



Los Angeles County  
Children's Planning Council  
*Improving Children's Lives*

# Making the Change

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Principles for Collaborative Planning

# Making the Change

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## Principles for Collaborative Planning

July 2001

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A Special CPC Anniversary Report

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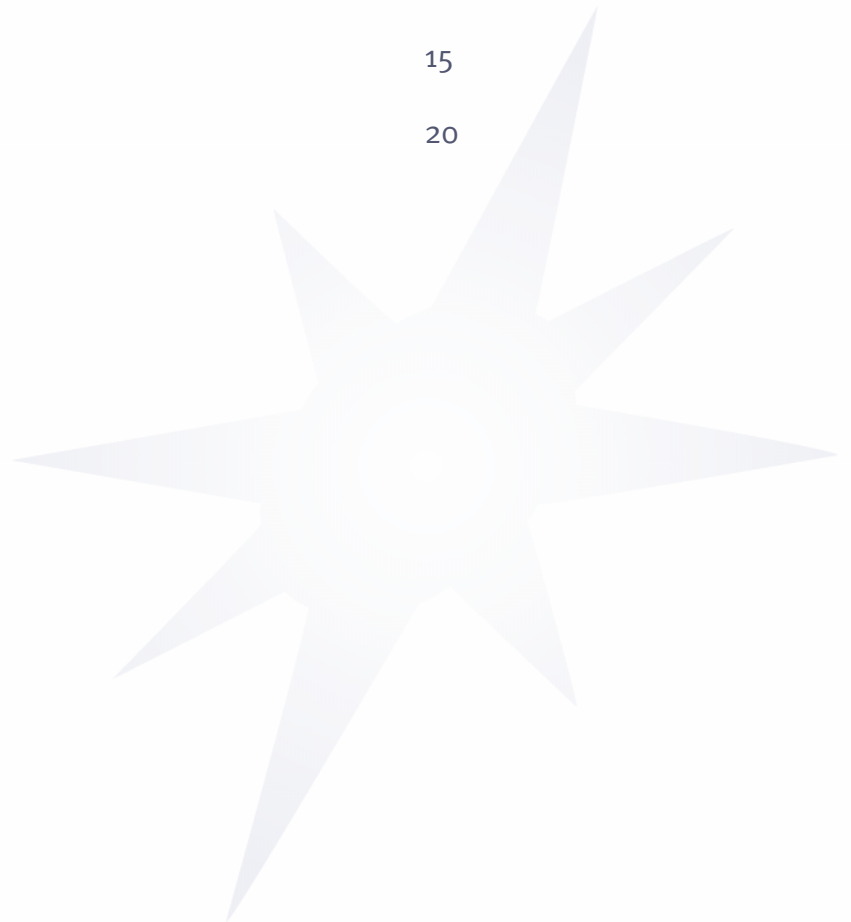




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# Preface

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As the Children's Planning Council enters its second decade of work on behalf of children and families, we pause to reflect on what we have learned along the way about systems change and collaboration. This document summarizes those reflections in a way that we hope will assist policy makers, leaders of public agencies, cities and school districts, collaboratives, service providers, funders, and community groups working to improve the lives of children and young people in Los Angeles.

Since 1991, the Council has attempted to promote, model, and nurture collaborative community-based partnerships on behalf of children and families. This has been a core value of the Council: the belief that stronger connections – and strengthened relationships – between family, community, local institutions, providers, and public systems are absolutely essential to creating the positive environments and services needed for children and their families to thrive.

The Children's Planning Council – itself a public/private partnership – was created by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to help improve conditions for children and families. Its commitment to collaborative community-based partnerships as a critical element of systems change over the last decade has translated into planning principles and

suggestions that we hope will help guide your work and inform the many levels of planning related to children currently underway in Los Angeles and around the country.

As we share with you insights gained after ten years, we acknowledge that we ourselves have much more to learn and more to do. We encourage you to share what you have learned with us and, more importantly, we hope that the Children's Planning Council can help support your efforts as we collectively strive to improve children's lives.

