



What is action planning?

Literally planning to take action. Most people, either as individuals or in a family unit, plan a number of courses of action on a daily basis. This is usually done as an automatic response to their life circumstances and they are unlikely to record this in a formal way or even be aware of the process they are undertaking. Action planning in a community setting will use similar processes but should be recorded to ensure that:

- the community has all the information it needs about the action plan
- people with tasks, or responsibility for certain projects, have the details they require
- there is an overall picture of the community's plans
- monitoring and evaluation can take place in an effective way

Why do action planning with a community?

Action planning can be undertaken with a community group for a range of reasons, the most common being to:

- Ensure identified local need is addressed in a systematic way
- Assist the group to focus its activities on realistic, achievable targets
- Assist the group to plan appropriately to meet targets and budget accordingly
- Involve a greater number of community members in group activities and community life
- Bring new skills into the group by targeting people who have the specific skills required for certain tasks;
- Build the capacity of group members by increasing their skills

Action planning is an integral stage in the community auditing process. A Community Audit does not serve any useful purpose in its own right, but when

the process incorporates a phase of action planning then the potential for real change within the community is greatly enhanced.

Who should carry out action planning?

Action planning can be undertaken by any community, whether geographical or a community of interest. Community groups and community members, supported by a facilitator or a local agency, are best placed to undertake action planning for the local community. It is vital that any plan of action is agreed and owned by the local community.

When should action planning be done?

Action planning should be done as a response to identified community need. Community groups will certainly need to have an action plan in place before undertaking any large piece of work. Action plans can be for almost any period of time, however periods of three or five years appear to be the most frequently used. A three or five year action plan will enable a community to plan for medium and longer term projects, in addition to meeting immediate needs. Action plans need to be reviewed and amended if necessary on a regular basis throughout the lifespan of the action plan.

Where should action planning be carried out?

Action planning can be undertaken in the normal community setting (meeting place) or in a venue removed from the community, for example, as part of a residential or away day.

How do we carry out action planning?

There are a number of terms, frequently used interchangeably, which can imply an action planning process, for example, strategic planning, operational planning. RCN has developed a simple model of action planning for use with community groups. This model is detailed below. This is by no means the only model of action planning available and workers and community groups need to decide which is the most appropriate model for them to use in their own work.

Action Planning in Practice

The following is an outline of some exercises that would enable a community group to undertake action planning. The person facilitating the exercises (facilitator) will require a flipchart stand, paper and markers. The facilitator may also require a packet of sticky dots (any colour) if the group needs to vote on priorities.

Session One

Exercise – List and agree projects/outcomes the community wish to undertake (refer to community audit results if applicable). Example:

- Committee meetings
- Stop the hospital closure (Community Audit 94% opposition)
- AGM
- Environmental Project
- Community hall
- Community information/representation
- Social events
- Fundraising
- Committee training
- Summer scheme for primary school age children (Community Audit 76%)

Prioritise – Voting on priorities (with sticky dots)

If your group has generated a list that is so long that it is unmanageable, then it will be necessary to prioritise the agreed list by voting. Group members will have to agree the number of tasks that can reasonably be included, while remembering that some tasks will have to be included eg AGM. Each group member will be allocated an agreed number of votes to cast (sticky dots). The outcome of the voting will then determine the group's priority issues in addition to issues which, although they remain important, cannot be addressed at that time.

Action Planning



Rural Community Network
SUPPORTING RURAL COMMUNITIES

Large Group Discussion – Template for action planning projects/outcomes
Begin to work through each project/outcome fitting it into the template below. An example is included.

Project/ Outcome	Tasks	Other help/ resources needed	Potential Issues	Person responsible (Team Leader)	Team members	Deadline
Committee meetings	Ensure venue is available and accessible Agenda is prepared and circulated to members	Key to hall Secretary to type and circulate minutes	Poor attendance by members	Tanya (Chair)	Walter (Secretary) Anne David	First Monday each month One week prior to meeting

Team leaders (agreed by the group when project/outcome templates are being completed) can then take each of their own areas and break down the tasks even further if they wish, using the same format. NB: It is important to decide the length of Action Plan (ie number of years) if this has not already been agreed.

Session Two

Large Group Discussion – Template for action planning projects/outcomes

Continue to work through each project/outcome fitting it into the template above until all the priorities have been completed.

Session Three

Large Group Discussion - Contingency Plans

List the issues that might arise in trying to undertake this action plan. These may be specific to one project/outcome or more general. List the potential mechanisms the community group can put in place to combat/overcome these issues. For example:

Issue: Poor attendance by members at meetings.

Mechanisms to prevent this occurring include:

- Focused meetings, including start and finish times, agendas, etc

- Involve as many community members in the group/projects as possible to avoid a small number of individuals doing all the work
- Schedule meetings at the most suitable times for members.

Exercise - Action Plan Calendar

Finally draw up the action plan calendar for each month of the year and don't forget that support/review meetings need to be included on a regular basis! See example below which details six months of a calendar, taken out of a five year action plan.

Project/ Outcome	April	May	June	July	August	September
Lobby to prevent hospital closure	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx
Environmental project in village	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx
Committee Training	xx					
Community Information Bulletin		xx			xx	
Community Social Event			xx			
Action Plan Review						xx
Annual General Meeting						xx
Committee meetings 1 st Monday of each month	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx	xx
Preparation and running of summer scheme		xx	xx	xx	xx	

