

Strategies for Achieving Results – Technical Assistance Notes 07/15/08

Question: What is a community strategy?

Answer: A community strategy is an array of mutually supported and integrated programs, services and activities, both formal and informal, that are linked to measurable indicators and tailored to meet the needs of a targeted population.

Question: How do we develop strategies that are an array of mutually supported and integrated programs - coordinated among organizations and community networks?

Answer: Use systems thinking to recognize connections between organizations and practices that also impact the problem at hand. For example, when thinking about drop-out rates, if we use systems thinking we start to think about all of the facets of a community which impact the drop-out individuals ... school performance, geography, parental financial status, age, housing, availability of after school programs. This systems thinking then leads us to think about an array of programs/services/activities (both formal and informal) which could address the problem.

Question: What exactly is 'systems' thinking?

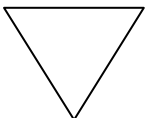
Answer: The ability to see the relationships between system elements and to anticipate how these elements affect each other.

Question: Who should decide which strategies to recommend?

Suggestion: The people who make the best decisions about needed strategies are those who are impacted by the strategy itself. Consider how your community can include: lay people, those concerned and affected, unusual 'suspects' and usual 'suspects'.

Question: When determining the strength of data, how do we get beyond the fact that data can be inherently incomplete, out-of-date, or not completely reliable?

Suggestion: Think about the concept of **Triangulation of data**. If data from three separate sources is all reflecting the same picture or pointing toward the same conclusion, then reliability is increased.



Question: If our town's data doesn't look that bad in comparison to State data or even data from neighboring/similar communities, how do we show our need?

Suggestion: Consider disaggregating the data to find where the needs lies. For example, maybe an average statistic will be more revealing when looking at a demographic or ethnic breakdown of the same statistic. Also consider simply presenting data alone and not comparing it to other towns or the state. If Windsor data is the same as the State's average, that doesn't mean it's acceptable.

Question: How do we get beyond the fact that data can be boring, tedious and may not speak with the urgency that we feel in our community?

Suggestion: Find the compelling stories behind the data. It's easy to ignore numbers, but it's difficult to ignore people.

Question: How do we find commonality with other organizations in town?

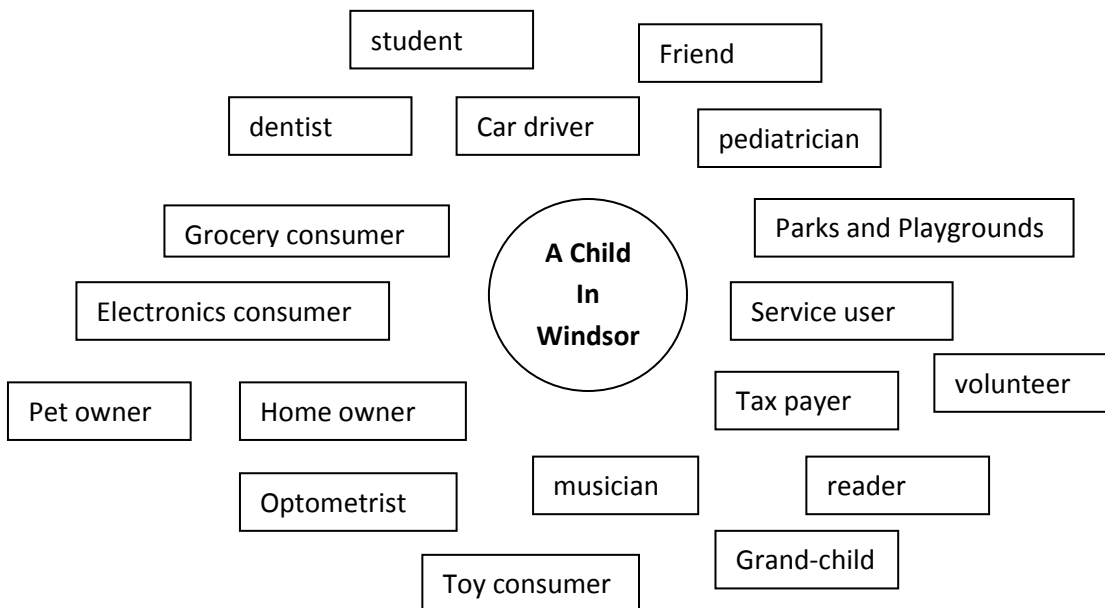
Suggestion: Consider finding the mission/vision statements of the other organizations in town and seeing how they overlap. For example, The Kiwanis is "A global organization of volunteers dedicated to changing the world one child and one community at a time." Certainly this is a basis for discussing common goals and possibilities for collaboration.

Question: How do we engage others in the community who are difficult to engage?

Suggestion: Consider these ideas:

- Ask "How can we help you?"
- Give examples of where this project has helped other communities
- Ask the other for advice
- Have an assumptive attitude about the topic. For example, if inviting someone to participate, assume that their answer will be 'yes' in approaching them. This could minimize any non-verbal message someone might hear like: "I'm going to ask them to come, but I'm sure they'll be too busy .."

A child and a few of the potential life-long 'impact points' in town



Litmus Test for effective strategies

Does the strategy:

- Relate to desired result(s)
- Contribute toward reducing risk factors and/or increasing a protective factor?
- Respond to the culture of the community and/or neighborhood
- Support and empower families?
- Reflect family-centered practice?
- Include integrated rather than discrete programs, services and activities?
- Include a continuum of services and supports, such as prevention, early intervention and remediation?
- Include formal and informal programs services, activities and resources?
- Build on the strengths of the current systems?
- Mitigate weaknesses of the current systems
- Is it feasible?