Zev Yaroslavsky  
Chair

Yolie Flores Aguilar  
Executive Director

# Introduction

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Throughout Los Angeles County, scores of public and private health and human service agencies, and local community groups, are involved in what is called collaborative “community-based planning.” This term carries as many meanings as there are perspectives and purposes in the maze of communities that is Los Angeles County. This paper is a modest attempt to share what the Los Angeles County Children’s Planning Council has learned about planning for systems change. We believe that it can benefit the many public/private partnerships and policy makers focused on bettering conditions for children and their families.

In its work to create an environment more supportive of children and their families, the Children’s Planning Council has worked with many partners over the years to build the vision and infrastructure necessary to link public sector resources with community expertise so that:

- Communities, government, and the private sector accept shared responsibility and accountability for the condition of children;
- Communities can determine their own priorities but work with government and the private sector to achieve shared goals that benefit children, youth, and families;
- Services can be decentralized to support decisions made at the community level.

In the first comprehensive action plan for Los Angeles County’s children, youth, and families, *Laying the Groundwork for Change* (1994), the Children’s Planning Council proposed a framework and action steps to help large bureaucratic systems and collaborating community groups improve results for the county’s children. Taken together, the elements of that plan provide the basis for unifying the various systems that meet the needs of children, families, and communities:

- A County Vision for Children
- Principles for Change
- Five Major Outcome Areas
- Four Strategic Directions

That framework has evolved in recent years based on a set of beliefs that translate to two overarching planning principles:

1. *The best way to ensure that children become healthy, productive adults is to build strong communities—communities that provide the opportunities, facilities, programs, and positive environments to meet children’s developmental needs.*
2. *Communities can offer this support only if residents are full participants in their design and governance, and only if the political systems of which they are a part encourage and support this self-determination.*



At the most general level, **“community-based planning”** refers to planning processes grounded in the culture, beliefs, values, and experience of a community, and that result in a consensus of opinion about a course of action to achieve a shared goal or set of goals.

*Community-based planning refers to an organized effort to identify common values and goals in a community—not for it—and to reach agreement on how best to allocate present and future resources both from within and outside the community to meet those goals.*

It is, in our experience, an *organized* effort to identify common values and goals in a community—not for it—and to reach agreement on how best to allocate present and future resources, from both within and outside the community, to meet those goals.

Everyone makes plans. But designing planning processes for and with communities is much more complicated because it

requires—or assumes—agreements on values and goals for entire communities. Planning for programs, agencies, events, and projects is not the same as planning for systems change and collaboration across service sectors.

**Collaborative community-based planning at the “systems” level requires a broader view and a wider range of participants to engage resources across organizational**

**boundaries and systems of care, and to make all mandated and voluntary service systems operate in unison to improve the conditions of well-being for children, young people, and their families.**

Most people want to know that they are part of a larger cause, a combined effort, and often enjoy creative insights and solutions. And it is action, not planning, that changes the condition of children in communities—but planning increases the probability of successful actions.

By bringing communities, government, and the private sector together, we have learned that more effective structures to plan and deliver services and support to children and families can be created in partnership with local communities if the structures:

- Support local authority
- Expand relationships but differentiate roles and responsibilities
- Have support from a variety of interests for the priorities selected
- Maximize collaboration

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- Make a meaningful link between organizational goals and community goals
- Change the interaction and organization of resources
- Understand the dual accountability of government staff to their respective agencies and the community

Planning is a creative and sometimes messy process, but four key elements of planning can serve as a framework for the many options available for designing a collaborative community planning effort<sup>1</sup>:

1. **Coordination** of local activities that can lead to the more effective use of existing resources
2. **Data collection** designed to identify needs, resources, demographic trends, and projections for the future
3. **Community participation** to build a consensus of opinion regarding the role and range of authority of the local planning effort
4. **Resource allocation**

It is important to state that planning and implementation are part of a single continuum, and that community-based planning is not to be confused with community organizing, which can serve as an effective implementation strategy.

