TOPIC: FIXATION OF PRIORITIES IN COMMUNITY PLANING FOR SOCIAL WELFARE"

WHAT IS PRIORITY SETTING?

"Priority is the order of importance in which one thing falls in relation to another. Like a set of criteria, priorities may change with changes in community, or with changes in people's concerns or knowledge."

When a community assessment has uncovered a number of issues such as health, economics and racial attitudes-developing a set of criteria for deciding how important each one is to address is crucial to effective action. Without considering what its standards are beforehand, a planning group may be reduced to each   member's intuition or particular pet issues, and descend into argument and eventual chaos.

The aim of the priority-setting process is to select among different options for addressing the most important needs. The process of priority-setting is inherently political; it is a process where societal values and goals are important, and resulting priorities reflect a compromise among stakeholders, including the population indeed, citizens are the principals and decision-makers of the priority-setting process. The priority-setting exercise generally follows a situation analysis and precedes decisions on resource allocation and planning.

COMMUNITY PLANING AND SOCIAL WELFARE

COMMUNITY PLANING:

"Community planning is a practice that is engaged in by numerous disciplines: community work, urban planning, macro social work, architecture, urban geography, community psychology, environmental psychology, community psychiatry."

A study of the practice of community planning in the various disciplines leads to the conclusion that despite their similar means and the fact they are influenced by the same social processes, almost no dialogue exists among the various professions engaged in community planning.

In community work, planning is often discussed under several names: community planning, social planning, and neighborhood planning. Community planning may be divided into planning that focuses on service and projects and planning that focuses on people.

SOCIAL WELFARE:

Definition: "Social Welfare can be defined as the group of assistance programs designed to ensure the wellbeing of a nation's citizens. In other words, it is a system that aims to provide quality care to society participants."

There are many different social welfare programs and they are implemented very differently depending on the country that we are looking at. There are unemployment care programs, elderly-people programs, retirement programs; assistance for disabled.

WHY DEVELOP AND USE CRITERIA AND PROCESSES TO SET PRIORITIES?

- It creates a structure that makes setting priorities more systematic and more likely to reflect the realities of the community.
- It helps ensure the most important issues for your community are addressed. Using a set of criteria and a good decision-making process makes it much more probable that you'll get the priorities right.
- It provides an opportunity to involve the community in the effort and to get community buy-in. Any effort is far more likely to succeed if the community feels ownership of it and supports it.
- An inclusive criteria-setting process makes sure you don't miss anything that only stakeholders know. Community members, especially those most affected by issues, may have a clearer understanding of what's important to the community and of which issues actually have the greatest impact on people's lives.
- Establishing criteria in a structured and inclusive way ensures that the process is an open one, and that any concerns are raised. It is essential to include those who are most affected by the problem.
- The process of selecting criteria allows an opportunity to educate stakeholders who may not have had this kind of experience before about how to make informed, systematic decisions

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY DEVELOPING AND USING CRITERIA AND PROCESSES TO SET PRIORITIES?

First, let's define some terms:"Criteria are standards for making a judgment. They provide guidelines for making decisions. They aren't set in stone: the criteria you use for examining a particular set of issues may be different from those you us for another set, depending on the community you're aiming at, the conditions that are in place at the time of the decision, the needs and concerns of the people making the decision, and other factors.".

There are two sets of criteria needed here. One will provide the guidelines for choosing one or more issues to work on. The second will help you determine what strategies and approaches are likely to be most effective in addressing the issues you've chosen. We'll suggest some examples of each in the "how-to" part of the section.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING AND USING CRITERIA AND PROCESSES TO SET PRIORITIES?

We've discussed involving all stakeholders…but just who are the stakeholders? There are several categories to be considered.Those most affected by community issues and/or inequities. This category may include anyone, but most often involves groups with less power and influence.

