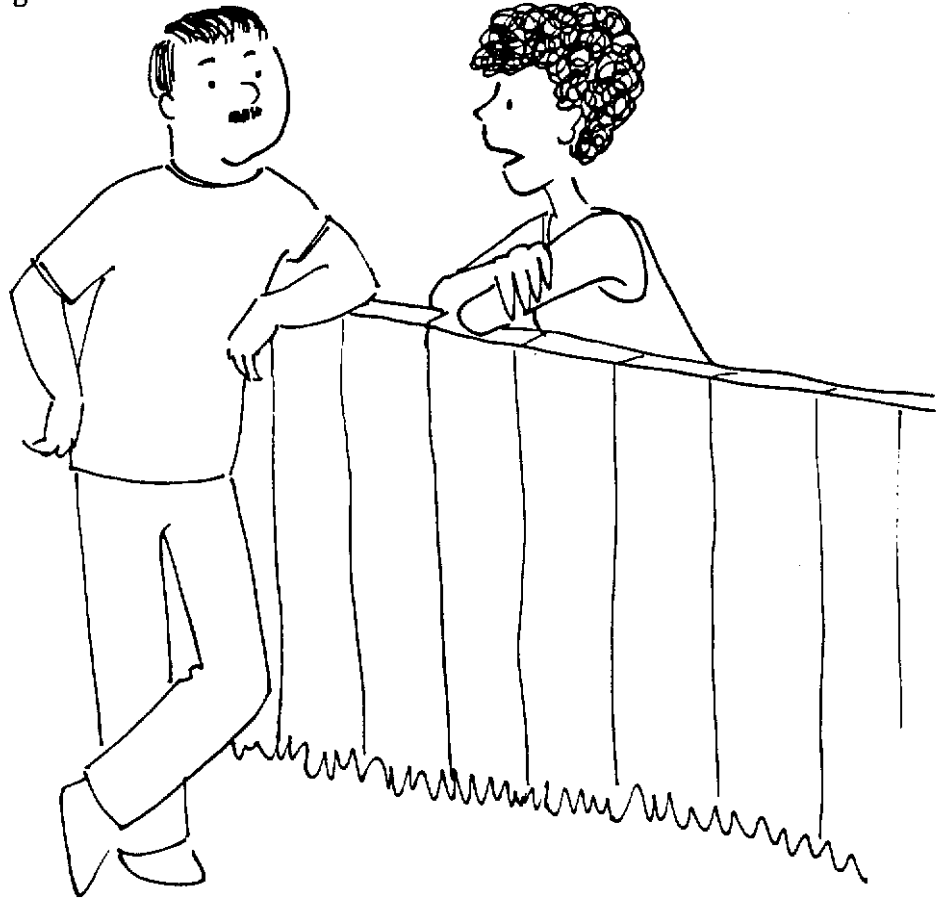

Strengthening Communities

A Series of Community Development Skills Guides

- ▷ Discovering Why Are We Here
- ▶ **Living Our Values**
- ▷ Thinking Creatively
- ▷ Making Choices
- ▷ Building Community Alliances
- ▷ Planning and Facilitating



Living Our Values

A guide to reaching common values and putting them into practice

A SPARC of BC Publication

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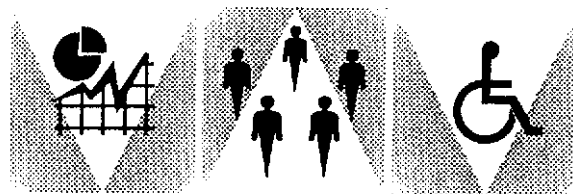
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**Social Planning and Research Council
of British Columbia**

SPARC of B.C. is a provincial voluntary association which conducts research and planning and provides public information and education to help people cooperatively plan for the social well being of their communities. For this Guide series, SPARC has drawn from its more than 25 years of experience with community work.

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Before you begin...

What binds your group together?

