The Community Action Plan

Official Community Plan & Zoning Bylaws Programs/ Policies/Services

A Municipal Guide to Community Action Planning

MCDP

SASKATCHEWAN

MUNICIPAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Developed by the

Municipal Capacity Development Program

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DISCLAIMER: *This document was created for the purpose of educating and assisting Saskatchewan municipalities. It is not intended for profit. Do not use without permission.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Municipal Capacity Development Program's (MCDP) Guide to Community Action Planning is a resource for Saskatchewan communities and inter-municipal groups to assist them in building their local capacity to plan for the sustainability of the region. The purpose of the guide is to provide a technical understanding and user-friendly process of developing a regional action plan.

The guide begins with an introduction to community action planning including the general process and benefits of completing a community action plan. The guide then dissects the process into four sections.

Section I defines the focus of a plan by explaining visions, missions and values and provides helpful hints and tools to use when facilitating the discussion.

Section II assists in assessing the situation of the communities involved. The assets and attributes (or strengths) of the communities are identified and the common issues and opportunities are discussed.

Section III sets the stage for planning for the future. It walks through goal and objective development and outlines the different components of an action plan worksheet.

Section IV is dedicated to explaining the purpose of developing measures to monitor progress and ensure the action plan meets the goals it was set out to accomplish.

MCDP assists Saskatchewan municipalities in building capacity for sustainability through facilitation, training, education, and research. We provide the knowledge and support municipalities' need to implement self-sustainable practices. For more information about other guides provided by MCDP, visit www.municipalcapacity.ca.

COMMUNITY ACTION PLANNING IN CONTEXT

Planning is essential in our personal lives; we plan our days, we plan our future, we plan our finances. If planning is essential to manage life on a personal level why would it not be a prominent part of the municipal operations environment?

Saskatchewan municipalities over the years have seen a decline in population, loss of schools, loss of businesses and some even the loss of an entire community. Until recently, the population remained below 1 million people and continued to decline until about 2006. Understandably, with so many years of hardship, municipalities welcomed growth and development opportunities with open arms; few questions asked. Though the growth provided Saskatchewan with a much-needed pride boost, municipalities were still unprepared in both strategies and infrastructure. Development has been invited into communities without an understanding of the current capacity and condition of infrastructure or assessing the current and future needs of the community. Municipalities now face the struggle of sustaining the growth they have while opening it up to more.

A <u>Community Action Plan</u> is one of the many tools available to assist municipalites take control of future growth and development within their communities, providing a preliminary strategic framework to begin formal planning. This guide outlines what community action planning is, the process and the means to creating a better, sustainable future for Saskatchewan municipalities.

The following diagram was developed by the Municipal Capacity Development Program to illustrate the process of building a regional strategy. By participating in any or all of the areas, our working groups are able to develop a coherent and strong inter-municipal working arrangement which may contribute to the successful development and implementation of a formal District Official Community Plan, Zoning Bylaws and Regional Programs and Policies.
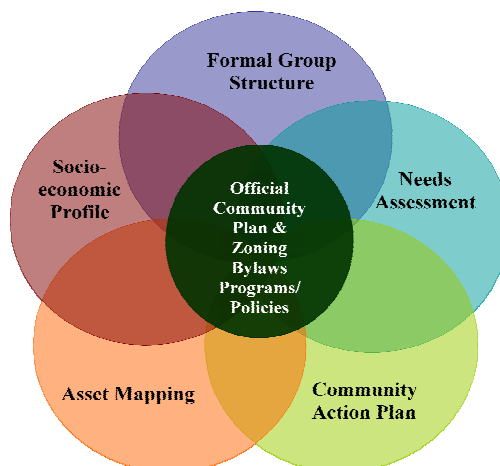
1) The Formal Group Structure identifies who is involved in a working group, decision-making, powers of the committee, internal leadership and member responsibilities. A group's structure may be formal or informal. A Memorandum of Understanding is a document typically used to identify an informal partnership. A District Planning Agreement and District Official Community Plan are formal documents which imply a deeper level of the intermunicipal working relationship. Developing a group structure, either informal or formal, is the best first step in developing an intermunicipal strategy. For more information, see MCDP's Guide to Municipal Co-operation- Succeeding in Regional Partnerships.

