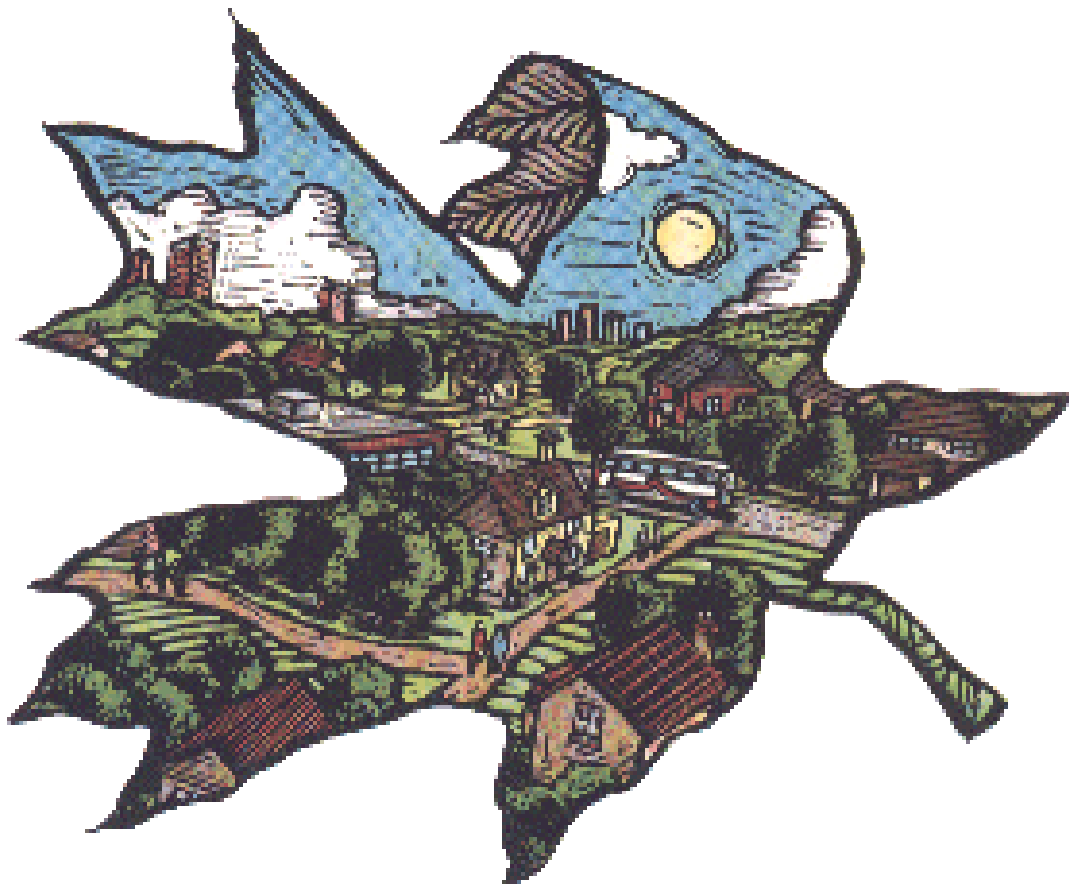


# COMMUNITY ACTION FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

A Guide to Helping Your Community Go Green



A publication of  
The Conservation Council of Ontario



# COMMUNITY ACTION FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

## A Guide to Helping Your Community Go Green

### FIRST EDITION

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### COPYRIGHT

The Conservation Council of Ontario

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# INTRODUCTION

## COMMUNITY ACTION FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Canada's environmental movement is changing. We are no longer struggling to make people aware of the issues: acid rain, ozone depletion, global warming, deforestation, toxic chemicals, solid waste, and disappearing natural areas. Canadians share a strong desire to improve the quality of our environment.

Our challenge now is to find ways to facilitate the transition to an environmentally sound society. Organizing ourselves is the first step.

### WHO ARE YOU?

Why did you pick up this document? We hope that it's because you want to make a difference in your community. Whether you're a local activist, a politician, a bureaucrat, a teacher, or a citizen with conviction, we can help you develop your community's potential for action.

This manual is designed to help communities organize. In turn, each community can become part of a growing network that is supported through provincial and federal programs, foundations, corporations, and non-governmental organizations.

Community groups and volunteers are an important part of the environmental movement. Through combined efforts we can reach and involve every citizen in Canada and encourage them to help improve our environment. When every part of the community is working towards a common goal, the results can be tremendous.

### HOW TO ORGANIZE A COMMUNITY

This manual will introduce you to a simple, low-cost approach that will show immediate results. It outlines a five-step process to encourage and support widespread community involvement in solving environmental issues.

**1. Develop a Community Network** — a contact list of groups and individuals that share a common desire to improve the local environment, including community groups, cultural groups, schools, businesses, service clubs, and all levels of government.

