



A publication of LISC/Chicago's New Communities Program

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PLANNING HANDBOOK



Roadmap to the “quality of life” planning process

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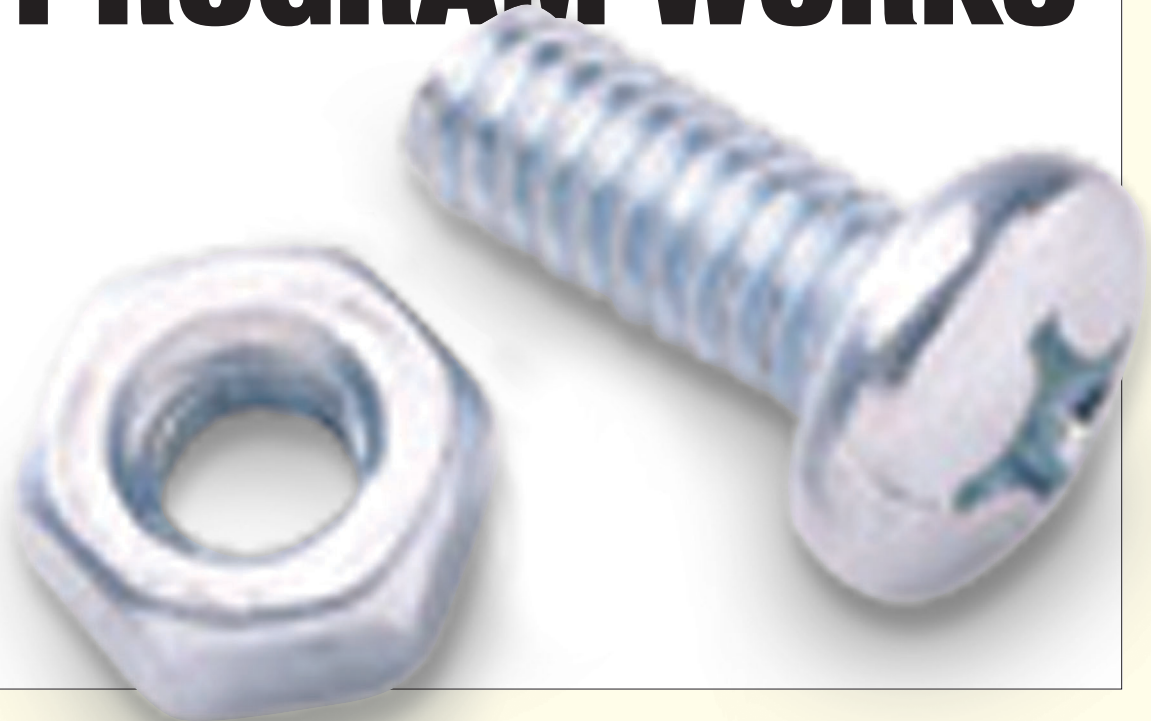
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HOW THE NEW COMMUNITIES PROGRAM WORKS



Program

The New Communities Program (NCP) is a long-term, comprehensive approach to urban development that uses neighborhood planning as a central tool for improving the quality of life of community residents.

Managed by LISC/Chicago and led by lead agencies in neighborhoods around Chicago, the New Communities Program will channel tens of millions of dollars in private and public resources into target neighborhoods over the next 10 years.

NCP incorporates more than 15 years of experience in the field of comprehensive community development. It has its roots in the Comprehensive Community Redevelopment Program in New York's South Bronx, where a new

approach called “quality of life” planning won the Presidential Award of the American Planning Association. Starting in 1998, LISC applied the comprehensive approach in three Chicago neighborhoods through the New Communities Initiative. With support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and others, that program has expanded to 16 neighborhoods and been renamed the New Communities Program.

The substantial resources that NCP brings to a community are largely allocated based on the ideas developed through the quality-of-life planning process. The NCP planning process was launched in May and June 2003 with “visioning” sessions attended by more than 150 people who live and

NCP principles

NCP operates around a set of principles that include:

- Investing in a lead organization in each community to anchor the comprehensive effort.
- Developing a quality-of-life plan that addresses both physical and socio-economic needs.
- Organizing broad-based community engagement.
- Providing long-term, flexible project and program funding.

work in the NCP communities. At these sessions, participants were asked to envision how they would like their neighborhood to be five years from now. Formal planning begins in the Fall of 2003.