## Learning From the Past

Over time, communities in Los Angeles have engaged in numerous dynamic planning efforts that have involved local groups, diverse populations, and a variety of

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strategies and initiatives. “Los Angeles has a long, rich history of locally-based community efforts aimed at identifying and planning solutions to community problems....”<sup>2</sup> From the 1914 Los Angeles Council of Social Agencies to the Welfare Planning Councils of the 1950s and ’60s, and the early development of United Way, such efforts shared the idea of increasing community involvement in the planning process.

The concepts of “community-based planning,” “public-private partnerships,” and “collaboration” are not new. Their re-emergence, during a time of rapid change and

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Community Planning Principles: A Bridge from the Past to the Future*, Los Angeles Roundtable for Children, March 1994.

<sup>2</sup> *Community Planning Principles*



increasing complexity for human services, however, has prompted the writing of this document.

There is a growing consensus among researchers, policy makers, professionals, and community leaders that stronger connections between family, community, local institutions, and public systems are essential to creating the positive environments, the responsive service delivery systems, and the improvements for children and youth we all seek. This

*Los Angeles County children should reach adulthood having experienced a safe, healthy, and nurturing childhood which prepares them to become responsible and contributing members of the community.*

document is intended for those persons and groups interested in creating a community-focused system of integrated services, and to inform the many levels of planning related to children currently underway in Los Angeles County. It assumes an approach to planning that links local efforts to larger countywide initiatives, and provides a new

opportunity for all who care about children to move in the same direction. We propose planning principles—guides—that we believe will yield results consistent with the County’s *Vision* for children:

*Los Angeles County children should reach adulthood having experienced a safe,*

*healthy, and nurturing childhood which prepares them to become responsible and contributing members of the community.*

And rather than offer techniques or step-by-step methods, we suggest a set of critical questions—a checklist—to assist public agencies, private non-profit service providers, and community groups in organizing and planning for systems change. A major lesson we have learned is that although the

organizing process may be relatively simple, the result is a complex set of structures, behaviors, and relationships based on human interactions and creativity.

No one agency or system alone has the resources or the knowledge necessary to make the changes required to improve the lives of children in Los Angeles. It is our hope that our experience will give the reader a better understanding of what is required to build public/private partnerships, how to link government services with community-based planning, and why common ground and relationships across systems are important to children’s services, as well as reinforce agreements about how we can all work together.

*A major lesson we have learned is that although the organizing process may be relatively simple, the result is a complex set of structures, behaviors, and relationships based on human interactions and creativity.*

# Successful Public/Private Planning Partnerships: Critical Elements

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## Elements for Successful Partnerships

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- 1. *Bring people together.*
- 2. *Agree up front on common language.*
- 3. *Use information to organize work.*
- 4. *Build upon a consensus of opinion.*
- 5. *Negotiate authority.*
- 6. *Plan to act.*
- 7. *Set milestones and completion deadlines.*

An interlocking set of integrated education and human services is essential to a community that wishes to provide opportunities to help young people develop their potential. Collaboration, systems reform, service integration, and blended funding pools, however, are means to an end, not ends in themselves.

The public/private planning partnerships envisioned by the Children’s Planning Council should change the relationships between the public sector, service providers, and community groups, creating dynamic interconnections that produce new possibilities for children and families. They require partners committed to a common vision of the future—of the condition of children and families—shared responsibility, accountability, and rewards; shared authority; shared risk; a commitment of resources; and active, sustained involvement with each other.

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Collaboration is not linear. Similar groups may have very different experiences and results as they try out new ideas, reflect on their actions, and revise plans accordingly. We found that the following elements contribute to successful partnerships.

**1. Bring people together.**

- Identify the most critical players/stakeholders.
- Build trust and confirm a shared vision.
- Agree to put aside personal and institutional agendas for common goals.

**2. Agree up front on common language that reflects shared ideas; the struggle with language can identify and help resolve conflicts, and build common ground.**

**3. Use information to organize work.**

- Collect *appropriate* data to bring objectivity to the process.
- Ensure clarity regarding the purpose of data findings.
- Use data to contribute to decisions about resource allocation.

**4. Build upon a consensus of opinion.**

- Requires involvement of key stakeholders.
- Requires facilitative leadership.
- Succeeds when choices are value-driven.