How We Define Community

We don't. People do that themselves in the many ways they create communities — by getting to know neighbours, sharing common interests, joining different clubs and associations, taking classes, making friends at work, maintaining strong ties to extended families, and joining with one another to address an issue.

Can you describe your community development process?

How We See Community Development (CD)

Community development involves community people taking democratic control by participating in planning, bottom-up decision making, and community action. The process and outcomes of community development reflect common values, conflict and compromise, and the shifting of power to the community.

Have you talked about the values that guide your CD process?

Some Community Development Ground Rules

Community development is a way of working together based on shared concerns and respect for one another. Its values — equality, caring and sharing, social justice — guide what we do and how we do it.

Being welcoming (inclusive, open to others, friendly), sharing resources in an equitable (fair) way, being willing to compromise or reach consensus, basing decision-making in the community, and involving the public are all part of the community development process.

Do you take the time to think about the way you are doing your community development work, and why?

Learn While Doing

Community development involves action (doing), reflection (thinking about, talking about, and understanding what your group is doing) and action (doing it again but doing it better, with more understanding), and so on...

Opportunities for improving skills are often found during times of reflection.

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A word about using the Guide...

Plan your learning activity the way your group learns best. Some groups may just want to talk informally about the ideas in the Guide. Others may want to proceed in a more structured way. The *Planning and Facilitating Guide* has lots of useful ideas to help you plan.

The Guides are set up so that you can easily work through them in a logical and meaningful manner, simply following through the Guides section by section. It is probably a good idea to give everyone a copy of the Guide you are working with.

- ▶ Begin by sharing and comparing each others' experience and understanding of the topic. (*Other people's stories.*) Are there any common themes? What are the differences and similarities?
- ▶ Next, look at some of the theory. (*Why is this Important?, Something to think about, It's tougher than you think.*) What do others say about this topic? How does this compare with what the group has already discussed? Does this change your thinking?
- ▶ Try a couple of the exercises. (*Getting down to work.*) You will find an exercise to correspond to each of the main ideas in the Guide. Use examples from your own community development activity to put what you've learned into practice.

You can also consult the Guides for ideas or activities as you work through a community development activity.

Tips...

- ▶ These are your key to quick skill ideas

Introduction

Values are identified through a process that involves people's feelings, thoughts, desires, actions and spiritual needs. For the community development process to be effective, groups will have to remind themselves regularly of the central role values play in shaping their community activity.

Community organizers have the challenging and very important task of leading groups through a discussion of the values which guide their work.

This is not easy. For many, taking the time to clarify values may seem like a waste of time when there are pressing community issues to be resolved.

Main ideas in the guide

- ▶ Ourselves and others
- ▶ Getting beyond talk
- ▶ Changing times, changing values
- ▶ Values we talk about and values we don't talk about
- ▶ The means and the ends

Ask yourselves...

- ▶ Do I struggle between the values I hold for myself and those that I think contribute to community life?
- ▶ What are the values we need to hang on to in this community? Is it time to let some go?
- ▶ Can you describe an instance when your group acted disrespectfully, undemocratically, or without tolerance?
- ▶ Can you talk about any times when you thought things that were happening in your group did not fit with what was being said?
- ▶ What actions in your group reflect your values?

These questions are explored in this guide.

Other people's stories

A growing community on the west coast of BC was committed to using a public input process to shape the next Official Community Plan (OCP). More than 1000 people completed surveys, registered for workshops, visited the Community Visions Office and participated in focus groups. In all, close to 15 percent of residents took part, with youth and seniors playing an active role. The result was a statement of community values that would guide the OCP.

What people valued (and wanted to enhance) was the quality and beauty of their community's natural environment and its small town atmosphere. They also wanted to develop a self-reliant economic base, to continue to develop their human resources and to have amenities accessible to all. The values identified in the process were used to shape municipal public policy from that point onward.

Specific activities resulting from these values include a shade tree program, workshops to form a youth advisory council, and the formation of a bicycle planning committee.

Why is this important?