2) A preliminary Needs Assessment can help identify common areas to work together, or unique issues to be addressed. MCDP has brief and comprehensive questionnaires available on our website to help. A needs assessment can assist the group in identifying regional priorities and strategies. For more information, see the Municipal Government Self-Sustainability Tool or complete MCDP's Comprehensive Needs Assessment Survey.

3) A Community Action Plan is the purpose for this guide.

4) Building a Community Resource Inventory (or Asset Map) involves compiling an "inventory" of assets in a community using primary and secondary information. The resources in a community extend to the skills, potential and function of every individual and/or group of individuals; the needs and services of Local Institutions, Informal and Formal Organizations; land assets, and the characteristics and carrying capacity of physical infrastructure. For more information, see MCDP's Municipal Guide to Community Resource Inventory Development.

5) The Regional Socio Economic Profile is a tool that provides a 'birds-eye view' of a group of communities. It can assist municipalities in identifying unique and shared characteristics for the purpose of implementing growth strategies, development planning, and supporting and growing local services. It displays combined and comparable statistical snapshots of the communities in your region. For more information, see the Municipal Guide to the Regional Socio Economic Profile.

Visit the MCDP website at www.municipalcapacity.ca for access to each of these guides or contact MCDP at info@municipalcapacity.ca for information on our facilitation assistance with these processes.
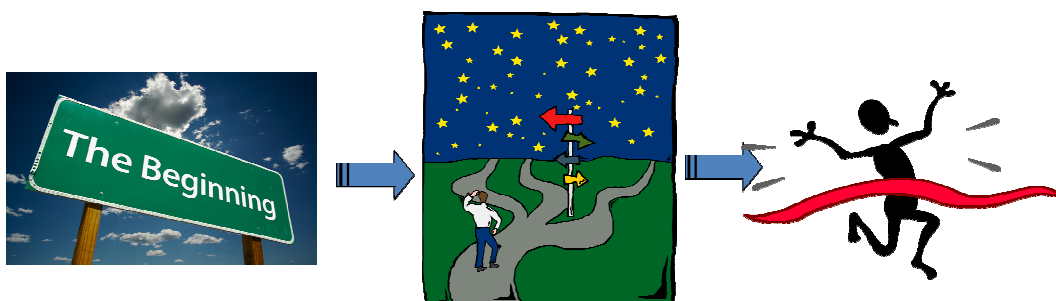
What is a Community Action Plan?

Community Action Planning is a unique form of strategic planning focused on developing a framework for a group of municipalities to meet the needs of the present and the future. It is the process by which guiding members of the organization (municipality) look to its future and develop the procedures and operations necessary to achieve that future. Like any type of strategic planning, it is not meant to be relief for short term issues but a way to create long term management and solutions to lessen the impact of future challenges.

The Process

The community action planning process is a journey with a destination in mind. How you reach your end goal is indicative of the road you take. Without a roadmap it can be impossible to know where you need to go, nor will you recognize when you have reached your destination. The process of creating a community action plan helps to organize your thoughts and ideas into a comprehensive and efficient way to approach and implement them. The process involves:

- Discussing the external environment including global, national and provincial issues that have and may affect the local economy in the future
- Identifying commonalities, shared needs, goals and priorities between the communities involved
- Creating a common vision for the future and strategies to turn challenges into opportunities
- Discussing and implementing share practices and tools to support each other in planning for the area
- Monitoring the progress made, evaluating the success achieve and adapting the process and the plan for the future based on your evaluations

Benefits of Community Action Planning

Cost Effective - Proactive planning is cheaper than reactive planning. When developing a plan for your region, you outline areas of interest, both pressing and future, to work on. This allows you to budget for the future and provide more and better services to your residents.

Efficiency - The planning process helps to uncover human, financial and partnering resources in you may have not known about or thought of in the region. By creating an action plan you are able to use these resources more efficiently.

What about succession? - By planning for the future of the community or region, you are setting a foundation for future leaders. It provides new decision-makers a starting point to continue to tend the fruits of seeds already planted. Think about your own experience: Would it have been easier for you to do your job now if your previous councils had established a plan?