This handbook is a simple guide to the planning process. It describes what goes into a plan and provides guidance on organizing an effective process. It won’t do the work for you, but it provides a series of checklists and tips to help make your process a success. Good luck!



Andy Mooney, Senior Program Director



Amanda Carney, Program Officer

- Building collaborations among organizations to achieve more results.
- Facilitating peer learning and organizational development.
- Connecting residents to jobs and economic opportunity.
- Emphasizing *doing while planning*—a fast-start approach.
- Encouraging use of partnerships and technical assistance.
- Demanding tangible results.

HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES BEGIN WITH PLANNING



Planning

Planning is one of the most important steps a neighborhood can take to become healthier, safer and economically stronger. By bringing together residents, leaders and community development experts, a community can **set goals for its future**, decide on priorities and get the wheels turning on positive changes. Planning is a big effort, but it has big payoffs.

LISC/Chicago's New Communities Program (NCP) requires each lead agency to engage residents and local organizations in a planning process that typically takes six to nine months. The planning is led by a task force of about 20 to 30 people and involves **five or six major meetings**, a subcommittee structure to focus on larger issues and an outreach effort to the community.

A quality-of-life planning process captures the vision of residents and turns their goals into achievable projects and programs. It is not planning for planning's sake, but **practical planning driven by community needs**, which leads to visible results.

The process is called “quality-of-life” planning because it looks at much more than street layouts and housing or retail needs. NCP planning links physical and program planning so that social programs and services are incorporated into the plan and its maps. NCP planning **looks at the whole community**, including schools, parks, health care and child care, community safety, organizing, social services and opportunities for economic advancement. When a community has good things going in these areas, it is likely to be a healthy place for residents and a desirable place for public and private investors.

A tool for action

Because many communities don't have all these pieces in place, the planning process is a useful tool to figure out what is needed and how to make improvements. It also can help **protect the community's interests**. A neighborhood that has a good plan already written is less likely to have a plan imposed on it by someone else.

While NCP communities are planning, they are also expected to begin implementing their ideas: **“doing while planning.”** The NCP program is structured to provide seed money, technical assistance and other resources to help the lead agency get started immediately on building a healthier community.

Recipe for planning

The planning process results in a publication about 40 pages in length that shows where the neighborhood has been and where it would like to be in five years. Here are some of the ingredients that your task force will work with as it builds its community plan:

Work program

Each major project will be on this list, along with a time frame for getting it done.

Renderings of proposed projects

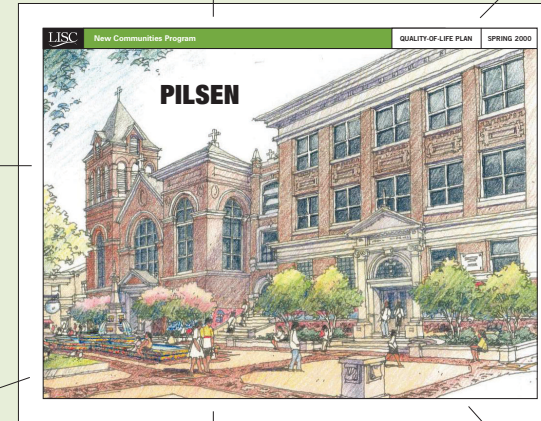
A professional planner will help each group envision what one or more projects would look like.

Issues

This is one of the first things to be discussed, and you'll return to the “issue list” often.

Community history

The recent past will help determine your next steps.



Photos

The photos should show your community's assets and potential, but not ignore the areas needing work.

Vision, strategies, projects and programs
These are the core elements of the plan and should be as specific as possible.

Maps

The task force will define neighborhood boundaries and identify streets and locations where changes are desired.