Values are always present. They determine individual behaviour and affect all group decisions. When people understand their own values and how those may be shared (or not shared) by others, they are better able to understand the behaviour and decisions of others.

More and more groups are willing to recognize that identifying values is an important first step in the community development process. Values that are talked about and agreed upon are much more likely to become part of how we do things.

Groups who understand and regularly remind themselves of the importance of values will be better equipped to handle the conflict which could otherwise sideline their activities.

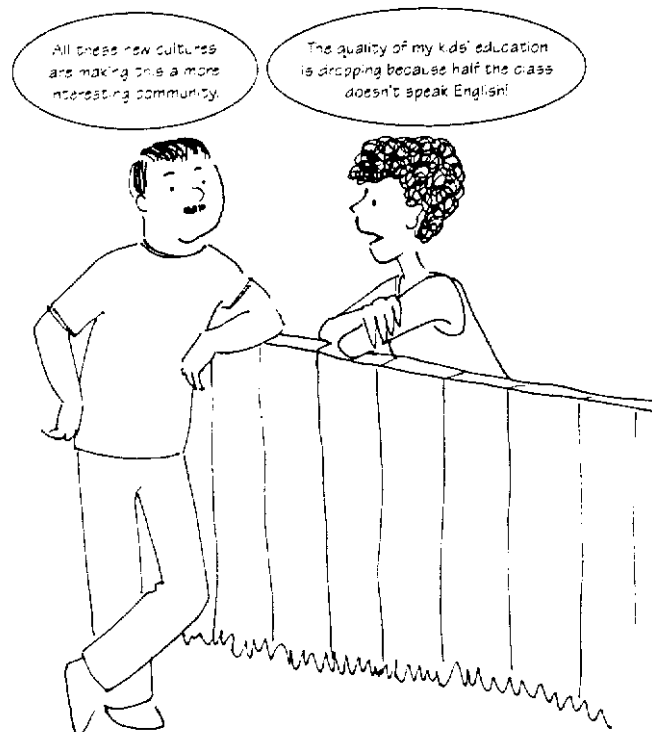
Something to think about

Ourselves and others

Community development incorporates the values of caring and sharing and emphasizes cooperation and collaboration. It calls on people to accept responsibility for working together for the well-being of their community.

Another strong value in Canadian society is that of individualism and individual rights and privileges. This includes the freedom to choose *not* to be involved and the freedom to live life as independently as possible so long as it does not take away another person's freedom.

The values of cooperation and collective responsibility and those of individualism can be, and often are, in conflict. This can be healthy when people are trying to strike a internal balance between their individual and community values. This conflict is not so healthy when, for example, people agree to the value of affordable, safe housing for all (a community value), but refuse to have affordable housing built in their neighbourhood (an individual value and the value of a particular group).



Changing times, changing values

Traditions play a powerful and positive role in shaping our communities. However, as times change, so do some values. People working in communities must think deeply about the traditional values they hold and move towards changing those that detract from healthy community life. A striking example in Canadian society, traditionally dominated by white males, is the slow and deliberate push towards values of multi-culturalism and inclusion.

I'm the fourth generation
in this neighbourhood.
We like it the way it is!

Yes but the world is changing...
we need to learn to accept new
ways of doing things.





Values we talk about, values we don't talk about

Sometimes we are unwilling to put all of our values on the table either because we are afraid to or because we are simply not aware of them. Often in community settings we quite openly express collective values like "we value families, neighbourhoods, and communities that care for one another". At the same time it may be difficult to talk about personal values that may be in conflict with group values, like "I highly value my right to privacy whenever I want it". If these implicit values (those not talked about) are not brought consciously to the surface, group members may run into conflict at precisely the point when they need to be most together (when they are taking action). Even controversial values are easier to deal with when they are out in the open. Groups can understand what those are and work to reconcile differences.

Matching the means and the ends

The outcome of most community work is based on “socially worthwhile values”, or those things we think of as “good” (inclusion, generosity and mutual respect). Sometimes, things get a little muddy along the way. Groups get caught up in conflict, competition, and political manoeuvring. Values are sacrificed in order to get the job done.