**2. Set up a Coordinating Committee** — representatives from all sectors of the community who have agreed to help promote and support community-based projects.

**3. Designate a Community Coordinator** — a staff person, consultant, or volunteer who is the main contact person for members of the community network, and for the provincial and national community support programs.

**4. Draft an Environmental Community Action Plan** — a brief statement of the environmental priorities for the community, the lead organizations for each issue, and some of the projects that will support the community goals.

**5. Conduct a Community Campaign** — a number of interrelated projects that support an overall community goal.

The suggestions in this manual can be adapted to reflect your community's existing activities and planning processes. You will also be able to determine your own priorities for action and find out where you can get support for community-based projects.

The more communities that get involved the better. In the end, we will have a network of communities across Canada that are working to improve their local environment. In turn, they will also be contributing to provincial goals as well as to Canada's environmental citizenship principles, as defined by Environment Canada.

### KEEP US INFORMED

As you read through the manual, ask yourself if you think our suggestions will work in your community. If you decide to organize your community, or if you are already organized, please let us know how you are proceeding. We may be able to help you turn your ideas into action, and your experiences might help other communities.

*Chris Winter  
Executive Director  
Conservation Council of Ontario  
March 1995*

# WHAT IS A CAP?

## DEFINING COMMUNITY ACTION

A Community Action Plan (CAP) is a call to action. As a document, it outlines and publicizes a community's commitment to improving the environment. It lists the projects, both current and desired, that have widespread support and will help address the major concerns of the community, and it provides a framework within which those projects can be undertaken.

As a process, a CAP is more than a document. It is a forum for creating a community network, with the goal of encouraging effective action.

The purpose of an environmental community action plan is to encourage individuals to act for the environment, either by making changes in their own lives, or by participating in community-based projects. It also provides opportunities for community groups to plug into existing initiatives. To this end, each community action plan has the following objectives:

1. To improve the local environment through public action and community projects;
2. To promote public involvement in environmental projects and community groups;
3. To develop partnerships in support of community projects, including, but not limited to, all levels of government, the business community, funding agencies, schools and universities, and non-governmental organizations.

Some of the distinguishing characteristics of a Community Action Plan are:

- It is cooperative. The CAP brings together community leaders from all sectors to determine where they can work together to achieve community-wide goals. If an issue is too controversial, then it should be referred to a different planning (or lobbying) process. For example, a CAP may not help you to site a landfill, but it will help you promote recycling, composting, and waste reduction initiatives throughout the community.
- It is efficient. The CAP process is designed to spend a minimum amount of time on committee work and planning. Depending on the size and existing degree of organization in the community, the Community Action Plan can start producing results in six months.

- It is effective. The Community Action Plan provides a concise summary of the major priorities for a community-wide campaign. Whether the reader is a volunteer, community group member, storeowner, teacher, or politician, the plan will show them how they can get involved, who to contact, and where to find support for their own initiatives.

## WHAT IF WE ALREADY HAVE A COMMUNITY PLAN?

No problem. Developing a Community Action Plan is not a new idea, nor is it a rigid process that must be followed to the letter. Community planning for the environment already exists in many forms. There are many existing types of action plans, including Healthy Community Plans (combining health, social and economic issues, and the environment), Remedial Action Plans (for water quality), Green Community Plans, solid waste management plans, and the municipal Official Plan. Each is designed to involve the public in the community planning process.



# GETTING STARTED

## A CHECKLIST FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

Before reading this manual, it's a good idea to take a moment to think about your own community, your own strengths, and what "community organization" means to you. Every community is different. These differences will contribute to how you want to organize for community action. Here are some important questions that need to be answered before you begin.

1. How do you define your community? Is it your town, your neighbourhood, a rural county, or the cottages on a lake?
2. Are there any environmental projects that you

already have in mind: cleaning up a lake or a stream, composting and recycling, conserving energy in homes, or planting trees? If so, who should be involved to make the project a community-wide success?

3. Is your community well-organized for environmental action? What are some of the groups and government bodies that you look to for leadership on environmental issues?
4. The most important question of all is: "Are you getting results?"

*Use this checklist to determine how well-organized your community is. Do you have:*

### A Community Network

Is there a contact list of groups and individuals that share a common desire to improve the local environment, including community and social groups, schools, businesses, service clubs, and the municipal government?

- Yes       No  
 Could be improved  
 Don't know

### A Coordinating Committee

Is there a committee of representatives from *all* sectors of the community who have agreed to help promote and support community-based projects?

The coordinating committee can be an existing multi-stakeholder committee, such as a Local Round Table, an Environmental Advisory Committee, or the steering committee for a Remedial Action Plan or Healthy Communities project.