**5. Negotiate authority.**

- Establish the decision-making/governance structure for *shared* decision-making.
- Clarify the role and range of authority afforded to local community groups.
- Clarify the role of community leadership.

**6. Plan to act.**

- Put what works through a “filter” applicable to that specific community/population.
- Translate ideas into action; get from talk to action in an organized way.
- Start small. Set and build incrementally on successes.
- Let the relationships play out.

**7. Set milestones and completion deadlines.**

- Establish a trail linking action and resources to results.
- Don’t reward bad results with additional resources.
- Devise evaluative criteria; program success is not equivalent to conditions for children getting better.

# Planning Principles

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1. *Responsibility grows with authority.*
2. *Set broad outcomes to be achieved rather than a full set of guidelines.*
3. *Focus resources toward the needs of children, families, and communities.*
2. *Value data-driven planning.*
5. *Build on community strengths and existing resources.*
6. *Develop a results accountability framework.*
7. *Don't plan in a vacuum—avoid tunnel vision/silos.*
8. *Address causes.*
9. *Strengthen service capacity.*
10. *Root processes in the community—plan with people not for them.*
11. *Value relationship building.*
12. *Define restrictions and constraints.*
13. *Plan for action.*

Success in collaborations is making changes for the better. Taken together, we believe that the following principles for human services planning can help reshape a community-driven, family-centered, flexible, and results-oriented system of service delivery within and among child- and family-serving institutions.

**1. Responsibility grows with authority.**

Communities need to claim authority for what happens in their neighborhoods. Collaborative community-based planning should:

- Create an environment which incorporates as many relevant perspectives as possible and a consensus among those many perspectives accountable to a broader range of constituents.
- Be a continuous effort to resolve differing perspectives.
- Require broad-based representation, a common vision, and partners who arrive at collective decisions while sharing the risks.

**2. Set broad outcomes to be achieved rather than a full set of guidelines.**

Give local communities greater latitude to decide how goals will be met and what resources will be required. Identify up front what is expected—the product or result—from the information and energy generated in the planning process.



**3. Focus resources toward the needs of children, families, and communities.**

Families and communities have multiple assets and strengths but may need additional education, technical skills, and resources to improve their own lives. Current dollars must be spent as effectively as possible. Non-geographic criteria of need should also be reviewed, including special education populations, language needs, and other factors.

**4. Value data-driven planning.**

Expand the use of outcomes data, rather than intake information, to enhance services and allocate resources among programs, agencies, and geographic areas to ensure public accountability for results. Make data more community-friendly.

**5. Build on community strengths and existing resources.**

Recognize what is working; don't reinvent the wheel. Community planning requires that people gain access to information not normally available to them.

**6. Develop a results accountability framework.**<sup>3</sup>

Create a framework that best measures progress toward goals, and put money where things are happening.

**7. Don't plan in a vacuum—avoid tunnel vision/silos.**

Identify how a particular effort will connect to similar efforts and/or affect public policies. Clarify expectations and recruit logical partners and others doing similar things. The best strategy may be to join what someone else is doing.

**8. Address causes.**

Consider how to address interrelated problems, not just their symptoms, that place children and youth at risk, like poverty, racism, violence in the home, substance abuse, and homelessness. The deterioration of neighborhood infrastructure should also be considered in the basic causes of conditions affecting children.

**9. Strengthen service capacity.**

Training and technical assistance can help assure that staff and leaders are culturally responsive, reflective of neighborhoods, and effective in the changing service delivery environment. Emphasis should be put on intra-agency training.

**10. Root processes in the community—plan *with* people, not *for* them.**

“Community empowerment” has emerged as a strategy to address the needs of children and families, and to help more people retain control over their lives.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from a presentation by Mark Friedman, director of the Fiscal Policies Studies Institute on “Results Based Decision Making and Budgeting,” April 1999

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- Community representatives will participate more often when there is some assurance that the effort will be meaningful and bring new resources to the community.
  - Provide opportunities for concerned parties to review progress and share information and perspectives.
  - Respect the pace defined by the community, which may not be in sync with timelines set by public agencies or funders.

