

Planning and Visioning

The State of Cities

John C. Maxwell, one of the leading authorities on visionary leadership, asserts that, “effective leadership is not simply having the vision, but being able to articulate the vision.”¹ In every GRASP city, increased activity and resources are bringing new commitment to out-of-school hours. Still, the vision — the picture of what outcomes these programs should impact, what an effective out-of-school opportunity looks like and what a city dedicated to providing such opportunities would have in place — remains unclear. Asking stakeholders to put on paper their assumptions about the end goal of their efforts reveals competing priorities, different goals and often an unclear focus. Perhaps more importantly, city-level visions for the out-of-school hours are seldom supported by shared plans or planning structures that ensure the existing efforts are headed in the same direction.

Yet, each of the GRASP cities are making progress toward the sort of common vision and shared plan that is likely to result in commitments that are more clearly aligned and mutually supportive. In Little Rock, a citywide goals-setting process in the early 1990s resulted in a sus-

tained public funding stream for out-of-school programming for children and youth — as well as broad public understanding of why these programs are important, given that citizen participation was at the heart of the goals-setting process. In Chicago, stakeholders continue to hold up the mayor’s *Blueprints for Change* — a 1993 document laying out a plan for improving supports to the city’s young people — as a coherent statement of the city’s goals. In Kansas City, the right mix of civic leaders may finally be around the table to mobilize the community’s resources on behalf of young people.

I have very mixed feelings about how much I would ask for another planning process. I’ve been amazed by the power of action in Chicago — there’s power in doing, relearning, fixing, moving forward. Otherwise, you get mired down in who is at the planning table and who isn’t, whether the process is right.

— A key stakeholder in Chicago

And in Sacramento, a series of meetings hosted by the region’s child advocacy organization and others have helped define and refine an agenda for increasing support for out-of-school programming. Through these meetings in Sacramento, out-of-school opportunities bubbled to the top of a list of 50 indicators of child well-being — and stakeholders soon realized that nearly half of these indicators would be positively impacted by a greater investment in out-of-school.

Planning fatigue occurs for people who have planned and not seen something to fruition . . . even if communities have only early returns on their planning investment, they’re unlikely to feel fatigue. In our process, it would have been hard to put in the enormous amount of effort we did without any return on the investment. I think there were some good outcomes, regardless, and there was a rediscovery of what was available, a reconnecting across boundaries, as a result of the planning. But having a clear potential funding commitment at the other end was critical.

— The director of a major joint community-school planning effort

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

To what extent do stakeholders within a city share a common vision of where they are headed?

What are the processes that result in citywide plans and visions for out-of-school programming?

What are the structures that should be in place to support ongoing local planning?

How can cities build on earlier planning efforts or find ways to expedite the process to avoid planning fatigue?

The GRASP project is a time-limited, focused effort to help four cities — Chicago, Little Rock, Kansas City and Sacramento — document the opportunities and infrastructures that support young people in the out-of-school hours, and to develop “big picture” plans for better supporting children and youth. GRASP was initiated by the Forum for Youth Investment with the support of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.



Helping organizations that invest in youth, invest in change

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Tolman, J., Pittman, K., Yohalem, N., Thomases, J., & Trammel, M. (2002). *Moving an Out-of-School Agenda: Lessons and Challenges Across Cities*. Takoma Park, MD: Forum for Youth Investment.

¹ Dundit, M. (n.d.). “Leading through Preaching: An Interview with John Maxwell.” Retrieved 11/15/01 from www.preaching.com/preaching/features/maxwell.htm

These planning and visioning processes face common challenges. How do you maintain the level of commitment and alignment that comes of a one-time planning event or process? In Chicago, as the years have passed, the power of *Blueprints for Change* to focus public attention and stakeholder activity has clearly waned. In Sacramento, no entity exists to carry the planning process between individual meetings. In Little Rock, two tax initiatives proposed in the late 1990s failed to receive the necessary votes, in part because they were not perceived as being rooted in the past citizen involvement and goals-setting efforts. Equally importantly, how do you ensure that the planning includes the right mix of stakeholders? In Chicago, community-based organizations feel left out of critical conversations about new initiatives. Finally, how broad is the vision around which citizens are coalescing? Is it focused on workforce opportunities, or gang reduction, or a broad agenda of what young people need and can do?

Critical Issues, Lessons Learned

Visions are often framed narrowly. Most city planning processes relevant to the out-of-school hours have a mandate narrower than the full range of hours, outcomes and age groups that make up the “big picture” of out-of-school time. Cities tend to frame their planning agendas based on current crises: e.g., gang problems, an increased number of mothers in the workplace, or education system failure. If the convener is a school-age care intermediary, that will be the lens. If a public official is interested in older youth, that will be the lens. Even if the end result of planning is a

focused, targeted agenda, it is useful to begin with both a snapshot of the entire out-of-school landscape and the full range of opportunities for action on the table.