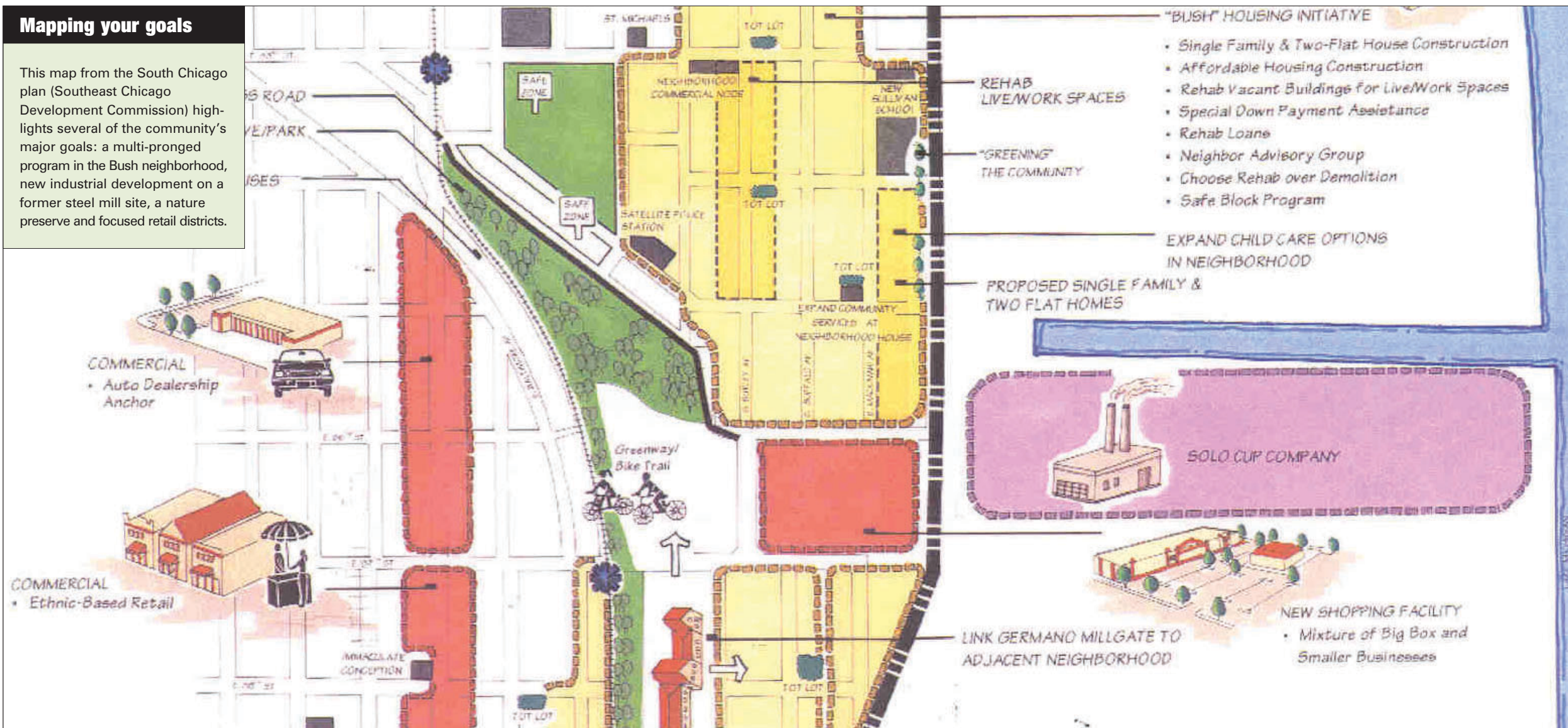
Sketching the future

Every plan will include at least one drawing that shows what a specific place in the neighborhood might look like after improvements are made. This rendering from the Pilsen plan suggests how streetscape changes could make a commercial area more inviting.



Mapping your goals

This map from the South Chicago plan (Southeast Chicago Development Commission) highlights several of the community's major goals: a multi-pronged program in the Bush neighborhood, new industrial development on a former steel mill site, a nature preserve and focused retail districts.



What comprehensive looks like

It’s a bit of a mouthful: “a quality-of-life plan for comprehensive community development.” But what it means isn’t very complicated. A *quality-of-life plan* looks at all the elements that make a neighborhood a good place to live or raise a family. *Comprehensive community development* is the method used to achieve that quality of life: it takes an integrated approach to neighborhood revitalization and it coordinates efforts to achieve maximum benefits. See the list below.

