



Define Your Goals: Core Values and Definitions of Success

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Our learning guides offer questions, exercises, and other tools to help you apply ideas in the briefs and other items on our website to your own work. Most of the items identified here, with the exception of “Further reading,” are available on the website; just follow the links. While the text refers to “your community” or organization, you may substitute “client” or “target” community or project as well.

Overview and scope. Core values are about what matters, to whom, and why. But community development goals often reflect values that have not been made explicit or widely discussed. “Doing” community development more effectively, and evaluating it well too, rests on some effort to make broad goals and the values that underlie them clearer—and to manage common dilemmas in how the goals are pursued. One reason is that a range of goals often lead to competing and taken-for-granted ideas about what will define “success.”

This guide focuses on core values and conflicts among values, including the problem of stakeholders pursuing different kinds of success under the broad rubric of “strengthening” neighborhoods. A future guide will focus on the social and economic context of U.S. cities as contexts for pursuing various community development goals, including local economic trends, demographic make-up, politics and institutions.

Resources (readings to prepare):

1. Briggs-1, “Rethinking Community Development: Managing Dilemmas about Goals and Values,” Working Smarter in Community Development, Knowledge in Action Brief 07-1 (2007). [On this website.](#)
2. Pp.10-12 (Principle #2) in Briggs-2, “Stocks, Flows, and Dreams: Shaping and Measuring Neighborhood Change in Community Development,” Working Smarter in Community Development, Knowledge in Action Brief 07-2 (2007). [On this website.](#)



3. Pp.27-31 (Principle #3) in Briggs-3, "Networks, Power, and a Dual Agenda: New Lessons About Old Community Building Dilemmas," Working Smarter in Community Development, Knowledge in Action Brief 07-3 (2007). [On this website.](#)
4. Robert Halpern, "The Emergence of Neighborhood Initiative," in *Rebuilding the Inner City* (New York: Columbia, 1995). [On this website.](#)

Further reading (not online):

5. Robert Chaskin, "Democracy and Bureaucracy in a Community Planning Process," *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (2005).
6. Robert Chaskin et al., *Building Community Capacity*, New York: Aldine DeGruyter (2001).
7. Kenny, "Tensions and Dilemmas in Community Development," *Community Development Journal* (2002).

Questions to consider and discuss:

1. What major tensions about core values and goals does **Briggs-1** highlight? How are the experiences in Chicago and Indonesia similar or different in the way goals are pursued with concrete strategies? What opportunities do you see in the concept of communities as "adaptive systems" specifically—for example, does it suggest *new* goals or just smarter *implementation* of goals?
2. **Briggs-2** highlights the importance of local change trends for how community developers set their targets for change. What role does your target neighborhood play in the local housing and business markets (do you know)? What regional or citywide trends do your goals seek to "leverage" (take advantage of) and which trends do those goals seek to compensate for (as in remedy or counteract something negative)?
3. **Briggs-3** adds the institutional dimension of local context: How do your goals reflect the civic landscape around your initiative or organization? What alliances are particularly important for you, and how should those relationships inform your goals?
4. **Halpern** outlines the important history of mobilization and protest that propelled modern community development in America, at least in the early years. What were the core values driving the movements, and how were they put into effect or compromised in the creation of formal community development organizations. In



what ways does Halpern's history line up with **Chaskin's** contemporary account of conflicts between "democracy" and "bureaucracy" in community planning processes? What newer considerations does Chaskin add to Halpern's look back at the founding days of community development in the 60s?

5. What key rationale for building community capacity do **Chaskin et al.** offer? What range of goals drive the specific efforts to build capacity, and what are the major challenges, according to the authors? (If you can't get your hands on the book, see the overviews)

Exercise (putting the ideas to work):

1. Identify the **top goals** of your community development initiative or organization, the stakeholders who have those goals, and how important the goals are for each group of stakeholders (try to rank them for each group). Think about stakeholders in your community or organization as well as important outside sponsors or partners who also have expectations about your work.
2. In what ways might these **goals compete** with, as opposed to reinforce one other, as the organization/project/alliance works to pursue them? That is, focus not on whether the goals are all important and worthy but on what achieving entails in the way of trade-offs. If you're not sure, then identify people or institutions who can help you think through this: A local grantmaker or university? Someone else?
3. What underlying **values** do the top goals reflect? Values are broad ideas, such as freedom, dignity, respect for diversity or identity, accountability, and loyalty. Values run deeper than interests, because values help define who we are, not just what we may want in a given situation. Using the "Rethinking" brief, try to identify values that may be in tension in your community's work.
4. Organize or plan a **dialogue** about core values and goals—what matters, to whom, and why. Who should be there? How can the discussion be structured to help people understand conflicting values and explore competing goals? What key ideas from the readings should be used and how?
5. How can **external stakeholders**, such as funders and policymakers, be brought into the conversation? What are their most important assumptions about core values and goals of community development?
6. What core goals and values can you get the stakeholders to **agree** on (or re-confirm)? Who needs to agree?