Planning infrastructure is in short supply. Few cities have an ongoing planning and visioning capacity, whether in the form of public agencies, standing committees and coalitions, or nonprofit intermediaries with a planning agenda. As a result, planning tends to be ad hoc and fragmented in nature, revolving around summits and documents that often fail to build on what has come before. In Sacramento, for instance, the region’s out-of-school agenda has bounced from summit to summit, without an entity or a process to shepherd the development or acceptance of the agenda. In response, stakeholders have called for the creation of a new coordinating body to support a more coherent planning process. Intermediaries with planning capacity, whether public or private, are at the heart of building a citywide out-of-school agenda.

Even good plans get old. In both Chicago and Little Rock, stakeholders still looked to vision documents from the early 1990s as the clearest statement of citywide commitment to the out-of-school hours. Both cities seemed ready for something new — or, ideally, for structures that allowed planning to be an ongoing process, rather than one that produced hefty documents that were soon out of date. Little Rock approached this planning by re-entering a citywide planning process after a decade had passed. Chicago has adapted through a series of gradual shifts in institutional commitments and smaller-scale planning processes. But in neither case are stakeholders completely satisfied with the planning processes or their outcomes.

CITY SNAPSHOT: LITTLE ROCK

In the early 1990s, when Little Rock was ranked in the top five cities in the country for violent youth crime, the city government established 13 working groups to begin a citizen involvement “community goals-setting process” known as FUTURE-Little Rock. Groups were asked to help determine what their city’s future should look like around issues concerning public safety, the environment, parks and recreation, health, education, and a range of other issues. Three people in each working group served as trained facilitators to help citizens explore the process. The working groups were conducted in open forum sessions, although participants were asked to focus on issues related to individual working groups. According to one participant, city government leaders did not impede the process, but relied solely on citizen input.

At the end of the 18-month process, recommendations were collected from all 13 working groups. The citizens had determined that more police were needed to address public safety concerns, but that for every new dollar devoted to police, there needed to be a dollar devoted to prevention. What was learned from this process was that “citizens are willing to put in time and effort to make recommendations for the future of the city. In short, people care.” With overwhelming support of the citizens of Little Rock, a half-cent sales tax was passed that would support funding of FUTURE-Little Rock programs, including more youth prevention programs.

Twice since the passage of this tax, citizens have been asked to pass additional taxes — once to primarily fund expansion of the jail, and once to fund city infrastructure needs plus expansion of many FUTURE-Little Rock programs. Both tax initiatives failed, and both were proposed without any citizen involvement process. According to one stakeholder, the lesson learned was that “you can’t hatch a deal in the back room and get it done...citizens thought it was a ruse to get a tax proposal passed without the input of citizens.”

Little Rock is currently engaged in a new citizen involved community goals-setting process known as VISION-Little Rock. Begun in early 2001, the process has been interrupted by the reduced revenue repercussions of 9-11 and recession. The top priority has been identified as “infrastructure,” but expansion of funding for youth programs and attention to education needs have emerged as a high priority issues. It remains to be seen if citizens will be willing to pass additional taxes to support citizen-identified needs of the city.

Contact Information for Local Efforts

Youth Services Division, Chicago Department of Human Services

(for information on Chicago's Blueprints for Change process)

Reness Ogletree, Director
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Chicago, IL 60602
Tel: 312.746.8439; Fax: 312.746.6284

New Futures for Youth

(for information on planning and visioning in Little Rock)

Mike Vogler, Program Specialist
400 W. Markham, Suite 702
Little Rock, AR 72201
Tel: 501.374.1011; Fax: 501.374.9736

Contact Information for National Resources

The Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, through its Wilder Center for Communities, provides technical assistance, training and resources to communities and organizations working to build collaborations, develop shared plans, and face related issues. For more information, contact:

919 Lafond Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55104
Tel: 651.642.4000
E-mail: webmaster@wilder.org
Web: www.wilder.org

The Fiscal Policy Studies Institute was created to assist communities, cities, counties, states and nations working to measurably improve the well-being of their citizens. The work of the institute is based on the principles of results-based planning and decision making; that is, on using valued outcomes and data about outcomes to drive planning. For more information, contact:

7 Avenida Vista Grande, #140
Santa Fe, NM 87508
Tel: 505.466.3284
Email: xfpsi@aol.com
Web: www.resultsaccountability.com

The National Civic League, through its Community Services program and the Alliance for National Renewal, supports communities as they tackle persistent problems and engage in community-wide work. The Community Services program provides technical assistance and resources around community visioning and planning, coalition-building, and a range of related issues. The Alliance for National Renewal is a coalition of community-building organizations, and has produced a number of publications on the community-building process. For more information, contact:

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