Geographic realities

The plan also must respond to geography, recognizing its role in the community’s development. Some of these physical elements might be:

- **A special neighborhood** within the community that has its own culture or boundaries.
- **Barriers** within or around the neighborhood like railroad tracks, industrial zones, highways or gang territories.

Ideas to consider

The comprehensive approach means that any element that contributes to, or detracts from, the quality of life is open for discussion. For most neighborhoods, that list might include the following:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| ■ Appearance of the community. | ■ Coordination of city services. |
| ■ Child care services. | ■ Cultural opportunities. |
| ■ Commercial development. | ■ Health care. |
| ■ Community image. | ■ Housing choices and condition. |
| ■ Communication among residents. | ■ Opportunities for friendships and other relationships. |

- **Connectors** like public transit routes, bike paths or popular parks.
- **Vacant lots** or abandoned buildings that represent a current problem but might have future uses.
- **Anchors of activity** such as commercial districts, universities, hospitals or major employers.
- **Underutilized parcels** that might be redeveloped for more-intensive use or provide land for open space, a school or health center.

Often a community plan will designate a subset of the community as a “target” area. Whether it is a six-block stretch of a street or a sub-neighborhood with distinct characteristics, the target area allows neighborhood organizations and the city to concentrate their resources and show a visible impact more quickly.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| ■ Jobs and job training. | ■ Needs of young adults “starting out.” | ■ Safety and crime. |
| ■ Leadership development and training. | ■ Neighborhood land use. | ■ Schools and education. |
| ■ Needs of families. | ■ Neighborhood traditions and events. | ■ Technology and its use in the neighborhood. |
| ■ Needs of the elderly. | ■ Parks and open space. | ■ Traffic and transportation. |
| ■ Needs of youth. | | |

Checklist for a complete plan

As your planning process continues, it's helpful to take a few minutes to make sure the task force is covering all the elements that will make the plan complete. Here's a checklist to gauge your progress. Your plan should:

- State a clear vision for the future.
- Address the neighborhood's key problems.
- Describe projects and programs that can be implemented.
- Be achievable within five years.
- Have widespread support in the community.
- Assign responsibilities and timeframes for implementation.

Some questions for discussion

As part of the planning process, task force members might **ask themselves certain questions** to see what kind of ideas might emerge.

- How can we improve the physical environment?
- What would expand economic opportunity for residents?
- How can we encourage new investment?
- How can we expand access to quality health care and social services?
- What would make the neighborhood safer and more pleasant?
- Which land and buildings could be used better?
- How can we improve transportation in and through the neighborhood?
- What would build connections between the neighborhood and jobs, shopping and entertainment in other parts of the city?

A sample Table of Contents

Here's a sample table of contents from the West Haven quality-of-life plan (2002).

Executive Summary

- I. The New Communities Initiative
- II. Our Vision for West Haven
- III. West Haven Then and Now
- IV. Strategies to Implement the Vision
 - 1. Create a Balanced, Mixed Income Community
 - 2. Develop a Thriving Commercial Center
 - 3. Expand Employment Linkage and Training Opportunities
 - 4. Improve Parks Programming and Extend Open Space
 - 5. Improve Local Schools and Build Connections to Them
 - 6. Enhance Community Life for Youth and Adults
 - 7. Improve Safety and Security
 - 8. Enhance the Community's Center at Madison and Hoyne
 - 9. Increase Neighborhood Communication
 - 10. Promote West Haven's Identity
- V. Quality-of-Life Work Program

HOW TO GET STARTED...AND FINISHED



Process

The process of creating a plan is part science and part art. The science involves making sure all the necessary elements are gathered together and properly assembled. The New Communities Program provides **professional help** in this area, beginning with a planning firm that will help manage the process and a “scribe” who will record the task force discussion and create a final report.

The art of planning is a bit trickier. It involves making sure that every voice around the table is heard, that disagreements are handled with respect and that **the community comes together** around a set of common goals. Success in this area isn’t just the responsibility of your plan’s facilitator or lead agency. Every participant should contribute.