- Yes       No  
 Could be improved  
 Don't know

### A Community Coordinator

Is there a contact person who can support the coordinating committee and the community network and provide a link to the provincial and federal support programs? Usually a paid position, the coordinator could be a municipal staff person, a contract position with a community group, or a consultant. Smaller communities may prefer to work with a volunteer.

- Yes       No  
 Could be improved  
 Don't know

### An Environmental Community Action Plan

Is there a brief document that states the environmental priorities for the community, the lead organization(s) for each issue, and some of the projects that support the community goals? It may be a separate publication, or material published through a community newspaper.

- Yes       No  
 Could be improved  
 Don't know

### Community Campaigns and Projects

Has the coordinating committee, or any of the participating organizations, used the network to develop a community-wide campaign in support of an overall common environmental goal?

Does the coordinating committee encourage and support a wide range of community-based projects?

- Yes       No  
 Could be improved  
 Don't know

## HOW DID YOU SCORE?

Relax, very few communities in Canada can answer each question with a resounding "yes". That's why organizing communities for environmental action is so important.

Many communities will have one or more of the pieces, such as an active environmental group, or a passionate community leader. There may even be an environmental advisory committee. Start with what you know and branch out.

# PREPARATION

## BUILDING SUPPORT WITHIN YOUR COMMUNITY

Is your community ready for community-based action? Here are some suggested steps to help you prepare your community for environmental action.

- Identify your community.
- Find out who is interested.
- Identify or establish a coordinating committee.
- Appoint a community coordinator.
- Identify or establish a community group network.
- Identify your community needs and resources.

### Step 1. IDENTIFY YOUR COMMUNITY

What do you consider your “community”? It could be your neighbourhood, town, county, watershed, or even a school or a business. This manual is written primarily for use at the municipal level, but it doesn’t take much effort to adapt the process to other types of communities. If organizing a municipality seems too big a task, look at your neighbourhood. Are there issues that can be addressed through a concerted community effort? Can you get the support of your neighbours, your local stores and your councillor?

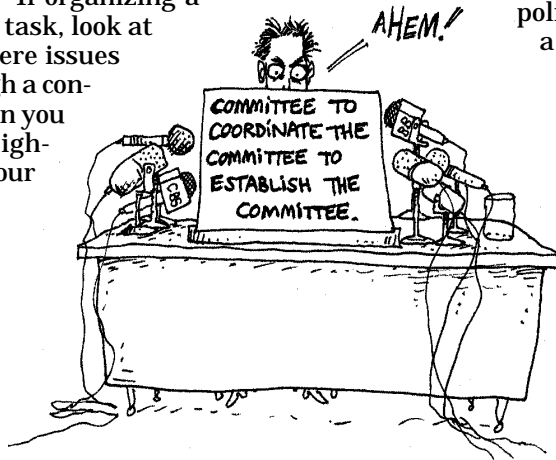
### Step 2. FIND OUT WHO IS INTERESTED

Anyone can initiate a Community Action Plan. It usually starts with one person who hears about the process and asks “Can it work here?” It could be the mayor, a local activist, a student, or a store owner. If you’re reading this manual, it’s probably you. The very first step is to take this paper to a few people in your community and ask if they are interested in working on a Community Action Plan.

Next, make a list of some of the people who

could help start a Community Action Plan. Try to include representatives from all areas of the community, including diverse local groups, schools, government, business, and any other major organizations.

Take it one step at a time and build the ground swell of interest and support for the project. Start with the people you know. For example, if you are a community leader — a politician, or a representative of a community group or the Chamber of Commerce — you can start by talking to the other members of your group and representatives of other major groups. If you have been approached by members of your community, offer to help them contact other organizations. Keep it informal. When you are ready, ask for a letter of support from each organization.



### Step 3. IDENTIFY OR ESTABLISH A COORDINATING COMMITTEE

The role of a coordinating committee is to oversee the preparation, implementation, and monitoring of the Community Action Plan. The committee

should include representatives of all sectors of the community, including government, citizens, cultural groups, and business leaders. The committee should ensure that all community groups, although not necessarily represented on the committee, have an opportunity to contribute to the drafting of the plan. The committee should also encourage other groups to submit ongoing or potential projects for inclusion in the CAP.

Does your community already have a multi-sectoral advisory committee? Many do. A common example at the municipal level is an Environmental Advisory Committee that is responsible for monitoring environmental issues and advising the municipal council. Others municipalities have set up Local Round Tables, adding in the responsibility to prepare a sustainable development strategy for the community. Still others have advisory committees on specific environmental issues, such as water quality (Remedial Action Plans) or waste management (Waste Management Master Plans).

Whether you are building on an existing committee or starting from scratch, make sure the coordinating committee has the mandate to:

- consult with the public on environmental priorities
- draft a community action plan
- coordinate and support community-wide campaigns
- assist community groups to develop their projects
- promote widespread public involvement through environmental projects and individual action
- advise the municipal council, business community, and others on environmental issues.

