

Session 5: The Power of Perspectives: Engaging Many Voices for Community Change Session Handout



Delilah Poupore, Executive Director, Heart of Biddeford

1) **Problem: describe the problem you are trying to address.**

Heart of Biddeford is revitalizing the post-industrial city of Biddeford, which has been characterized by lack of job opportunities, urban blight, and lack of hope and cooperation. Simultaneously, we seek to create sustainable development that doesn't lead to a loss of opportunity or stability for people who are most vulnerable in a struggling economy.

2) **Your Approach to the Solution**

Since our inception in 2004, Heart of Biddeford has engaged the community based on the National Main Street "four-point approach." In 2009-2011, Heart of Biddeford partnered with the City of Biddeford to serve as a pilot project in the Orton Family Foundation's Heart & Soul community planning process. Over this two-year period, we utilized innovative methods to engage high school students, long-term and new residents, and the municipality in a conversation about "What Matters Most" in order to create a Downtown Master Plan.

3) **Key Activities & Results**

Our Heart & Soul process began with high school students interviewing their grandparents about life in the mills and Biddeford's "heyday," story-telling booths at traditional community events, and resident-recorded stories at a dozen "HeartSpots." This resulted in five community values ("what matters most").

Next, we facilitated 33 community meetings with 300 people in kitchens and living rooms, church basements, and the community center to validate the list of what matters most. The community next prioritized 7 Focus Issues, and ideas for how to address the issues. Finally, we held a forum where the community used key-pad polling to vote on the top actions to pursue. The prioritized objectives, goals and actions were written into a Downtown Master Plan, accepted by the City Council in June of 2011.

Heart of Biddeford now engages 300 volunteers each year, who invest 3000 hours in the proven Main Street 4-Point Approach (promotions, business enhancement, design, and organization). Heart of Biddeford and the City of Biddeford have completed 80% of the actions listed in the Downtown Master Plan (or the actions are in progress). Key results include:

- Main Street Challenge business competitions have yielded new businesses and positive "buzz"
- 38% reduction in vacancies on Main Street.
- 18 of the businesses that have opened since 2012 have brought more than 100 jobs.
- New cooperation among the various city entities as well as collaboration with the City of Saco.
- Green space is more available and safer for public use.
- Diverse cross-sections of our community interact regularly through more volunteerism and public events.

Session 5: The Power of Perspectives: Engaging Many Voices for Community Change Session Handout

- Elected officials in recent years have shown more leadership in revitalizing the downtown, including the purchase and removal of Maine Energy Recovery Company (trash incinerator) from the downtown.
- Tax assessments on all mill buildings and large percentage of Main Street buildings have increased, meaning more income for the City, potentially reducing private taxpayer burden.

4) Key Learnings

Because we were serving as a pilot program for Heart & Soul, there was an atmosphere of experimentation. This contributed to the extraordinary length of the project, which in turn created burn-out for some staff and volunteers. There are many community engagement processes (including the now fine-tuned Heart & Soul process) that have more efficiency.

After the community engagement piece ended, we received \$6000 from the Orton Family Foundation to implement high impact/high visibility projects in the six months following the completed plan. This was essential for building confidence and momentum following all the hard work of engagement.

The community-created plan led directly into the City's and Heart of Biddeford's annual work plans. You must have designated entities with ability and funding to implement plans after they are created.

The community engagement processes created a strong, diverse base of support and direction. However, the work of building connections and bringing people on board is never ending. However, we have found that it is also important to avoid becoming side-tracked by the few people who are not willing/able to become engaged in positive action.

Session 5: The Power of Perspectives: Engaging Many Voices for Community Change Session Handout

Who are you?

Marjorie Withers, Co-Director
Charley Martin-Berry, Co-Director
Community Caring Collaborative
247 Main St. # 2
Machias, ME 04654
207-255-8000
www.ccc.maine.org
mwithers@cccmaine.org
cmartinberry@cccmaine.org

The CCC is a collaborative that includes 45 non-profit, state, tribal and community partners working to expand resources and increase hope, health, and wellbeing for people in Washington County, Maine.

The problem you are trying to address.

Many community members face a legacy of generations of poverty, trauma, exposure to violence, substance abuse and profound loss of hope generated by those experiences.

Approach to the Solution

The CCC convenes partners to establish shared goals, increase skills and knowledge and to incubate programming for far-reaching impact. We work to create trauma- and poverty-informed, substance abuse-aware, family-driven, culturally-competent, and strength-based supports that help all community members. The CCC has a dual role in supporting individual agencies as well as community members.

Key Activities & Results

The CCC is removing barriers to services and opening up opportunities so vulnerable populations and whole communities experience a continuum of support that addresses their concerns and aspirations. Regular meetings with partners and annual visioning meetings provide vital information for addressing gaps in services and for responding to community needs, and have resulted in the development of numerous model programs, including Bridging, Family Futures Downeast, Early Childhood Consultation and Outreach, and the Hope Fund.

Key Learnings

Relational health is essential for authentic collaboration and is characterized by trusting, meaningful relationships where partners commit to addressing changes and challenges effectively. This work takes time and collaboration can be seen as a developmental process.

The CCC's annual training agenda is informed by the partners and is responsive to their needs and desires for increased skills and knowledge. Trainings, from brown bag lunches to three-day institutes, support the shared language, expertise, and values of partners working across systems.

Listening and responding to family and community voice are essential for removing barriers and creating services and supports that will effectively address challenges and create new opportunities.

**Maine Immigrant
Refugee Services (MEIRS)**

Rilwan Osman-Executive
Director
(207) 753-2700
Rilwan@meirs.org
www.meirs.org

Tree Street Youth

Julia Sleeper-Executive
Director
(207) 577-6386
Julia@treestreetyouth.org
www.treestreetyouth.org

Too many immigrant and refugee youth getting involved with
the Juvenile Justice system

Our Approach: Support understanding of JJ
system through accessible training and
culturally competent case
management/therapeutic programs

Our Approach: Provide daily activities,
mentoring, social support while working on
promoting restorative practices in schools, JJ
system, and broader community

Juv.
Just.
Panels

Parent
Groups

Youth
Groups

Restora
tive
Circles

Daily
Activiti
es

Mentor
ships

Results: Clients being shared, more supervision, better
communication with parents/families, collective
responsibility, support services on all sides, more
culturally appropriate treatment options.

LESS YOUTH INVOLVED WITH JUVENILE JUSTICE

Key Learnings:

1. Collaboration **MUST** be intentional
2. **REAL** Open/honest dialogue-have the hard
conversations even about \$\$\$
3. Capitalize on each others strengths/no replication
4. Nothing more powerful than the voice of the clients
5. Best answer may come from most unexpected place
6. Don't be afraid of the answer you didn't think of!
7. Keep the focus on the goal!