The science of planning

First, the science. LISC/Chicago will provide each group with professional resources to help get the job done:

- **a planning consultant** from Camiros, Inc., a Chicago-based planning firm that will help guide the process and create maps, renderings and project outlines;
- **a writer** or “scribe” who will serve the task force by drafting issue lists, fleshing out priorities and writing the final report;
- **technical assistance** as needed to help the group work through an idea or solve a problem;
- **background data** about the community including demographics, market information, land use, housing conditions and pending city projects; and
- **“early action” grants or loans** to help the community get started on one of its priority projects.

Steps in the process

Start-up

Pre-planning The lead agency recruits a task force of 20 to 30 people who represent the community in terms of race, ethnicity, income levels and affiliations. This might include resident leaders, organization staff, educators, block club presidents, service providers, business owners and others recruited for their knowledge of the community or history of involvement. The task force should include individuals who can help conduct outreach to the community and assist with implementation of the plan.

Research

Interviews Some communities expand the pre-planning process by formally or informally interviewing neighborhood residents to hear their viewpoints. This can identify participants for the task force, bring a broader set of ideas to the planning process and lay the groundwork for later outreach work.

Data Each community receives a Data Book filled with information about population, housing, income levels and land uses. This is an important reference that should be consulted early and often.

Meeting 1

Kickoff meeting The lead agency describes the process and timeline for getting the plan completed, and then the task force begins its work as a team by developing a preliminary “issue list” of the neighborhood’s strong points and weaknesses.

Meeting 2

Create committees Often the second meeting is devoted to further refining the issues and focusing the planning effort. At this meeting, committees are usually formed to research issue areas and start coming up with strategies.

Detour

Stumbling blocks Sometimes discussions get bogged down for lack of technical knowledge or because of a disagreement. This is fairly normal for a planning process. One approach to getting over a barrier is to assign a group of leaders to work through the issue with residents and stakeholders. Another strategy is to bring in an expert on that subject (found through the community, the planner or LISC) to help the group learn more and find common ground.

Meeting 3

Visioning and initial strategies As the issue areas are discussed, a vision of the community’s future will begin to develop. The group should fine-tune this vision and identify strategies to move the vision toward reality within five years.

Feedback

Community outreach Throughout the process, task force members should communicate with neighbors and constituents to test ideas being discussed so that the group doesn’t waste time on something that will not work or isn’t a priority. This outreach will pay off when the plan is finished because community members will feel they were part of the process.

Meeting 4

Strategies workshop After the task force has a working list of strategies and projects, a special meeting called a “charette” is held. At this meeting the planner uses maps and drawings to help the group fine-tune its strategies and set priorities.

Meeting 5

Review, refine, agree The task force fine-tunes the work from the charette, comes to general consensus on which projects and strategies to pursue, and discusses responsibilities for implementation.

Meeting 6

Set roles Implementing a plan requires a clear understanding of which organizations should lead on each project, what is an achievable time frame and where resources can be developed. With task force guidance, the lead agency will assign these responsibilities and may recruit agencies or individuals that were not directly involved in the planning.

Celebrate

Publish the plan The lead agency works with the planner, scribe and LISC to create final text, maps and timelines so that the quality-of-life plan can be printed. The task force and lead agency can then celebrate its completion with a special meeting open to the entire community, government officials and potential investors.

The art of making it work

Just as important as the technical milestones is the softer side of planning: the art of working with a group to develop an effective and realistic plan. Here are some roles where participants can contribute:

- The task force **chairperson** should be different than the facilitator. By opening and closing the meetings and making executive decisions, the chair can help the facilitator and planner move the process forward.
- The **recorder** jots down ideas on a flip chart during the discussion. He or she can also draw maps or flow charts to describe how something might be done. This frees up the scribe to take more detailed notes.
- The **timekeeper** makes sure the group spends a reasonable amount of time on important subjects, but not so much that the group goes home without finishing its tasks. Sometimes the timekeeper can pause the conversation to ask participants whether their time is being used properly.