- People of low income
- Diverse people and ethnicities, including immigrants
- Youth
- Seniors
- People with disabilities
- People living in substandard housing
- Those most seriously at risk from or affected by particular health, economic, or social conditions
- Those most seriously affected by negative environmental conditions
- ❖ Organizations and institutions that serve or otherwise deal with those groups, including:
- Health and human service providers, such as hospitals, welfare agencies, homeless shelters, and other community-based organizations
- Faith communities
- The business community, which needs access to a healthy and educated workforce
- Schools and post-secondary institutions
- Community coalitions
- ❖ Those charged with carrying out or otherwise implementing proposed interventions, changes in policies or regulation, or preventative measures. These might include:
- Staff of health and human service providers
- School personnel
- Public officials
- ❖ Those whose jobs or lives will be affected by interventions, policy changes, or preventive measures. Some examples:
- Police, who may have to respond to more calls,
- Landlords, who may be required to address substandard housing issues

- Medical professionals, teachers, or others
  - ❖ Citizens concerned with the issue(s) at hand, including activists, academics, and professionals in fields related to the issues or populations of concern.
  - ❖ Local and other funders, such as United Way, state agencies, and foundations

WHEN SHOULD YOU DEVELOP AND USE CRITERIA AND PROCESSES TO SET PRIORITIES?

It is ideal to start creating a process to develop criteria for prioritizing issues as soon as you decide to conduct a community assessment. The process will go more smoothly if you've discussed and agreed upon criteria beforehand. Having an effective participatory decision-making process agreed to by community stakeholders as early in the process as possible is essential.

HOW DO YOU DEVELOP AND USE CRITERIA AND PROCESSES TO SET PRIORITIES?

Assemble a participatory group representative of all stakeholders. The first step is to ensure participation and buy-in from the community by inviting stakeholders and other interested individuals and groups to constitute a planning group. Check with group members to make sure that there aren't others who should be at the table. Make sure particularly that those most affected by community issues are represented, since their voices are the ones most often ignored. If only "leaders" – directors of organizations, CEOs, public officials, etc. – are part of the group, it's likely that the community won't feel ownership of the effort, and that the plan and intervention that result may not speak to the real needs of the people at whom they're aimedIdentify the interests of various stakeholder groups in relation to the process of setting priorities and using them to plan the implementation of an intervention or initiative. Depending on their perspective – as health or human service providers, as part of the population affected by community issues, as public officials, etc. – their interests might have to do with:

- The openness and fairness of the process
- The use of a democratic process
- The creation of a forum where all voices can be heard
- The feasibility of the plan and of affecting the targeted issues
- The costs of the plan
- The use of proven practices
- Whether individual or organizational certification can be obtained or enhanced by taking part in the effort
- The involvement of particular organizations or groups

- The need for funding or matching funds
- The necessity of a plan that will address stakeholders' specific areas of concern
- The necessity of addressing social determinants
- The importance of being respectful of all and of their concerns, even when there's disagreement

Establish a process for engaging stakeholders and the broader community in setting priorities for issues to address.

Once you have a list of criteria, you'll have to decide how to apply them in determining the priority order of the issues you've identified in your community assessment. Creating a process for doing so will make for smoother and more effective decision-making.

- Review the criteria and ensure that everyone understands and continues to agree on them.
- Discuss the issues in question; again making sure that everyone understands them and their implications. Some issues may in fact be eliminated as potential targets as a result of this discussion.
- For each issue, discuss whether an issue is strategic or not – i.e., whether addressing it is feasible, whether it has larger implications, whether it ties into other efforts, whether addressing it will bring other benefits, etc.
- Individually or in small groups, rate each issue in terms of its importance and the feasibility of affecting it.
- Discuss the ratings as a group, examining whether some issues can be consolidated – i.e., considered as a single issue, or as two or more issues that could be addressed by a single intervention.
- Using the criteria the group agreed upon, rank order the issues and select the highest three to five

Establish criteria for selecting an approach to address each of your priority issues. Possible criteria might include:

- Cost-benefit
- Feasibility of carrying out the approach
- The likelihood that the approach will resolve the issue
- The fit of the approach with the efforts/organization's/institution's vision and mission
- The fit of the approach with community standards
- The compatibility of the approach with efforts already ongoing

- Whether the approach is a best or promising practice tried successfully elsewhere
- The availability of people with the expertise to carry out the approach or to train others to do so
- The availability of community assets that can be used in this approach
- The availability of adequate resources to be effective
- **<u>Establish a process for selecting approaches</u>**: Once again, you have choices to make. The basic process here is likely to be very similar to the one you used to choose the issue(s) to work on.Review the criteria for selecting approaches that you agreed on, and make sure that everyone understands them clearly and still agrees.
- Discuss the possible approaches in terms of their history of success, their fit with the community context and standards, their appropriateness in relation to your mission, etc.
- Individually or in small groups, rate the possibilities by how well they're likely to work and how feasible they would be to implement.
- Discuss the ratings as a group, considering whether one or more approaches might be consolidated or combined.
- Rank order and select priorities, using the same method as that used for prioritizing issues.
- From the top choices, vote on which approaches to use.

