings with the opportunity for community input may be all you need. If you're hoping for full participation, however, taking the steps above makes sense.

HOW CAN COMMUNITIES ENGAGE EFFECTIVELY IN SOCIAL PLANNING AND POLICY CHANGE?

As we've discussed, there are several sections of the Community Tool Box that deal with how communities can initiate policy change. When the initiative comes from policymakers, the situation is somewhat different, since the issue of community participation may not be on the planner's agenda.  So in good measure, it's up to community leaders and activists to raise the issue and make sure the community becomes part of the process. If policymakers resist the idea, and can't be swayed by logic or argument, then it may be time to switch to social action mode.  It's generally far more productive, however, if policymakers and the community can work as partners, rather than as adversaries.

**HOW-TO STEPS FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS AND ACTIVISTS TO ENSURE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

* **Get to know and**[**maintain contact with policymakers**](http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/direct-action/relationships-with-legislators-aides/main)**from the beginning, so that when issues of policy arise, you'll have an open communication line.**  Congresspersons, state legislators, city councilors, county commissioners, mayors aldermen, selectmen, members of municipal boards - all are concerned with what citizens think, and all are accessible at least some of the time.  If you make the effort, you can meet them and get to know them well enough so that they'll recognize you in a crowd, return your phone calls, and be willing to discuss issues with you.  When they initiate a policy change process, you'll be able to approach them about [making it participatory](http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/encouragement-education/formal-communications/main), and be heard.
* **Try to anticipate the community's policy needs, and approach policymakers before they have decided to act.**  As a community member, you're apt to know more about the community than a policymaker, and to know what's needed and when. If you [initiate the conversation about policy change](http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/encouragement-education/proposal-for-change/main), you may have a much better chance of initiating a participatory planning process as well.
* **Equip yourself with as much information as possible, both about the benefits of a participatory process and about the issue itself.** Read the research and literature about social change policy and inclusive, [participatory process.](http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/advocacy-research/overview/main) Learn what other communities have done, search the web for best practices, etc. The more knowledge you have, the more convincing you can be.
* **Mobilize the community.**  Preach the gospel of participatory process to your fellow citizens, so that they'll stand with you in demanding to be involved in any policy decisions that affect them.  If it's obvious that the community wants to be involved, it is ready to put in the necessary work, and will support the implementation of the resulting policy, it will be hard for policymakers to resist.