Coordination - When a group of municipalities work together to plan for their region, the discussion process will assist in communicating and coordinating development (i.e. an intensive livestock operation would not be placed next to a residential development in the neighboring municipality).

Consistency - Coordinating your efforts and priorities will provide consistency for administrators, current and futures residents, and potential developers. Each municipality is unique but a community action plan can create consistency in the priorities that are similar or regional by nature.

Better decisions - The planning process involves unearthing and collecting as much information as possible about your community and region. More information will allow for more informed decisions.

HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

This user-friendly guide was developed to allow communities and inter-municipal groups the opportunity to independently undertake a Community Action Plan. The terms "community," "region," "organization," and "committee" may be interchangeably used throughout the guide to describe the intended municipal audience.

The **Components** category provides you with both a technical and simple understanding of the different components compiled in each section of a Community Action Plan. There are **helpful questions** and **tips** to assist you in facilitating and generating the components during brainstorming sessions.

All the parts of a Community Action Plan are important. It is the collection of those pieces that make up the strong hope for the future of your community. Though some parts may be harder to determine or develop, they are important in the journey of building a sustainable community. For professional assistance with your Community Action Planning Process, contact the Municipal Capacity Development Program.

Section 1 – Defining Your Focus

Having a focus is the foundation for your community action plan; it's the Emerald City at the end of the yellow brick road. Without a focus, communities become scattered with no sense of direction which can be detrimental to long term sustainability. If you focus the direction for your journey you will be able to focus your time and money on the ideal future for the region.

Defining your focus is done through the development of a *vision*, *mission* and *values*. The vision is the overarching picture for the region; the mission explains what you are doing as a group and why; and the values reflect the core ideology of the group.

These three statements become an overarching measurement tool to make sure you are on the right track towards your overall goal.

> **Tools and Resources: Visioning Brainstorming Session**
>
> Flip Chart
> Visioning Cheat Sheets
> Markers
> Sticky Tac

> **TIP:** No idea is a bad idea and may be useful later on in building your community action plan! Write down every and all ideas without judgment.

Vision

A <u>vision statement</u> is the guiding light of any organization. Essentially, a vision statement takes into account the current status of the organization, and serves to point to the direction of where the organization wishes to go. As a means of setting a central goal that the organization will aspire to reach, the vision statement helps to provide a focus for the mission.

The vision statement is not about what the community currently is, but what it hopes to become. It answers the question, "Who are we and what do we strive for?" "What would the ideal future look like?" It defines who and what the region is when operating at its' most effective level. What does your "Emerald City" look like? The tricky thing about a vision is that it should be something you continually strive for. If the vision is reached then it was not set high enough or it needs to be revisited and restructured; sustainability is ever evolving. Your vision and mission statement can and will change over time, as you strive to perfect your community and achieve your goals.

Helpful Brainstorming Questions:
- How do you see the community/region/organization in 5 to 10 years?
- Who are you?

TIP: If time is of the essence, provide all participants with a simple questionnaire before brainstorming session about how they see the community/region in 5 to 10 years. Have someone collect and compile the answers for a cheat sheet.

TIP: Build a starting point with fill in the blank phases such as
  Our vision is to be _____ OR
 *We are _____ that _____.*

Mission

While vision statements and mission statements are very similar in nature, there is a fine point of difference. A mission statement describes the overall aim of the group, a simple statement of your group's reason for existing. Often the statement is a pledge to deliver a superior product or service to customers on a consistent basis. A mission statement complements a vision statement by explaining *what the organization does* to reach its vision and why it does it.

> **Helpful Brainstorming Questions:**
> - What are you doing as a group/community/region?
> - Why are you doing it?
> - For whom are you doing it?

Values

Value statements are created to ensure there is no animosity, disagreements, or questions about the way people should act, or how the work should be carried out. It is very similar to the golden rules or playground rules set out by teachers in the classroom. Values reflect the core ideology of the group and describe how the group carries out its mission. They are meaningful sentences and more than single words.
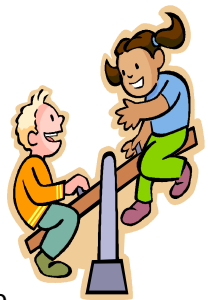
> **Helpful Brainstorming Questions:**
> - What values will help make this group effective in working together?
> - What values will guide our activities and intentions?

