Checklist of Basic Process for Planning a community initiative

Before starting to plan a results-based community initiative, it is crucial to take the time to ensure leadership support from throughout the community. Many types and levels of leadership are necessary for an effort to succeed and endure.

Leadership:

Two levels of leadership are involved in the process:

1.   Leadership team: a public-private multi-disciplinary team of individuals at a high enough level to authorize and approve action plans.

2.   Advisory Committee or Planning and Action Committee-public private multi-disciplinary team comprised of mid-level leaders who can meet regularly to develop and implement strategic plans. This team would also be the ones to plan and facilitate community convenings.

Stakeholders:

Leadership is significant but engaging vital stakeholders in leadership, action, and design and evaluation roles, including youth, families, employers, neighborhood residents, civic leaders, non-profit organizations, businesses, law enforcement, governmental agencies, and others. Those affected by gang and community violence should be given a seat at the table to shape their futures. Different people will bring different perspectives, resources, and talents that can help accelerate the capacity and success of the initiative.

Basic Explanation of Process:

1.   **Prioritize Community goals and develop performance measures.** To determine if community initiatives are successful, starting with the "end in mind is crucial." Communities must first decide what they want to achieve and then measure progress using performance measures. The performance measures should be based on community conditions and guidance from those most affected by the needed changes. For example, a community needs assessment determined that we need to focus on "decreasing the number of truancy cases referred to Pulaski County Juvenile Courts from the Public School district." A performance measure to check success could be a percentage of youth referred to the Court system during an identified period of time. Another example, "all teens receive a quality education and are prepared to lead successful lives. An indicator of success would be an increase in the high school graduation rate of those teens enrolled in the program. The leadership team should prioritize a list of 3-5 primary goals and 3-5 accompanying measures that will be the primary focus of the planning process. The goals and actions will help set the vision for success and keep everyone involved in what matters throughout the planning and implementation process.

2.   **Graph each prioritized goal and its accompanying performance measure.** Data is critical to community initiatives. Using data allows us to understand past and current community conditions accurately. It is also the only way to understand whether our efforts have the desired impact. It is imperative to consistently track and update your performance measures so that leaders, stakeholders,

and the community can access the timely information they need to develop effective strategies. If it's not documented, it didn't happen is the motto that we live by. During this step, you will want to identify data for each of the primary performance measures you have specified. You should also separate your data to identify challenges and promote equity among subpopulations. It would help if you ended up with graphs for 3-5 primary goals and measures. Separating your data like this will allow your community to focus efforts and resources where they will make the most difference.

3. **Hold Community Meetings.** During this step, gather key leaders and stakeholders, including representatives from affected populations, to analyze the "why" behind your data. Analyze each prioritized performance measure to determine the factors that influence the historical and current direction of the initiative. Use information from completed community needs assessments and research other information.

4. **Identify Other essential partners that can help to improve the initiative and achieve the prioritized goals.** Examples could include law enforcement, city agencies, post-secondary education institutions, alternative schools, hospitals, and more.

5. **Brainstorm "what works" to address the contributing factors and improve the performance measures.** Look at what other communities are doing, read scholarly articles, research evidence-based practices and programs, or develop your ideas based on the information gathered in step 1. During this step, you should also identify what is already working in the community. Think innovative… allow a free flow of ideas during this step.

6. **Prioritize the best strategies from the brainstorming sessions and develop action steps to implement these strategies.** You want to choose strategies with the highest potential impact based on your performance measures. You want strategies that are child and family-focused. You want to select strategies that are sustainable and feasible.

7. **Further refine strategies and action plans after community meetings.**

8. **Leadership approval:** Once the advisory/planning committee has an action plan, the leadership team reviews and approves it for implementation or asks for revisions.

9. **Continue evaluation on an ongoing basis.** The planning process is very data-driven, dynamic, and results-focused. You must continuously evaluate and adjust based on data trends and community needs. I suggest that the leadership team meet quarterly and the advisory committee meets monthly.