



HOW TO PLAN AND IMPLEMENT A PROJECT

by Dr. Patricia Mihaly Nabti

Action 1: Decide on a Project

To decide on a project, participants need to consider six important factors:

- 1) What is the **community** we seek to serve?
- 2) What is the **need** we seek to address?
- 3) What are we **interested** in doing?
- 4) What **can** we do?
- 5) Is our project a **genuine service**?
- 6) Is our project **sustainable**?

Consider doing a project related to the **Millennium Development Goals**. If the group starts by choosing the community it wants to serve, it helps to do a **needs assessment** or **community mapping** exercise. Analyze community assets and needs, create a short list of possible projects, and do a pro/con analysis to decide on the right project for the group.

Action 2: Identify Stakeholders and Create the Project Team

Who are the people who have the **greatest stake or interest in the project** and may be enlisted to help in some way? Make a list and recruit them to join the team, provide in-kind support, or help fund the project.

Action 3: Gather Information

The more the participants know about the project, the better it will be. Early in project planning it is good to do an Internet search, check information in the library, and/or meet with the prospective recipients of service and experts on the subject to learn from them.

Action 4: Create a Project Statement

Create a half page explanation of the project that answers the questions:

Who? Group name; in collaboration with

What? Project name; mission statement

Where? Project location

When? Project time frame

Why? Needs statement; vision statement

How? Project summary; project objectives

Action 5: Plan According to Key Principles and Factors

Two Principles:

Think before you act.

Work from broad to fine.

Four Factors:

Time

Quality

Information Management

Organization

Action 6: List and Assign Major Tasks and Specific Jobs

Develop a list of the major tasks that need to be completed to achieve the objectives of the project with the specific jobs to be done for each task (**broad to fine**). Assign the person in charge of each task and job, and indicate the deadline for completion.

Action 7: Identify Project Needs and Assets

Create a chart of project needs and assets. Indicate the source for those that are easily available and the potential source for others, starting with the stakeholders and their contacts. Include the price of items that will need to be bought. Use the Needs and Assets list to create a project budget, raise the necessary funds, and obtain all that is needed.

Action 8: Manage Risks

Risk management involves anticipating what things could go wrong, proactively trying to avoid them, developing alternative plans for certain anticipated problems (contingency plans), and dealing with problems that actually arise confidently, resolving them or at least minimizing any negative outcomes (damage control).

Action 9: Prepare for Implementation

This is when the skills are learned, dances are rehearsed, and preparations are made for the activities in Action 10. In addition, participants need to develop greater understanding of the cause they are serving and be provided with appropriate sensitivity training. Contingency plans in Action 8 also need to be prepared for “just in case.”

Action 10: Implement

Implementation is usually viewed as the project itself, though it is notable that this is Action 10 out of 14. It is the point of the project when the wall actually gets painted, the orphans get visited, or the boxes of recyclables are taken from the classrooms or offices and brought to the storage area for pickup. Implementation is when participants find out if the preparation was adequate, and actually begin to see the results of their efforts.

Action 11: Document and Publicize

There are many different ways to document a project before, during, and after implementation: create a project journal, take pictures, collect receipts and brochures, etc. Both documentation and publicity can help the project get funding and other support. Publicity can increase awareness of the issue and inspire others. It also serves as a form of recognition for those doing the project.

Action 12: Clean Up and Follow Up

It is important for those doing the project to take responsibility for the clean-up after a project – to know that the job is not really done until everything is cleaned up, put away, returned, or properly disposed of. Follow up can then make a good project great by sustaining the project or repeating it at regular intervals, either through the effort of the same group of participants or another group.

Action 13: Reflect and Evaluate

Learning can be maximized by giving participants the opportunity to reflect on their service experience before, during, and after implementation. What did they learn? How did they benefit? Evaluation of all aspects of the project can be used to improve this or similar projects in the future. What went wrong and right? And why? Ideally, all participants should reflect on and evaluate the project.

Action 14: Appreciate, Recognize, and Celebrate

Appreciation should begin by having the participants thank the people who helped them do the project (experts, sponsors, government officials, etc.). All the participants should also be recognized for their efforts through a poster about the project, a letter or visit from the principal or organization president, or a certificate of participation. Participants should have some appropriate means to celebrate their efforts, alone or with others involved in doing the project.

For more detailed explanations of each of the 14 actions, see Chapter 12 of *Learning to CARE: Education, Volunteering, and Community Service*, by Patricia Mihaly Nabti (2006).