The values that groups want to see in the end product must be continually expressed in how they do the work (their process).

Getting beyond talk

Most groups are willing to talk about values as an important first stage in the community development planning process. As groups move from planning to action, however, decisions are often made that bear little resemblance to the mutually agreed upon values. What happens is that groups start to realize the implications of their easily agreed upon values. It is one thing to support the value of clean fresh air in theory. It is another thing to put this value into practice by accepting car-pooling requirements and restrictions on individual use of private vehicles.

Community organizers should not underestimate the intense emotional energy which can be generated by this contradiction. It will help if groups start by thinking through the implications of their values (“clean air” may mean changing the way we live) and remind each other of those values as they move beyond talk to action.



It's tougher than you think

When we share our values, we run the risk of having them challenged. This may mean we find ourselves changing some of our values.

Many people believe that talking about values is a waste of time and keeps us from getting on with community action.

In some instances, talking about values may show people that they cannot work with others who do not share enough common values.

When community groups do not share the same values as the dominant power structure (city hall) their efforts to make change may be frustrated.

Getting down to work

This section contains some straight-forward exercises to get you started. These exercises can take as little as an hour or as long as a day to complete. Use your own community development project to make the work more practical. Choose the exercises which are best for your group and issue (the *Planning and Facilitating Guide* gives tips on how to plan these activities).

Most of the exercises are highly participatory — one of the best ways to learn about community development.

An exercise for *ourselves and others*

A decision a day

What is it?

This exercise allows people to take some time to reflect on their own values. It will push people to think about what type of values (personal or community) influence the decisions that they make.

Why use it?

Often we agree to a set of community values because we do not understand their implications. By looking closely at the decisions we make in our day-to-day lives we are better able to understand the values which motivate us.

How is it done?

Invite people to keep a personal diary over a two week period by recording one decision a day. Encourage them to think about the decisions they make each day. Some examples may include:

- ▶ Should I take the bus or drive?
- ▶ Should I go to the public meeting or stay home and watch the hockey game?
- ▶ Should we have the in-laws over or should we go away by ourselves for the weekend?
- ▶ Should we support the affordable housing project or support our neighbours who oppose it?
- ▶ Should we take the time to help our sick neighbours bring their crops in or should we bring ours in first?

Remind group members that we are constantly called on to make decisions like these which balance our own interests against the interests of others.

At the next meeting ask people to comment on the exercise. Were there any surprises? How often did personal interests drive decisions?

An exercise for *ourselves and others* and *getting beyond talk*

Reality Check

What is it?

This is an exercise to help groups think through what might happen if they actually put their values into practice by thinking about the implications of each value.

Why use it?

Sometimes groups come up with values that sound good in theory but are difficult or impossible to put into practice. (There are many reasons for this but one of the main reasons is that personal values are conflicting with collective values.) This exercise will help groups think through what their values may mean if they were actually put into practice. Groups will also be able to pinpoint areas where their personal values may clash with community values.

How is it done?

List group values on a sheet of paper. On a separate sheet write the questions: What are some of the possible outcomes from this value? Can I live with these results? Can I support this value in a practical sense?

Ask each person to consider the questions silently for three to four minutes and then jot down responses for each.

In a large group setting, ask for responses from the group on each value. Note key points on a flip chart or other large sheet of paper.

Ask the group:

- ▶ How does this affect the values we have agreed on?
- ▶ Do we need to change our values in any way?
- ▶ Is there anyone in the group who cannot live with these values?

Diverse Community

- many people from different cultures living together
- a variety of cultural celebrations
- a changing look to our cities
- many kinds of food in our grocery stores
- many more languages spoken in schools

Exercises for *values we talk about, values we don't talk about* and *changing times, changing values*

Story Telling

What is it?

Values shape the experiences of our lives. By telling stories — reflecting on the past, describing the present, and dreaming about the future - we can find those values.