**11. Value relationship building.**

Dedicate time to build trusting relationships. Community-based planning requires time and constant attention to building and rebuilding the relationships between and among residents, associations, and institutions.

Tension is created by unclear or unspoken loyalties. There must be a conscious, deliberate effort to alter personal relationships within and across organizations or systems to change the *quality* of services, not just their number.

**12. Define restrictions and constraints.**

In some situations, public/private partnerships and planning may not work. Participants have the right to know what impact the time and energy dedicated to the process will have, and what constraints exist in the ability of participants to define a course of action.

**13. Plan for action.**

To achieve results, a set of directions or an implementation plan is required to establish priorities and to clarify what actions are to be taken, along with timelines, roles and responsibilities, resource requirements, and evaluation measures.



# Critical Questions for Collaborative Planning Partnerships

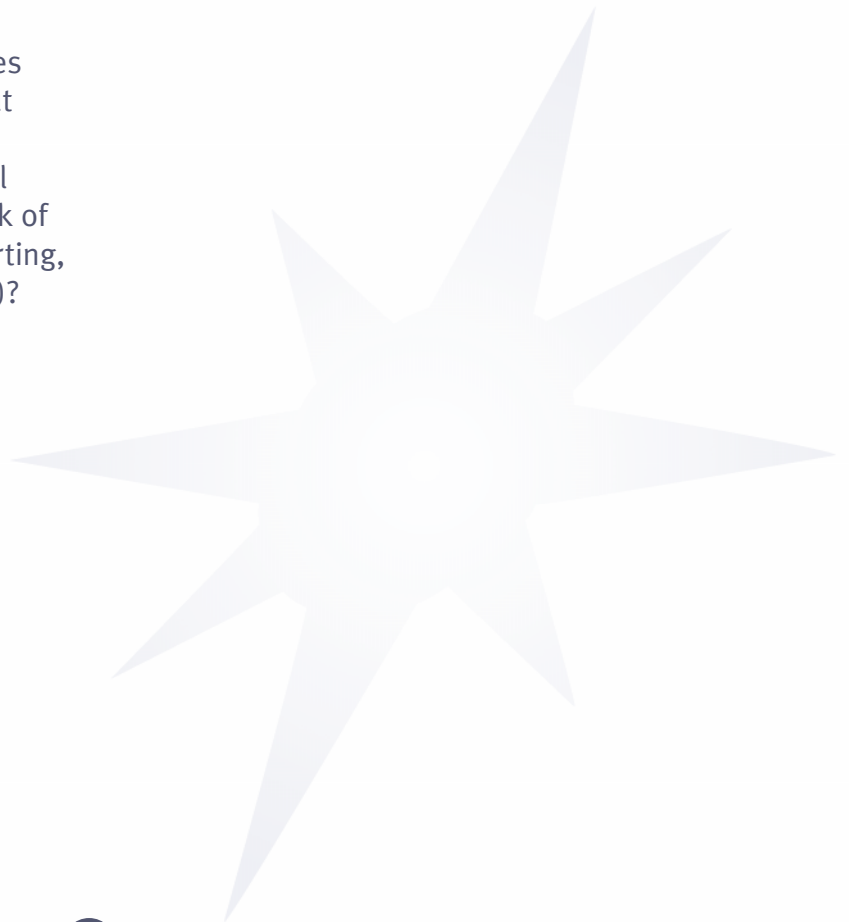
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The following questions are intended to serve as a “checklist” to establish and maintain effective and collaborative planning efforts among government agencies, communities, and the private sector, with the purpose of improving the conditions of children, youth, and families.