The committee and the Community Action Plan should focus on environmental issues, but both also need to address related issues of concern to the community, including health, social issues, culture, arts, and economic concerns. In fact, many activities in the environmental field (cycling, recycling, public awareness, tree-planting, etc.) have positive effects in promoting health, new business opportunities, and community involvement. The coordinating committee should encourage involvement by these other sectors in finding solutions that go beyond simple band-aids for environmental problems.

#### Selecting committee members

Members of the coordinating committee should be selected for their ability to work with and understand the priorities of each of the community groups. In addition, individuals with particular expertise will prove helpful when committees are

defining difficult or specific issues in the community.

The qualifications for committee members will vary with the size and type of community. Small municipalities will likely be able to identify individuals who are already involved in several community groups and understand the community's priorities. Larger municipalities will want to include individuals able to incorporate the concerns of single-interest groups into the overall multi-issue plan.

In general, the members of the coordinating committee should:

- have a good understanding of community issues and concerns, and of provincial (or global) environmental priorities
- be positive and constructive in approach, and be able to identify and create opportunities for community involvement
- be able to assist in drafting the community action plan by contacting organizations and assisting in preparing a concise summary of proposed activities
- be able to assist in implementing the action plan, through promotional activities, work with local organizations, or other skills
- be prepared to meet on a regular basis to monitor and revise the plan as required
- be able to provide community leadership.

#### COMMITTEE SIZE

The coordinating committee should be large enough to adequately represent the community, but small enough to be manageable (somewhere between six and fifteen members). The optimum size of the committee will vary with the size and make-up of each community.

#### Step 4. APPOINT A COMMUNITY COORDINATOR

You will soon need a main contact person for the project. In smaller communities, you may be able to get away with a volunteer, perhaps paying an honorarium for services rendered. Larger communities will almost definitely need a paid position, either part- or full-time.

The responsibilities of the coordinator can include any or all of the following:

- supporting the coordinating committee
- researching and developing the community network

- coordinating public consultation and publicity for the CAP
- drafting the community action plan
- developing a list of resources and support programs within the community, and within the public and private sectors
- assisting in the development of projects and community-wide campaigns
- keeping accurate files and records on all aspects of the CAP
- maintaining communications within the coordinating committee, with the public, and with the media
- measuring the progress of the CAP against the stated objectives.

The different types of coordinator positions that have been tried in our pilot communities include a municipal staff person, a professional consultant, a community group (supported by a foundation grant), and volunteers from the coordinating committee.

We also suggest that the coordinator be the main contact person for any funding or support programs.

### Step 5. IDENTIFY OR ESTABLISH A COMMUNITY GROUP NETWORK

The coordinator should develop a comprehensive list of community groups and community leaders. Be sure to include all types of community groups and private sector partners: environmental, ratepayers, religious, social, cultural,



youth and seniors, schools, and service clubs, along with local industries and small businesses. Some potential partners may not be located within the community but will have a valid role (e.g. regional Conservation Authorities or district government agencies). These groups and individuals should be contacted early in process and asked to submit their recommendations for activities to be included in the action plan. The list should be developed in consultation with the coordinating committee. (See box below.)

Ideally, an action plan will draw on resources in every part of the community. The best plans are ones that develop partnerships between a wide range of groups, using the skills of each to improve the prospects for success.

Larger municipalities may wish to set up two levels of community networks, or identify a lead organization that will assume the responsibility for involving each of the smaller groups within its network. For example, in Metro Toronto, approximately 100 groups are identified at the regional level, and over 1,000 groups and individuals are included in a community contact list.

### Step 6. IDENTIFY YOUR FUNDING NEEDS AND RESOURCES

You don't necessarily need major funding to organize your community. For most communities, the cost can be kept to a minimum by allocating existing staff, public consultation budgets, and community grant programs to the process. Communities with tighter budgets may want to rely more heavily on volunteers and donated services.

## A COMMUNITY NETWORK — WHO TO INCLUDE

*Each of the following individuals or groups can play an active role in helping to draft and implement an environmental Community Action Plan.*

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| ● conservation and environmental groups | ● ratepayers groups                         | ● business associations  |
| ● cultural groups                       | ● local foundations                         | ● major employers  |
| ● service clubs                         | ● local MPs or MPPs                         | ● labour unions or councils  |
| ● religious organizations               | ● local industries                          | ● small businesses (e.g. corner store, local factory, video store) |
| ● schools                               | ● individual citizens                       | ● professional associations  |
| ● school environment clubs              | ● municipal politicians                     |  |
| ● individual classes                    | ● municipal departments                     |  |
| ● individual students                   | ● local government agencies                 |  |
|   | ● the Chamber of Commerce or Board of Trade |  |

Community action is a good investment. It will help the municipality achieve a healthy environment, community spirit, and reduced costs for environmental management.