And here are some roles that the facilitator, chair or any task force member might play to keep things moving in a fruitful direction:

- The **validator** makes room for uncomfortable or unfamiliar ideas, reminds participants not to interrupt and invites quieter members of the group to offer their opinions.
- As **pacesetter**, the facilitator or chair may sometimes stop the flow of discussion, or postpone the start of open dialog, so that the planner or an outside expert can provide “start-up” information that informs the discussion.

If the pacesetter closes off discussion before others are ready, the group can respectfully ask that the topic be reopened.

- Any member of the group might be a **synthesizer** of ideas, finding and voicing the relationships between various parts of the discussion. This can be a very powerful role if it helps people see how issues interconnect. Synthesis can also help get the group “unstuck” from scattered, unproductive discussion.
- Usually the facilitator or chair will become an **assigner** of follow-up tasks such as doing further research or communicating back to the community. Successful assignment of tasks (and completion of the tasks by those assigned!) can shorten the planning process and make it more comprehensive.
- Mediation is sometimes necessary when task force members disagree over central strategies. The **mediator** helps the group integrate conflicting ideas or develop a plan to learn more about the alternatives.

The planner and scribe will help the process along by bringing write-ups, maps and other information to each meeting. This will help the task force keep track of the discussion and decisions being made.

Five tips for planning success

- **Be specific.**
What needs doing?
Who will do it? How?
- **Be inclusive.**
Allow all viewpoints to be aired and help the group find agreement.
- **Don't get bogged down.**
Use workshops, committees and experts to get past barriers.
- **Keep people coming back.**
Make the meetings interesting and productive so that your task force stays involved. Serving food usually helps.
- **Be an advocate.**
Take every opportunity to talk up and promote the plan.

A roadmap to the quality-of-life planning process

The planning process can be a long and winding road with occasional roadblocks or detours. But getting to the finish line isn't that hard if the task force uses good information, keeps the community informed and sets realistic goals and timelines.

Let's get going!
Create task force.

Meeting 1
ID the issues.
What's working?
What's not?

Meeting 2
Create committees.
Share the workload.

Info roadblock.
Get outside help.
Technical experts can bring needed info.

Meeting 3
Develop vision.
Create strategies to make it happen.

Get feedback.
Engage with others on basics of plan.

Disagreement.
Help group to find common ground.

Early action.
Don't wait to launch a project.

Results. Starting something builds momentum.

Meeting 4
Special meeting.
Fine-tune strategies and pick projects.

Meeting 5
Draft your plan.
The scribe and planner will help.

Ownership.
Sell the plan to your community.

Meeting 6
Set roles.
Who does what and by when?

Publish.
Put together text, maps, timelines.

Use the plan!
Turn the vision into reality.



LAUNCHING AN “EARLY ACTION” PROJECT



Action

Ideas will begin flowing at the first meeting of the task force. While some of them will be (and should be) on the ambitious side, others will be **very practical and within reach**. These ideas shouldn't just be written down. Some of them might be implemented almost immediately.

LISC can provide seed funding and technical support to help get “early action” projects off the ground *while the planning process is still underway*. These projects can relate to any of the priorities being developed by the task force and should be of small enough scale that they can be sketched out, fine-tuned and **started within a period of months**.

The early-action process is easy. When an idea is first developed, the lead agency should talk to its LISC program

officer and discuss whether it might work as an early action project. Then the lead agency, task force or a committee should work with LISC to flesh out the details, discuss the project with consultants or bring in whatever technical assistance might be necessary. Meanwhile LISC will work to get the resources necessary, from grants to loans to technical assistance, so that the project can get underway. If the idea continues to look feasible and aligned with the community's interests, **LISC will cut the check** that gets the project started.

Keep in mind that LISC doesn't expect the lead agency to do every project and program in the plan. Far more can be accomplished through collaboration with other groups and by encouraging leadership among many organizations. The actual recipient of the early action resources, therefore, might be a collaborating organization. But the request should be coordinated through the lead agency.

Bringing an "early action" project to life

"Doing while planning" is a mantra of the New Communities Program because it creates momentum and provides visible evidence of change within the neighborhood. Here's how a project might develop out of the planning process.