<u>Finalize your choices</u>: Make sure you've considered such factors as what else is going on in the community, where your resources are likely to come from, who might best implement the effort, and whether people will have to be hired for the purpose.Make sure as well that your final decisions are truly agreed-upon and participatory. As we've discussed, there are likely to be people in the group who have little experience with this kind of process, and who may be reluctant to speak up, especially if they disagree with the majority. Yet they may have information or emotional reactions that are extremely important because of their grounding in the community. It's essential that the planning group's facilitator makes sure to draw them out and that the group supports them in speaking out, regardless of the substance of their comments.If you are working with more than one issue, try to identify factors that relate to all of them. You may find that, rather than approaching issues directly, you can be more effective by directing efforts toward social determinants or root causes that affect issues "upstream." Looking at health issues, for example, a focus on environmental changes to enhance access to healthy food for all can help reduce cardiovascular disease and health disparities.

<u>Look for ways in which your issue and approach might mesh with other community efforts:</u> Look for overlap or ways to share work or collaborate with other efforts. If parts of your approach or initiatives aimed at your target are already in place and successful, make

sure you're working together rather than at cross purposes, and that you're not trying to reinvent the wheel. The more collaborative your approach, the more likely that everyone in the community will be positively affected.

Be prepared to monitor your effort and change priorities as conditions change: Communities continue to develop and change and your effort should change as well if it's no longer addressing the needs that are most urgent and most important to community members. You can use your criteria and your processes whenever you think you might need to change direction The possibility of collaboration or shared workload

Determine Priorities and Plan the Program

Addressing all the unmet needs and access issues identified in the needs assessment is rarely feasible. Therefore, it necessary to identify the needs that are of highest priority for the community. Determining health priorities helps direct resources to the programs that matter most to communities. Additionally, legitimate documented needs, including those that cannot be immediately addressed, can be useful for responding quickly to funding opportunities that may become available in the future.Several priorities may be identified, some to be addressed immediately and others to be dealt with later. It is important to reach consensus on oral health priorities and to then create realistic objectives to address these priorities. A thorough priority-setting process that is inclusive and documented can help garner widespread support and endorsement for subsequent actions.

A. Prioritize Needs: The process of prioritizing needs is best accomplished by a group of stakeholders who have reviewed the analysis of assessment data, understand the issues, and are knowledgeable about the community. The more inclusive the process, the larger the group of stakeholders who will take ownership of the problem and of proposed solutions. The community oral health coalition can act as the core group for this process while involving other interested stakeholders. Although it is essential to focus efforts to make tasks manageable and to show results, with so many competing priorities it is often difficult to determine where to channel resources. To differentiate among competing priorities, it is useful to establish criteria or guidelines for use in discussions about priorities. Before discussions begin, it is important to ensure that everyone involved understands and accepts the criteria for recommending and adopting priorities.

The following criteria may be helpful in making decisions about priorities:

Impact of Addressing the Problem: Assess the feasibility and impact of addressing the problem, and correlate the two. For example, the needs assessment may have identified a lack

of oral health services available for young children. Stakeholders would then determine the feasibility and perceived impact of addressing this problem.

The Size or Extent of the Problem: Assess and compare the perceived size or extent of the problem (e.g., how many individuals are affected), the seriousness of the problem, and the feasibility of implementing evidenced-based interventions that will result in improved outcomes.

Indicators: Compare local oral health indicators to national oral health indicators. Use a ranking system to identify indicators as "better than," "same as," or "worse than," and then arrive at a consensus about where the community should focus its efforts.

Availability of Acceptable Interventions: Assess the availability of interventions, the feasibility of implementing such interventions, and their acceptability for addressing a problem or issue using the Priority Rating System for Public Health Programs (PEARL) Framework, a tool for assessing the socioeconomic, legal, and political viability of various interventions.