Look first for sponsors within your community. Such sponsorship will help build a strong commitment to the project as well as make it more attractive to outside funders. Try to find one, two, or several lead agencies who will agree to oversee the project and underwrite the cost of preparing, publishing, and promoting the plan. In many cases a municipal government will agree to fulfil this role, although the main sponsor agency could be a native band council, conservation authority, service club, community foundation, major employer, or a neighbourhood ratepayers group (for a neighbourhood action plan).

If a municipal government is going to sponsor a Community Action Plan, it may want to pass a resolution supporting the project and allocating staff and financial resources to the project. The request should come from community representatives, with the backing of as many organizations and individuals as possible. Talk to your local councillors beforehand and make sure they will support the resolution.

When identifying resources for your Community Action Plan, be creative. The possibilities are endless. Below are some examples of different approaches to funding various elements of a CAP.

**Community coordinator:** The coordinator can be an existing staff person, a new position, a paid consultant, or a volunteer. Larger municipalities may be able to identify other resource people in support of the project, such as a writer and publicity staff.

**Public workshops:** Public meetings can be covered by the municipality, supported through corporate or foundation sponsorship and public donations, or sponsored by a local group.

**Printing and distribution:** The final action plan can be published and widely distributed as an official report, or it can be given limited distribution to the community groups. Distribute the plan to the interested public free of charge, or at cost. Another innovative option is to print the action plan as an insert to the community newspaper. It provides the newspaper an opportunity to actively participate in the plan, reduces printing costs, and ensures wide distribution.

In general, to develop and carry out a Community Action Plan, some type of support is needed for the following activities:

- designation of a coordinator for the project
- establishment or identification of a community coordinating committee
- community consultation efforts
- preparation of a draft action plan
- provision for public input into, comment on, and review of the draft action plan
- revision and approval of a final action plan
- publication/printing of the final document
- provision of ongoing support to the coordinating committee.

Funding for communities engaged in organizing themselves for action is available from the federal and provincial governments, District Health Councils, foundations, and companies. Grants range from small (a few thousand dollars) to large (\$300,000 over three years), and each program funds different aspects of community action. See the *Resources* section of this paper for more information.



# GOING PUBLIC

## DRAFTING A COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

This section is an introduction to a written Community Action Plan. It outlines the steps your coordinating committee can follow to prepare an action plan. They are:

- Adapt the process to the community
- Solicit input from the community
- Draft the community action plan
- Review and approve the plan.

### Step 1. ADAPT THE PROCESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Every community is different. The task of making an action plan fit the needs of the community rests mainly with the Coordinating Committee. That is why ensuring that the committee is dedicated, well defined, and grounded in the community is so important. The initial public consultation event will serve to identify community concerns and priorities. Before the committee undertakes this event, they will need to ensure that they are all comfortable with the CAP process. This aspect of CAP development should not be rushed. It is pivotal to the success of the program. As a first step, the Coordinating Committee should:

- review the background material (such as this discussion paper), existing municipal strategic plans, existing public consultation processes, and other environmental reports for the municipality;
- agree on the purpose and structure of the action plan;
- review the initial list of community groups and identify a list of groups for each member of the committee to contact personally;
- establish a work plan and timetable.

A solid, well-defined beginning will ensure a solid, well-defined Community Action Plan.

### Step 2. SOLICIT INPUT FROM THE COMMUNITY

In preparing an action plan for your area, it is essential to determine how you can reach each and every member of your community. Involving as many diverse community groups as possible will allow the plan to reach a large percentage of the population.

There are many ways to canvass community groups and the public for ideas that can become part of your action plan. Here are some suggestions:

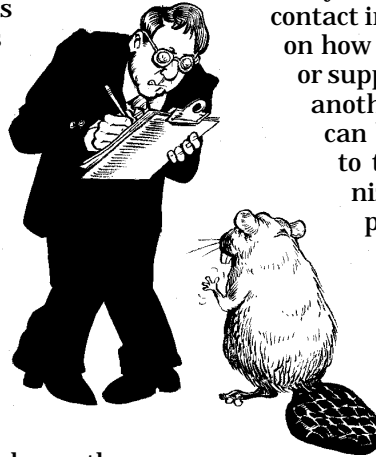
- Issue a press release to announce the project, introduce the members of the coordinating committee, and request public involvement
- Advertise through local newspapers
- Contact local businesses to solicit their involvement. The local Chamber of Commerce can play a lead role in coordinating the involvement of the business community in the action plan
- Contact groups directly. Distribute a questionnaire to community groups to solicit their suggestions for community-based projects. (See box.)

- **Host a public meeting.** A public meeting will provide the community with an opportunity to learn about Community Action Plans and to discuss their priorities.

activities ensure immediate results whereas the long-term projects can lead to high profile and significant results.