Week 1

Great idea!

It could be "early action" project.

For instance: Greening projects. Newspaper/newsletter. Personal finance club. Housing repair fund. Youth arts program. School network.

Week 2

Talk to LISC.

Introduce the idea and get feedback.

Week 2-6

Flesh it out.

Create committee to work out details.

Details: Who does it? What's the goal? How long will it take? How much will it cost? Is it feasible? Why do it?

Play it out: Recruit the team. Line up the partners/consultants. Create long-term budget. Discuss seed funding with LISC.

Week 6-8

Call LISC again.

Still feasible? Need technical assistance?

Week 6-8

Write it up.

Draft brief memo and budget.

Fast! Early-action project timeline: as little as eight weeks from idea to start-up.

Week 8-10

Receive check.

Use grant \$\$ to attract other resources.

PUTTING YOUR PLAN TO WORK



Results

A central idea of the New Communities Program is that the quality-of-life plan is not left on the shelf. It is a plan for action. A well-executed planning process and an early action project can help get implementation started, but **follow-up** is just as important.

As the planning process nears its conclusion, every task force will create a chart listing its main strategies and projects and a **priority for each of them**. Some projects can be tackled immediately and accomplished in a single year; these are designated “short-term” efforts and are initiated immediately. Others may require some building blocks to be in place first, or demand resources that aren’t yet available. These are medium-term projects that can be taken on in

years two and three. Finally, there are long-term plans that can't be realistically undertaken now, but might be in years three through five. Also, some strategies can be ongoing, with activities and programs planned for every year.

Here's what the **work program** looked like for South Chicago's plan, created in 2000 (see chart at right).

The last column on the right is an important one. It assigns the project or strategy to the most appropriate organization or agency. Often the **responsible party** is the NCP lead agency, but it could be a collaborator that was part of the planning process, or it could be another neighborhood or citywide organization that was consulted during the process and is ready to take on the task.

The task force or lead agency may assign neighborhood leaders to advocate for certain projects and keep them on track. They may also set up **periodic meetings**, perhaps semi-annually, to review the work program, revive any projects that have stalled and rework plans that have become out of date or impractical.

The plan is a useful tool for the lead agency to **raise funds for priority projects**, because it shows the potential investor, whether it is a foundation, government agency or private business, that the idea being pursued has support in the community. The plan can be a useful fund-raising tool for other organizations as well if their priorities are reflected in the plan.

LISC will use the work program as a **tool to monitor progress** and help the lead agency stay focused on the plan's priorities. It is easier to raise funds from LISC and other sources if a project is part of the community plan, and it may be harder to convince LISC of funding something that can't be found anywhere in the planning document.

South Chicago Quality of Life Plan Work Program

STRATEGY/PROJECT	VISION PRIORITY			LEAD ORGANIZATION(S)
	Short Term Year 1	Intermediate Term Years 2-3	Long Term Years 3-5	
I. Promote Economic Development and Opportunity				
A. South Chicago Job Resource Center	x	x	x	SCDCom; MOWD
B. Expanded Child Care Options		x		El Valor
C. Commercial Avenue Improvement Program		x		SCDCom
D. Commercial Avenue/93rd Street TOD Project		x	x	SCDCom; TPAP
E. 87th Street/US-41 Retail/Commercial Development			x	SCDCom
F. Small Business Development Program		x		SCDCom
II. Preserve, Expand and Improve Affordable Housing				
A. Bush Housing Initiative	x	x	x	SCDCom; NHS; Bush Homeowners & Renters Association; Block Clubs
B. Southeast Chicago Construction Contractors Association	x			SCDCom
C. Government-Assisted Housing Programs	x	x	x	Claretian Associates; NHS
D. Homeowner Education and Awareness	x	x	x	Claretian Associates; NHS; SCDCom
E. Emphasis on Rehabilitation Instead of Demolition	x	x	x	NHS

Final thoughts

A well-conceived and executed quality-of-life plan should be a useful and effective document for many years. A good plan will harness the energy and creativity of your community and should make a substantial and visible difference within five years. At that point, with victories notched and new challenges to address, it could be time to convene another task force and start the process all over again.

Notes

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