Sustainable Community Development Step 6: Carry Out Projects and Monitor, Evaluate and Make Adjustments as Needed[1]

Kaylene Sattanno, M. E. Swisher, and K. N. Moore[2]

Overview

This document explains how to evaluate your project and use sustainability indicators to measure progress. The document includes the 10 steps of the Bellagio Principles used to measure and assess progress towards sustainability.

Carry Out Projects and Monitor, Evaluate, and Make Adjustments as Needed

Monitoring of sustainability indicators and project evaluation allows you to assess the short-term and long-term outcomes of your project and determine whether goals and objectives are met.

Communities must be attentive and responsive to change. Through project monitoring and evaluation, new information feeds back into the community, fostering new questions and new practices. This information feedback allows communities to better adapt to changing conditions, while promoting greater long-term community stability and resilience.

A holistic approach to project evaluation considers the results in a broad context, taking into account the individual, regional, and potential global effects of the project. Using multiple evaluation methods best captures the true effectiveness of a sustainability initiative, which may be composed of several distinct program activities. Effective evaluations provide results that are understandable to community members and, therefore are, more readily channeled into the information feedback system.

Different methods exist for evaluating progress toward sustainability in a community. The Bellagio Principles, developed in 1996 by an international group of measurement practitioners and researchers, proposed a set of criteria for measuring and assessing progress toward sustainability. One evaluation method is to assess your sustainability project in light of the Bellagio principles that follow.

1. Guiding Vision and Goals: Are the community's vision of sustainable development and goals to attain that vision clear?

2. Holistic Perspective: Does the initiative consider the whole system, including social, ecological, and economic sub-systems?

3. Essential Elements: Does the initiative consider equity within the current population and between present and

future generations? Are the ecological components, on which life depends, considered? Is social well-being fully considered?

4. Adequate Scope: Does the time horizon used capture both human and ecosystem time scales and does it reflect the needs of current and future generations? Does the spatial scale reflect both local and global sustainability?

5. Practical Focus: Are there a limited, manageable number of key issues and indicators and standardized measures to facilitate comparisons?

6. Openness: Are data, methods, and interpretation public and accessible?

7. Effective Communication: Is simplicity and clarity of structure and language emphasized?

8. Broad Participation: Were all relevant stakeholders included in the design and implementation of the project, including youth, women, minorities and disenfranchised groups?

9. Ongoing Assessment: Are goals, frameworks, and indicators adjusted as change occurs and new insights gained?

10. Institutional Capacity: Is continuity of progress toward sustainable development supported by local institutional capacity?

In order to assess the projects long-term potential, your evaluation should include the following questions:

- How well are community leaders articulating the vision of the project?

- How does the project build on the natural, social and physical capital of the community?

- Was the effort collaborative and did it create new community partnerships?

- Do community members feel accountable for the outcomes of the project?

Reporting Evaluation Findings

When your team is ready to report your evaluation findings, consider the resources that will be required to do so. Will you communicate successes, lessons learned and concerns visually, in brochures, as a report, or through personal communication? In Jacksonville, FL, a report entitled "Quality of Life in Jacksonville, Indicators for

Progress" is published annually to evaluate targets toward sustainability.

- Consider contacting newspapers and television and radio news stations to spread the results of the evaluation throughout and beyond the community. A poster in the community's center can display the community action plan or vision statement.

- Provide testimony from local organizations or community members about the benefits of the sustainability project.

- Display quotes from the program participants about changes in their commitment to the community and how their actions made a difference.

- Create and present graphics like charts, pictures and computer models that illustrate changes occurring in the community.

- Develop a website as both a sustainability education tool and a method for documenting the status of the project.

- Utilize communication techniques that emphasize successes to engender community pride and encourage continued action.

As community members begin to recognize that their shared vision is attainable, a change in consciousness may follow. Thus, the community can be transformed into one where economic security, environmental protection, social justice, and commitment to the welfare of future generations truly exists.