### Step 3. DRAFT THE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

Once initial community consultation has been completed and community groups and businesses have been contacted directly, the Coordinating Committee will need to meet on a more regular basis to prepare the action plan. There are five basic steps in this process:



#### a) Identify a community vision

Did one or two issues emerge as priorities for your plan? Draw from the results of public consultation, other existing reports on environmental issues, statements from the participating groups on their existing priorities, and any other relevant documents.

#### b) Assess each project

Review the projects and priorities submitted by the community groups. Assess each project's merits and select those that fall within the mandate of the CAP. Include proposed projects as well as existing ones. Include both short-term and long-term projects and activities in the plan. Short-term projects and

#### c) Develop partnerships in support of each project

For each project, identify the partners and their respective roles. The committee and the community coordinator should be prepared to contact individual groups with suggestions on how their project can be strengthened or supported through a partnership with another group. Although this process can be time consuming, it is essential to the integrity of the plan. Recognize that as the plan is implemented, partnerships may change.

#### d) Identify possible community-wide campaigns

For those issues that have a large degree of support, the committee may wish to consider proposing a community-wide campaign within

which the committee and/or other lead organizations would coordinate a series of community projects.

#### e) Prepare a draft plan

The project coordinator should compile all of the information (e.g. community priorities, coordinating committee members, short-term and long-term projects, potential community-wide campaigns) to

## A COMMUNITY QUESTIONNAIRE

*Keep it simple. We suggest three questions:*

#### i) What are the priority issues for our community?

Have groups list the major issues they feel need to be addressed in the community. They will probably be local issues, but may also include global, national, and regional concerns.

#### ii) What can your group do to help?

Have groups give a short summary (one or two paragraphs) of any existing or planned projects, activities, or resources that will help to address the priority issues. Ask for

- a description of the project
- the people and organizations involved
- its status (e.g. planned, or third year of operation)
- anticipated benefits.

Ask for as much information as possible on each project.

#### iii) What support do you need?

For each activity/project, ask groups to provide a summary of the resources, support, staff, training, materials, equipment, etc., that would improve their ability to carry out projects. This will give the coordinating committee a sense of what groups need and where partnerships with other groups, businesses, or funders can be arranged.

create a draft of the action plan. The committee can then review the overall plan and suggest other activities that could be initiated by community groups. For example, your community may have several tree-planting projects on the go, and a “Pitch-In” campaign to pick up litter, but there may be no long-term care for a local greenspace. You can recommend that a group “adopt” the area, keep it clean, and look after newly-planted trees.

Include any recommendations the committee wishes to make for public or private sector support programs. For example, you may feel the community needs more expert advice and training on tree-planting. With identification of this need, provincial forestry and environmental organizations, and the provincial and federal governments will be encouraged to develop improved support programs.

When the vision of the community has been developed into a strategy, with individual projects and goals, the committee should revisit the process of identifying funding needs and re-

sources. A more detailed action plan will help identify specifics for funding proposals and applicable programs.

Use this sample Table of Contents to identify essential elements of your Community Action Plan.

#### Step 4. REVIEW AND APPROVE THE PLAN

Once the committee is satisfied with the draft plan, it will need to undergo public review. Distribute the draft to your community group network, the participating businesses, and the local government in advance of the meeting.

The review will identify any weaknesses, and help to solidify public support for the plan. The comments received can be reviewed by the committee before the final version is prepared. The coordinating committee and each of the sponsoring organizations should approve the final version before it is distributed officially.

### COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN

#### Suggested Table of Contents

**Cover Letter:** a letter to the community from the Mayor or community leader

**Introduction:** a description of the purpose of the action plan and how it was developed

**Community Profile:** a brief overview of the distinguishing characteristics of the municipality and the priority issues

**The Community Action Plan:**

- a description of the issues and community goals
- lead organizations from each sector
- current activities and projects
- suggestions for new projects or a community-wide campaign

**Resources:**

- where to go for financial support
- where to get advice and educational material
- where to get donated products or services

**Network:** a contact list of key groups, government departments, and others who are supporting the Community Action Plan

# IMPLEMENTATION

## COMMUNITY CAMPAIGNS & INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

By this stage, you will have an overall Community Action Plan, lead organizations for each issue, and a network of community groups interested in participating in the plan and its projects. Transforming the plan into action is the next step. Below are some suggestions on how to go about implementation by:

- Supporting individual projects
- Deciding on a project
- Initiating special campaigns.

### Step 1. SUPPORTING INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

There is no shortage of ideas and energy within a community. However, there may be many difficulties to overcome before a good idea is turned into a successful project. With a little help from the Coordinating Committee and other members of the community network, local groups can develop projects that will implement elements of the overall action plan. Creating partnerships allows diverse groups to contribute different skills and resources to a common project.