Why use it?

Story telling is a creative way of expressing stated (explicit) values. It is also a non-confrontational way to bring hidden (implicit) values to the surface. Story telling also provides group members with an opportunity to look carefully and critically at traditional values.

How is it done?

Explain to the group that this will be an opportunity to talk about the values that affect their day-to-day lives.

Use three large pieces of paper. Label one "past", one "present", and one "future".

Stories about the past

Have one or two members of the group tell the stories about their past that made them want to work with others to make a difference in their community.

Ask others to listen for the main points that remind them of their own experiences, and to listen for those points which are quite different from their own experiences.

List the main points on the pieces of paper labelled "PAST."

Stories about the present

Have one or two other people tell stories that describe why they want to work with people now around the issues that brought this group together.

Ask others to listen for the main points that remind them of their own experiences, as well as to listen for those points that are quite different from their own present experiences.

List the main points on the piece of paper labelled "PRESENT."

Stories about the future

Ask another one or two people to tell a story about what they would like the future to look like for the issue(s) that brought the group together.

Ask others to listen for the main points that remind them of their own vision of the future, as well as to listen for values that are quite different from their own.

List the main points on the piece of paper labelled "FUTURE."

Looking for values in our stories

Look over the points recorded on the three pieces of paper and ask each other, "Which of these really express our values?" Underline the values with a coloured felt marker.

First Stage

(Ask these questions under each heading:)

- ▶ What part of these stories is really talking about values?
- ▶ What values lie below the surface of what is being said?
- ▶ What values should be added?

Second Stage

- ▶ Are there any differences between the past, present, and future values found in the stories?
- ▶ Do we still want to hang on to the values that shape our past?

Third Stage

- ▶ Which of these values are we willing to adopt as group values?

Fourth Stage

- ▶ How does this affect what we are now doing?

An exercise for *matching the means and the ends*

Values Gap

What is it?

This exercise will give groups a chance to compare the values they would like to express with those values they are actually expressing.

Why use it?

One of the most difficult challenges in community work is ensuring that the theory remains consistent with the practice. In the case of values, groups need to check regularly that they are expressing the values they think they are.

How is it done?

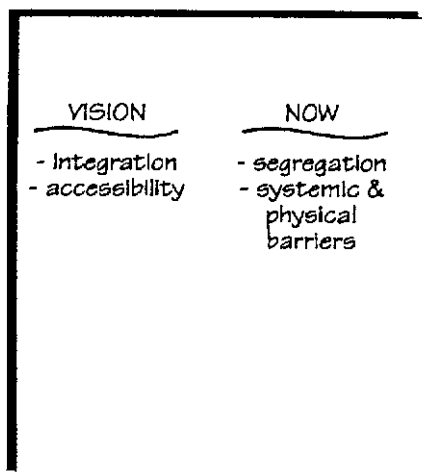
Draw a line down the centre of a piece of flip chart paper. Down the left hand side of the page list the values you would like to see as a part of the end product (what you are working towards).

Now, for each of these values ask yourselves: What are we doing now?

List these on the right side of the page:

What are the gaps between where we are and where we would like to be?

How can we get to where we want to be?



For more information

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The Series

Use the Guides...

*...to direct an activity
...to get back on track
...when all else fails!*

Discovering Why We Are Here

Help your group figure out what it is about, and why.

Living Our Values

Help your group be clear about what is near and dear to its heart. It will make working together a lot easier and a lot more effective.

Thinking Creatively

Help your group put its creative energy to work.

Making Choices

Ideas are a dime a dozen. Help your group sort through the list and choose what is best for your own work.

Building Community Alliances

Help your group figure out who else to work with and why.

Planning and Facilitating: A Guide to Help Use the *Strengthening Communities Series*

For the old hand and the faint of heart! A step-by-step guide to facilitating groups the CD way.

Although each booklet stands on its own, most will find that the booklets *Discovering Why We Are Here* and *Living Our Values* are a good place to start.

Apart from that, the choice is yours!