1. Does the group have a clear vision or focus that was developed and is supported by the members? What will the group achieve, how big, for whom? Is it easy to understand?
2. Does the mission of the group require the development of measurable goals in terms of child and family outcomes (the condition of well-being for children, youth, or families being addressed)? Is the group taking a comprehensive, systems view of the problem or challenge?
3. Has the collaborative completed the necessary analysis and gathered sufficient data to produce a profile of well-being of the community/ population and describe existing service delivery systems?
4. Are the proposed results/goals measurable? Are there agreed-upon criteria against which proposed strategies can be measured? How are they to be financed? Are timelines, accountability, and evaluation standards in place?
5. Are the right partners at the table to accomplish the goals and the mission—including consumers of services, public sector organizations, private providers and non-profit organizations, business groups, cities, schools, and other public sector systems?
6. Is there a process in place to assure that additional stakeholders can be added or heard so that the group is inclusive of the communities/sectors it claims to represent?
7. Are letters of agreement or similar written commitments required of the partners/members? Have personal or organizational self-interests been declared?
8. Does the decision-making/governance process allow for shared leadership and equal participation of the partners? Is the decision-making process manageable and realistic? Are roles, responsibilities, and ground rules clearly articulated?
9. Are there skilled conveners or facilitative leaders in place who can build consensus and gain the trust of the members?
10. Is there an open and accessible mechanism by which local groups and families can provide feedback that will actually help set directions?

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11. Is there a demonstrated commitment to cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in an atmosphere of support and encouragement?
  12. Is there a communication strategy that will maximize information-sharing among the members and with related stakeholder communities/agencies? Do formal and informal communication links exist?
  13. Is there a deliberate strategy in place to build trust and resolve conflicts among members? Is there an understanding that the process will take time?
  14. Is there sufficient flexibility in policies and practices to inspire creativity but also ensure movement toward the goals? Are the appropriate structural systems in place to manage the work of the group (record-keeping and reporting, technology, fiscal management, etc.)?
  15. Are sufficient resources available for the collaborative planning effort? Is this responsibility distributed among the members? Are members giving sufficient support to the effort?
  16. Is technical assistance required and available on issues raised by the group to assure forward movement?





# Public Sector Insights

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On August 5, 1997, the Board of Supervisors adopted the Los Angeles County Children’s Planning Council recommendations to improve outcomes for children and families. The following insights or “lessons learned” were identified by lead agency (department) representatives as a result of their efforts to implement seven recommendations over a two-year period.

1. A vision for change must be understood and owned by those persons doing the work. It must also include consensus among different groups about the process and resources required to implement change.
2. Collaboration cannot be mandated. Timing is as important to county departments as it is to communities.
3. A neutral coordinating entity or agency is needed to track progress, help resolve problems, strengthen communication, and consider mid-course corrections.
4. Open communication—with consistent messages at all levels—adds to the workload but is critical to the success of collaborative efforts.
5. Clear, measurable goals that can be easily understood are critical to implementation. The lack of clear goals makes it more difficult for large departments to come together by agreement, and prevents them from setting benchmarks and tracking progress over the life of an initiative. Once a goal is set, consistent translation at various levels within a department and throughout a community must be ensured.
6. Clear goals without resources to implement agreed-upon strategies will cause most efforts to stall—or stop altogether.
7. Supportive professional relationships can be formed among the staff of various agencies, and between agency staff and community leaders. A “team” approach allows staff to respond more quickly to other opportunities for action. The existence of a core group facilitated and expanded the work of involved agencies, and added value to their collective and individual experience.
8. Careful consideration should be given to the assignment of lead agencies. A mismatch of agency and task, or unexpected changes in leadership, can become barriers; they may result in implementation efforts that run along separate tracks rather than in joint efforts across jurisdictions.
9. County staff should *listen* to community feedback. This requires putting aside a sensitivity to initial criticism of county government and any negative perceptions held by some communities about the way in which departments serve the public.

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10. County staff should help communities understand State, Federal, and other mandates that departments have, and clarify what can and cannot be done in collaborative structures.
  11. Consideration must be given to the time required to do community-based work. Additional time will be needed to research targeted communities, to identify and respond to barriers, and to understand the political climate of local communities.
  12. Expand the definition of “resources,” in addition to funding, as initiatives are developed.
  13. Current data on target populations allow county staff and community partners to develop more effective outreach strategies.
  14. Embrace flexibility; build on the momentum of a group, issue, or opportunity without trying to “control” it.
  15. Collaboration adds to the workload. Some internal adjustments will be required to prevent burn-out among staff involved.
  16. Recognize people and agencies that contribute to the successful achievement of goals.