Here's where the Coordinating Committee can help:

- review and strengthen individual project ideas
- find partnerships within the community (other groups that are doing related activities, possible support opportunities)
- research funding, in-kind donations, and technical support within the community
- maintain an up-to-date list of support programs (financial and otherwise) that are available from the provincial and federal governments and agencies, non-governmental organizations, corporations, and foundations
- write letters of support for key projects that have been reviewed and approved by the Coordinating Committee
- help promote projects through a media strategy

- initiate a volunteer program to support CAP projects.

### Step 2. DECIDING ON A PROJECT: ADVICE TO COMMUNITY GROUPS

Even the smallest of groups is important to a Community Action Plan. The goal is to reach as many people as possible, and every school class, neighbourhood group, local business, and cultural and social group can play a role.

If your group is interested in taking on a larger project, take a moment to review your collective strengths. Try to design a project that will build on your existing skills and resources.

#### Assess Your Strengths

- What are the interests of your members?
- What is your total membership?
- How many people can you expect to attract to an event? How many people can you reach through educational activities?
- What are your areas of expertise (as individuals and as a group)? What special skills do your members have? What experience does your group have?
- What resources do you have? Do you have an operating budget that will cover basic project costs?

Are there people who have donated goods and services in the past and who are likely to continue doing so?

**vi) How can your group best support a Community Action Plan?**

- By taking a lead role in establishing an action plan for your community?
- By participating in public workshops?
- By being a lead organization on one issue?
- By developing a special project?
- By contributing to a project or community-wide campaign?

### Assess Your Project

Do you have a project that you think is appropriate for the CAP? Use these questions to help refine it.

- 1) Is it achievable? Have you set realistic goals for your project?
- 2) Does it support a community goal? Are there other organizations with similar or supporting projects?
- 3) What are the barriers? Can you think of anything that would present a significant problem?
- 4) Who are your friends? Who will assist your project, either financially, through in-kind donations, or with moral support?

## SAMPLE PROJECT IDEAS

*There are many types of projects community groups and schools can organize.*

*Here are some ideas that can be adapted to almost any issue or community action goal:*

### Research Projects

- an inventory of the local natural environment
- sampling and testing (soil, water, air quality)
- community mapping to indicate environmentally sensitive areas, or toxic hot spots
- research papers on specific issues
- community surveys or a “needs assessment” (what do people want to see, what do they need to know?).

### Education and Awareness Projects

- door-to-door/farm to farm/individual contact campaigns
- landowner contact programs
- home audits (for toxics, solid waste, energy and water conservation, etc.)
- local business education campaigns
- development of general and target specific educational material
- public displays
- presentations to schools
- self-education programs for your group on specific issues
- information network (establish a network of community experts)
- an information hot-line
- special media events (launches, community days, project results)
- information fairs or parties

### Hands-on Projects

- adoption of an area (stream, woodlot, marsh, street, or urban park) with a look at all aspects of its management and enhancement
- tree-planting
- stream clean-up and rehabilitation
- renaturalization (creating wetlands, urban parks, arboretums etc.)
- litter clean-up
- recycling or composting
- toxic waste collection (with appropriate government approval and participation)
- community gardens
- neighbourhood, or community challenges (for transit, saving energy, reducing garbage, etc.).

### Government Interaction Initiatives

- communicate your priorities to your elected officials
- learn about and participate in government planning
- facilitate public involvement in public consultation exercises (Official Plan reviews, environmental assessments, etc.)
- develop a check-list, or sponsor an “environmental priorities” questionnaire during municipal elections.

### Step 3.

## INITIATING SPECIAL CAMPAIGNS

Here's where things really begin to happen! A community campaign brings all the interested groups in the community network together to tackle one common goal. Each organization designs and carries out its own project consistent with its interests, expertise, and resources. The Coordinating Committee can announce a special campaign for any one of the issues identified in the Community Action Plan. Over the next year, the committee can coordinate a series of projects to achieve the campaign target.

There are three main objectives for a community campaign:

- 1) achieve measurable results in environmental enhancement and/or resource conservation
- 2) promote environmentally-responsible behaviour and attitudes
- 3) promote public involvement in community projects.



The campaign will vary depending on the size of the community and the complexity of the issue. For example, smaller communities can reach every citizen more easily than larger municipalities. In addition, some issues lend themselves more easily to community based projects and activities.

Try to select a campaign and a goal that are both challenging and have a high chance for success. Here are some possibilities:

- 100% of homes with composters
- a 10% reduction in home energy consumption
- a 20% increase in commuter cycling
- a 10% increase in natural areas
- the complete restoration of a degraded stream

- a 10% reduction in household hazardous waste
- a green economy initiative (such as ecotourism, or small business ventures)

Any of these campaigns will require careful planning and the complete support of all sectors of the community. These are some of the steps involved in undertaking a community campaign:

#### 1. Identify the campaign target

The Coordinating Committee should agree on the focus and objectives for a community campaign and draft an initial outline of the projects and activities that could be developed under the campaign.