> **TIP:** Start with single words of how you want to work together, I.e. honesty, openness, etc. then build them into meaningful sentences by asking how. How will you be honest? How will you be open?

Section 2 – Assessing Your Situation

Once you have a perfect picture of *your* Emerald City in mind, now it is time to come back to the starting point and map out your yellow brick road.

Assess your current circumstances by recognizing where it is in relation to your vision, and what you have now that is of value or could increase your success later. This also requires identifying any challenges and turning them into opportunities that will help you to reach for your vision. In addition, you will need to prioritize these challenges and opportunities in order to develop goals, objectives and key activities moving forward.

> **Tools and Resources: Assessing You Situation Session**
>
> Flip chart paper
> Markers
> Sticky Tac
> Sticker Dots

Components

Envisioning Assets and Attributes

Starting with the best, positive characteristics and features of your community will enable you to see the potential in reaching the vision you have created for the region. Envisioning the assets and attributes of the area includes looking at everything you see as a benefit to the region and want to see remain in the community. This could be anything from social, cultural, educational, or environmental aspects, as well as physical and emotional aspects.

> **Helpful Brainstorming Questions:**
> * List any and all assets and attributes you wish to see remain in the community over the next 15 to 20 years.
> * What brought you to the community?
> * Why do you stay?
> * What do you enjoy most about your community?
> * What would you miss?
> * What are the best features of your area?

> **TIP:** Even if you may not see something as an asset or attribute, someone else might. Write down all the comments from all participants.

Identifying Challenges and Opportunities

When municipalities start to identify and discuss the challenges and opportunities in the region they will begin to recognize the commonalities between neighboring municipalities. Ultimately, this is the first step in building a strong relationship for sustainable success. Identifying challenges is easier at first than seeing opportunities; most inter-municipal relationships start because there is a problem they would like to resolve together. The challenges you identify can be current issues or something that may arise in the future.   A group should not focus solely on challenges relating to their vision; they should also list and discuss potential opportunities in the region that have not been capitalized on. Listing your combined assets and attributes *before* identifying your challenges and opportunities, you are able to see what you have in common to better leverage an opportunity or help alleviate an issue.

Prioritization

The list of challenges and opportunities can seem daunting for a single municipality let alone a group, especially starting out. Prioritizing your challenges and opportunities will create a more manageable list of key areas to begin to build your plan. A shorter, more manageable list will help participants feel like they are better able to accomplish something sooner and achieve tangible results in the short term. For those who prefer to talk than act, prioritizing will minimize tangent discussion and channel the discussion into clearer focus. The group must decide the number of priorities they feel is a manageable to work on. Issues can be grouped into categories to help narrow down the list.

Helpful Questions:
- How much time and manpower can we dedicate to priorities?
- Which priorities are short term (less than one year), midterm (one to three years), and long term (three to ten years)?

Section 3 – Planning for the Future

Your starting point and future destination have been outlined, but without a clear path to follow its very difficult to move forward effectively. A common problem in strategic planning is that the implementation plan for the vision and priorities is overlooked. Once the direction of a strategic plan has been written, a group often dusts off their fingers and pretends to have accomplished what was set out to do. Without an implementation plan the group loses focus and motivation. Without set goals, objectives, timelines and measures, the road to building opportunities and breaking down barriers will be confusing stagnant, and lacking in accountability.
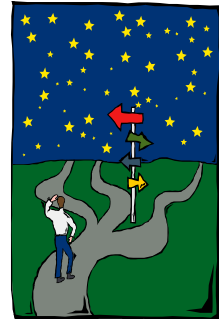
Following through with the implementation plan or the "action plan" is the "painful" part of planning - which is why many organizations don't get past their vision statement. Without a plan, a group of municipalities will be put in stressful reactive situations that will cost more, take more time to resolve, create tension and potentially damage any hope of growth or sustainability.