# Definition of Terms for Planning

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## **AGENCY**

A public or private organization acting for others.

## **COLLABORATION**

Joint efforts to achieve common purposes by sharing resources, responsibilities, and risks across agency lines.

## **COMMUNITY**

A place or a class of people having something in common that may transcend geography.

## **COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT**

Is both a “process” and an “outcome”:

- A process that builds the capacity of a neighborhood—or population—to set priorities and control resources essential for increasing self-determination.
- The outcome is increased access to and control over resources—including organizational resources by local residents.

## **COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIES**

A multi-faceted, holistic—not categorical—approach to solutions.

## **DIVERSITY**

A range of characteristics around which people differ, such as race, language, class, culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability/disability.

## **EVALUATION**

Includes qualitative and quantitative activities that offer an independent, impartial assessment about what changes actually occurred and the extent to which agreed-upon outcomes were achieved. It provides judgments about the process by which those results were obtained.

## **GOALS**

Broad directional targets to carry out the purpose; the end result.

## **INDICATOR/BENCHMARK**

A measure, for which data is available, that helps quantify the achievement of a result.<sup>4</sup>

## **MISSION**

A brief, clear statement of purpose; tells “why” the organization exists.

## **NETWORK**

A loose-knit group of interconnecting individuals or organizations exchanging information for mutual benefit.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Friedman

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## **OBJECTIVES**

Specific measurable actions by which the goal is achieved, consistent with the purpose, that are time-limited.

## **OUTCOME OR RESULT**

A desired end result and/or change stated in measurable, attainable terms. A condition of well-being for children, families, or communities. <sup>5</sup>

## **PERFORMANCE MEASURE**

A measure of the effectiveness of agency or program service delivery. <sup>6</sup>

## **PLANNING**

The process through which an organized scheme to get something done is developed; decisions that set a course of action. <sup>7</sup>

## **POLICY**

A guideline statement.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Friedman

<sup>6</sup> Mark Friedman

<sup>7</sup> Strategic Planning refers to the creative process in which an organization can close the gap between its vision and where it actually is now. It is long-range planning that examines external environmental trends and internal organizational trends, identifies specific strategic issues fundamental to the organization's future, and formulates strategies to address those issues with a conscious focus on change. The *what*.

An operational or "business" plan should result from a strategic plan, and provide a chronology of specific actions/tactics to be taken to accomplish goals identified in the strategic plan. The *how*. It includes the identification of responsible parties, timelines, resource allocations, and an evaluation plan that identifies specific measurable outcomes to be achieved.

## **PRINCIPLES**

Basic standards or set of beliefs that shape behavior or influence choices.

## **SERVICE INTEGRATION**

The allocation of resources by multiple providers of service from similar or different sectors to address the multiple needs of a group of people served in common.

## **STAKEHOLDERS**

The sum total of individuals and formal and informal networks with a vested interest in the quality of life—social, economic, physical, and spiritual—of a community, population, or neighborhood.

[Formal networks = libraries, unions, service agencies, advocacy groups; Informal networks = resident associations, block clubs, consumers]

## **SYSTEM**

Organizations that are linked together in the provision of services/products (e.g., transportation system, K-college education system, child welfare system). An interdependent linking of organizations that rely on each other for the exchange of resources.



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## **SYSTEMS CHANGE**

A change in the way that people and institutions think and behave to affect fundamentally the types, quality, and level of resources and services available to individuals, families, and communities.

## **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

Can be “substantive” and/or “process-oriented.” It includes a wide range of activities performed by an outside person or group, professional or non-professional, that can help a collaborative meet its objectives.

Technical assistance can fill knowledge gaps of individuals, organizations, or communities (short term) and/or improve competencies, i.e., individual skills, knowledge, values, attitudes, and orientation (longer term).

## **VISION**

A statement that expresses what a group is trying to build—aspirations to be realized. It conveys an image of the future.

# Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council

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# Acknowledgements

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