#### 2. Bring together the players

Coordinate the organizations, government departments, businesses, and others that can take a lead role in developing, supporting, and implementing the campaign.

#### 3. Hold regular planning meetings

At the first meeting, participants should outline the resources they can bring to the campaign and ideas for projects. Try to find a lead organization for each component of the campaign, and a short list of other groups that can be involved as partners. For example, the local utility could develop a home energy conservation kit that, in turn, will be used by community groups in a homeowner contact program or at shopping mall displays, or will be given away at a community conference on "How to Save on your Energy Bill!"

#### 4. Assist each organization in preparing their project

Members of the Coordinating Committee, and other participants in the campaign, should help community groups find the financial, technical, and material support they need to get their project off the ground. Try to establish new partnerships within the community: partner community groups with local businesses, corporations, funders, or provincial and federal support. Use the community network to develop a list of groups and volunteers who will help with the campaign.

#### 5. Develop the overall campaign

Here's a check-list of things to look for in a good campaign:

- a clear purpose
- strong prospects for success
- strong partnerships
- large-scale community awareness and involvement
- a broad range of activities

A good campaign achieves its targets through several different approaches, including, but not limited to:

- an effective media strategy
- local displays
- local government programs
- community events (workshops, displays and special activities)
- one-on-one contact (door-to-door, farm-to-farm, workshops, staffed displays, etc.)
- community group presentations and membership education.

**We cannot overstate the importance of involving as many community groups as possible in the campaign.** Most people belong to at least one group, whether through work, home, or community. The community group network provides an unequalled opportunity to reach the entire community through personal contact.



### Provincial and National Campaigns

*Many provincial and national groups organize public awareness campaigns. Organizing projects as part of one of these larger campaigns might fit your community's resources and priorities.*

EVENT	DATE	HOST GROUP\CONTACT
Heritage Week	second week of February	Ministry of Citizenship and Culture
National Wildlife Week	second week of April	Canadian Wildlife Federation
Earth Day/Earth Week	April 22/week of April 22	Earthday Ontario/Earthday Canada
Arbor Week	last week of April	Arbor Day Council of Canada
National Forest Week	first full week of May	Canadian Forestry Association
Pitch-In Canada	first week of May	Pitch-In Canada
Environment Week	week of June 6	Environment Canada
Toxic Free Week	early June	Conservation Council of Ontario
Clean Air Commute	late June	Pollution Probe
Waste Reduction Week	first week of October	Recycling Council of Ontario
Community Parks Week	first week of October	Ontario Parks Association

# REVIEW

## IMPROVING YOUR ACTION PLAN

The Coordinating Committee's remaining tasks are: to evaluate the success of the Community Action Plan, find new partners, recommend additional activities that would further promote environmental stewardship, and revise the action plan as required. The two requirements are:

- Monitor and evaluate the plan's success
- Revise the plan as required every few years.

### Step 1. MONITOR AND EVALUATE THE PLAN'S SUCCESS

The Coordinating Committee should review the community's progress, as necessary, in order to identify new areas in need of special attention. Refer back to the characteristics, goals, and objectives of a CAP listed in the "What is a Community Action Plan" section.

If you held a community campaign, hold a workshop at the end to review the results. If you ran into problems, or you discovered limits to what can be achieved through voluntary action, use the workshop as an opportunity to develop recommendations for government, corporate, non-governmental, and individual actions that would make it easier for people to contribute to a healthier environment.

Highlight your successes. The Coordinating Committee or municipality can give out annual awards to groups, businesses, and individuals who have played a key role in implementing a project under the Action Plan, and to those projects that are particularly successful.

### Step 2. REVIEW AND REVISE THE PLAN AS REQUIRED

Every two years or so, the Action Plan should be revised in order to keep it current. The first revision

can be a streamlined version of the CAP process, asking each group to update their activities. The streamlined revision can be accomplished in two to three months.

There are several reasons to revisit your CAP on a regular basis:

- As your community moves ahead with its CAP activities, its priorities will change. In addressing one issue, another may become apparent.
- Government policies or programs may change, or new information may become available, requiring your community to address other issues, or use different approaches.
- New programs may be developed in the private sector which will impact your community's priorities.
- In expending effort in specific projects, it is easy to lose sight of overall goals and strategies. As you move toward your goals, you may discover more effective approaches, which will need to be reflected in the CAP.
- For many issues which will be identified, achieving measurable differences in habits and perceptions will require long-term commitment.

Plan to hold additional public workshops every four or five years in order to conduct a thorough assessment of the plan and identify any new priorities.





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