When People Care Enough to Act (Community Engagement)

Deb Wisniewski
Consultant/Connector, Sharing Common Ground
Faculty, Asset-Based Community Development Institute
Who is here today?

- Name
- Organization, Location
Goals for Today

- Define what we mean by “community engagement.”
- Explore how an asset-based community development (ABCD) perspective can shape how we think about community engagement.
- Discover what motivates people to act and find ways to use that information to engage them.
Definition of Community Engagement?
Ladder of Participation

(Source: Arnstein, 1969:217)

Figure 3 Ladder of participation
Community Engagement Continuum

Increasing Level of Community Involvement, Impact, Trust, and Communication Flow

**Outreach**
- Some Community Involvement
- Communication flows from one to the other, to inform
- Provides community with information.
-Entities coexist.
-Outcomes: Optimally, establishes communication channels and channels for outreach.

**Consult**
- More Community Involvement
- Communication flows to the community and then back, answer seeking
- Gets information or feedback from the community.
-Entities share information.
-Outcomes: Develops connections.

**Involve**
- Better Community Involvement
- Communication flows both ways, participatory form of communication
- Involves more participation with community on issues.
-Entities cooperate with each other.
-Outcomes: Visibility of partnership established with increased cooperation.

**Collaborate**
- Community Involvement
- Communication flow is bidirectional
- Forms partnerships with community on each aspect of project from development to solution.
-Entities form bidirectional communication channels.
-Outcomes: Partnership building, trust building.

**Shared Leadership**
- Strong Bidirectional Relationship
- Final decision making is at community level.
-Entities have formed strong partnership structures.
-Outcomes: Broader health outcomes affecting broader community. Strong bidirectional trust built.

Reference: Modified by the authors from the International Association for Public Participation.

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)
Two Paths – Two Solutions

Needs
(What is not there.)

↓

Services to Meet Needs

↓

Consumers

“Programs are the Answer”

Assets
(What is there.)

↓

Connections & Contributions

↓

Citizens

“People are the Answer”
ABCD is…

Building on…

• the skills of local residents,
• the power of local associations, and
• the supportive functions of local institutions,

ABCD draws upon existing community strengths to build stronger, more sustainable communities for the future.

~ adapted from www.abcdinstitute.org
Three Characteristics of ABCD

1. Asset-Based: Starts with what is present, not with what is absent

2. Internally-focused: Concentrates upon the agenda building and problem-solving capacities of local residents, associations, and institutions

3. Relationship-driven: Constantly builds and rebuilds relationships between and among individuals, associations, and institutions
ABCD as a Lens
ABCD in Action: Savannah, GA
Savannah, Georgia

- Observations?
- Assumptions?
- Strategies?
- Comments?
- Other thoughts?
Assumption: Everyone has gifts

- Gifts need to be discovered
- Most people want to contribute
Assumption: Relationships Build Community

An intentional effort to recognize, build and nourish relationships
Are we strengthening natural community relationships and networks?

Or

Are we replacing them?
Community Members at the Center

Not just…

- Recipients of services
- “Helping” agency leaders

They can…

- Contribute their gifts and talents
- Co-produce/co-create the community they want
- Invite other community members to participate.
Paradigm Change

Problem

Problem Solver

Client

Change Maker

Recipient

Co-Participant/Co-producer

At risk population to be dealt with

Leadership asset to be cultivated

Tomorrow’s Leaders

Part of today’s Leadership team

Adult in the making

A citizen today
Assumption: All People Care About Something

“Apathy is a sign of bad listening. People in communities are motivated to act. The challenge is to discover their motivation.”

~ Mike Green
What Motivates People to Act?
Watch this video:
**Stuck on an Escalator**

- What are they waiting for?
- Why are they waiting?
What Motivates People to Act?

- **Concerns** – What I don’t want to happen
- **Dreams** – What I want to create
- **Gifts** – What gifts do I have to share

*Reflect: Motivation to Act vs. Just an Opinion*
Discovering Motivation to Act

**Less Successful**

Start with the answer

Recruit people to implement the answer

Look for answers to the additional problem of “lack of motivation”
Discovering Motivation to Act

More Successful
Start with questions

Discover what people care about & what they have to offer

Make connections & build relationships
One-on-One Learning Conversations
Learning Conversation Goals

- Develop a stronger relationship
- Discover motivation to act
- Explore mutual interest & clarify possible action steps
- Find more prospects

This is about listening!
Conversation Tips:

- Meet where the person is comfortable - home vs. neutral location.
- One hour at the most... And stick to it!
- Don’t take notes while listening if you can avoid it.
- How will you start the conversation?
- What questions will you ask?
Questions!
We Can Ask Questions in Two Ways

- What is wrong with our community? What problems can we fix? What are the needs of our community? What is broken?

  **OR**

- What are the strengths and assets of our community? Share a time when you felt our community was at its best? What do you value most about our community? What is the essence of our community that makes it unique and strong?
One set of questions:

- How long have you lived in this neighborhood/community?
- What do you like about this neighborhood/community?
- If you had a magic wand, what would you change about your neighborhood/community?
- What can you do to help with making this change happen? What gifts and talents do you have?
- Would you be willing to meet with other people to work on this together?
- Who else should I talk to?
One-on-One Conversations
Community Conversations

...engaging people in conversations about questions that matter
Listen Slow

If you are going to work with me,
You have to listen to me.
And you can’t just listen with your ears,
Because it will go to your head too fast.

If you listen slow
With your whole body,
Some of what I say will enter your heart.

~ Christine Meyer
Ask, Ask, Ask!

- Once “gifts to give” and “motivations to act” are recognized, an opportunity to act must be offered.
- The opportunity to act must be connected to gifts and motivation.
- Join us, we need you!
So What?

- So how does this change your definition of community engagement?
- How does it change how you do your work?
- How does it change how your organizations operates?
There is no power for change like a community discovering what it cares about.

~Margaret Wheatley
Turning to One Another
ABCD Resources

- **ABCD Institute:**
  http://www.abcdinstitute.org

- **Tips for Working with Neighborhoods, by Dan Duncan:**
  http://www.abcdinstitute.org/toolkit/

- **When People Care Enough to Act, by Mike Green**
  http://www.inclusion.com/bkwhenpeople.html
More Resources

- World Café: http://www.theworldcafe.com
For more info, contact:

Deb Wisniewski
Email: scgwis@gmail.com
phone: 608-345-4761
LinkedIn:
http://www.linkedin.com/in/debwisniewski