Tools and Resources: Assessing You Situation Session

List of Priorities
Action Plan Worksheet
Flip Chart
Markers
MCDP Website – www.municipalcapacity.ca

Components

Goal Development

Defining your goals is the first step in taking your priorities into the implementation phase. A goal allows you to focus on the reason you made that specific issue or opportunity a priority. It is the overall reason for a solution. Take the 'why' and create an action to go along with it. Different municipal groups may have different visions but similar priorities and goals. Each municipal group is unique, so decide what is right for you. Continue to ask 'why' until you uncover the basic reason for **your** priority.

> **Helpful Questions:**
> - Why is this a priority for us?

> **Example:** Why do you need bylaw enforcement? To keep our citizens safe and to avoid confusion as to what is right and wrong. So then your goal could be: "To create an environment that is safe and certain for citizens."

Objective Development

An objective identifies the solution to your goal. If your priorities are specific, tangible issues then they may actually be the objective or solution you need. For example, if you listed bylaw enforcement as a priority you would first need to determine the goal or overall reason for bylaw enforcement. Then list bylaw enforcement as an objective, but be specific. If someone from outside the group were to read your community action plan would they understand what you meant by 'bylaw enforcement?' For example, do you want to enhance existing services, create a bylaw enforcement unit, increase the number of enforcement officers? Explaining the solution in terms of specific accomplishments will assist in creating a very defined objective.

There are other times when you have a priority that is more generalized and thus closer to a goal rather than a specific solution. This is where the group would need to brainstorm the different ways to accomplish or reach the goal. For example, in Planning and Development, the goal could be to "Create consistent planning and development across the region" and the objectives may be to create a district planning commission; review and update bylaws for consistency; create a district development appeals board, etc.

> **Helpful Questions:**
> - Does our priority reflect a goal or objective?
> - What is the solution(s) to reaching our goal?

> **Remember:**
> Goal = Overall Reason for addressing priority
> Objective = the Solution to address the goal

Action Plan Worksheet

The action plan worksheet encompasses the detailed implementation plan of your objectives. The key elements include activities, timelines, resources and leads.

Activities are the list of actions that need to be undertaken to complete your objective. The *timelines* outline the deadlines to complete activities. The *resources* include the human resources you have or need to complete the objective; financial resources required or already obtained; and any other existing assets you have that may assist in completion. The *leads* refer to the person(s) responsible for completing an activity as well as the person responsible for overseeing the completion of the objective. Outlining the details of implementation will help build agendas for meetings, maintain accountability and ensure efficient completion of objectives. A **sample action plan worksheet can be found in Appendix A** to assist you in building your own implementation plan.

> **TIP:** Research and inquire about the process other groups have taken to implement their objectives. The MCDP website houses an abundance of information on numerous municipal topics, sample agreements and other inter-municipal group documents.

Section 4 – Measuring Success and Progress

Many times the success of an action or goal cannot be seen immediately. It may take months or years to see the effect of your inter-municipal cooperation, community action plan, or achieve your goals. ***Measures*** allow you to track the progress so you stay on track and on time. Consistently monitoring your progress will help you to recognize when and where your plan goes off course.

Many times, municipal achievements can be hard to measure due to the intangible factors involved. How can you measure how people view your community? How will you know if putting a plan in place actually did what it was suppose to do?

Tools and Resources: Measuring Success Session

Action Plan Worksheet
Statistics for current situation on each goal
An idea of ideal timeframes

Components

Indicators

The first step in measuring the success of your goals is to create *indicators*. Indicators are the tangible means used to measure the progress of achievement; it is the physical "thing" you keep track of. If you don't have a tangible way to measure intangibles, you may not know if your return on investment is worth it. For example, you have a goal of creating growth in your community; how do you measure growth? You may use the number of houses built, the number of new businesses in the community; whatever you feel can be used to measure "successful" growth in the eyes of the members.

> ### Helpful Questions:
> - What will you use to measure success of a goal?

> **TIP:** Your Objectives can be seen as the tangible way of meeting your goals and may provide some assistance in determining your indicators of reaching your goal.

Measures

There are three measures used in monitoring your success. The *baseline* or starting point is the current situation of your indicator when you begin. For example, if your indicator is number of houses built, your baseline would be the number of current houses before the plan is implemented. The *benchmarks* are checkpoints in your timeline. For example, you have benchmarked 5 houses to be built in six months, 15 houses in one year and 25 hours in two years. The *target* is the end result you are aiming for. For example, you would like to have 40 houses built in three years.

Helpful Questions:
- What is the current situation of the indicator before beginning?
- At what specific points in the project's timeline do you want to assess your progress? What should be completed with regards to your indicators by those timelines?
- What is your overall timeframe for completion? Based on your indicators, what will the end result be?

TIP: An example action plan worksheet that includes the components of Section 3 and 4 of the Community Action plan can be found in Appendix B.

USING THE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

A community action plan is a living document; once developed it is meant to guide your inter-municipal group to achieve priorities and sustainability in the region. So what do you do once the plan has been developed? **Follow the Three R's to keep your Community Action Plan as a living document!!**

Regular Meetings

Many groups will have completed the group structure step before developing a community action plan. One of the steps in creating a group structure is determining the frequency of committee meetings. Regular scheduled meetings can maintain a high level of motivation to complete actions from the action plan. It will also create deadlines for certain tasks to be completed by. Regular Meetings are a time for the group to discuss what has been completed, provide clarification, and deal with any complications.

Reporting

Whether the group chooses to have sub-committees to accomplish tasks or meet as a full group, a structure should be developed and used to report on the progress of the community action plan. You could choose to have a written report for the sub committees, create the agenda for a meeting based on the objectives or discuss certain objectives at certain meetings. Whatever works best for your group to make sure the plan is continually at the forefront of the work you do.

Review

Sustainability does not always mean keeping things the same. Each action you complete can have a ripple effect of changes in your community. Set aside time at an annual meeting to review your situation and the progress made on the action plan and adjust your community action plan to remain current and applicable.

MUNICIPAL CAPACTY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM SERVICES

The Municipal Guide to Community Action Planning is simply one resource for municipalities developed by the Municipal Capacity Development Program. Established in 2006, the MCDP was founded on the outcomes of the [Clearing the Path Initiative](#) and developed as a partnership between [SARM](#), [SUMA](#), [New North](#) and [Municipal Affairs](#). This partnership program was created with the goal of promoting growth, cooperation and community development through intermunicipal partnership. The partnering organizations recognized a need to:

- *Assist municipalities in building capacity for planning;*
- *Promote cooperation among municipalities to deliver more cost effective infrastructure and services;*
- *Further the adoption of intermunicipal growth management plans; and*
- *Foster long term working relationships amongst communities and encourage collaboration amongst municipalities, including First Nations and Métis communities.*

Over the last several years, following the suggestions of numerous council and community members, the MCDP has come to provide a variety of services to meet needs of municipal leaders and build and maintain sustainable communities in Saskatchewan.

The role of the MCDP in sustainable community development is to encourage and assist municipalities in developing long-term municipal capacity on an inter-jurisdictional basis. The benefits of such an approach to capacity building range from achieving more effective, accessible, and cost efficient services to managing growth and attracting economic opportunities on a regional level.

Whether you are a community leader, and economic development professional, or interested citizen, we can help you identify local priorities and carry out strategies to help you achieve your community goals. For more information on our program and services, or to access our other guides, please visit our website at www.municipalcapacity.ca or email us at info@municipalcapacity.ca.

APPENDIX A – ACTION PLAN WORKSHEET

Priority:

Goal:

Objective	Activities (and sub-activities)	Lead (Who?)	Resources	Timelines

Measures				
Indicator:				
Benchmark:				
Target:				

APPENDIX B – EXAMPLE ACTION PLAN WORKSHEET

Priority: Growth

Goal: To grow the community for a sustainable future

Objective	Activities (and sub-activities)	Lead (Who?)	Resources	Timelines
Increase number of available housing	Create an Request for Proposal for Contract services	Jim	**Financial**	June 20th
	Select contractor	Bob	$50,000 from RM	August 1st
	Apply for housing grants	Anne	$100,000 from Town	ongoing
			$150,000 from Grants	
			Human Resources	
			Contractors	
			Plumbers	
			Planner	
			Current Assets	
			Available land south of	
			Town	
Measures				
Indicator:	# of houses built			
Benchmark:	5 houses in six months, 15 houses in one year, 25 houses in two years			
Target:	Build 40 houses in three years			