

# **DISCOVERY 2007**

## **A Community Planning Framework for Young Children**

**Working Document  
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## **Acknowledgements**

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## A Community Planning Framework For Young Children

### A. A Community Plan in the Discovery Context

Many Discovery communities are beginning to look more comprehensively at the well being of young children and their families and identifying conditions that must improve for all children in their community to succeed. The premise of the Discovery initiative is that a broad and inclusive community planning approach is a viable solution to increasing resources, engaging parents, improving collaboration and ultimately creating a system of services that is accessible and supportive of families.

For Discovery, a community planning process is another way in which the collaborative can be a catalyst for systems change and engage those most affected in local decision-making. *Therefore, the process of creating a community plan is as important as the product.* A well-orchestrated and inclusive planning process that incorporates a diversity of perspectives can yield more creative solutions than those that rely only on experts. Community plans are most relevant when the impetus for the plan is locally driven and broadly supported, and vests ownership for implementation with multiple sectors and constituent groups within the community.

#### In the context of Discovery, a community plan is:

- Focused on *all* children birth to age eight, and *all* the systems that support healthy child development and school success
- Based on analysis of root causes, or a community needs assessment across systems and organizations
- Reflective of the thoughts, opinions and needs of community members, including stakeholders who don't typically have opportunities to speak out or get actively engaged, such as parents and neighborhood residents
- Builds on and strengthens community assets
- The result of an iterative, inclusive planning process that yields consensus on priorities
- An impetus for changing the way a community "does business"
- Institutionally owned by a wide variety of entities and stakeholders
- Financed through existing and new public and private resources
- A mechanism for ongoing community-wide results based accountability
- Accessible to *all* of a community's diverse audiences
- A living document that is continually updated in response to changing community conditions and the achievement of results
- A source of pride and celebration for all members of a community

#### A Systems Approach

Understands the inter-relationships among services, programs, organizations and policies, as well as the process of change as it affects individuals and institutional practices and policies.

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### **Similarities and Differences among Plans**

To ensure common understanding and terminology among Discovery partners, it is important to note how a community plan is similar to and different from other types of plans and planning processes. The differences are in the scope of the plan and the process used to develop the plan.

- **A Strategic Plan** is typically conducted by an individual organization to set its course and direction. Often an organizational strategic planning process includes an external scan of how the organization “fits” in a broader community context, but the focus is on a single organization and its mission. A community plan incorporates many of the elements of an organizational strategic plan (vision, mission, objectives, and strategies), but the scope and scale is larger and more complex.
- **A Discovery Action Plan** is often limited to the four Discovery objectives and may not address the comprehensive needs of young children 0-8. Typically it is the work plan for the Discovery collaborative and not the implementation plan for a community agenda. In a community planning process, the action plan is often referred to as the implementation plan. Like an organizational action plan, a community plan details who will do what by when but it is institutionally owned by a wide variety of entities including governmental bodies and community agencies.

A “*Blueprint*” is what many communities are calling a community plan; it includes many of the same elements that are incorporated into a community plan as defined in the Discovery context. Not every community will be interested in or ready to engage in a community-wide planning process. Clarity and consensus in response to several basic questions can help determine a community’s interest and readiness: Why do we want to do this? What is it and what does it take? Is it the right time given what is going on in our community? Do we have the necessary leadership and resources?

Discovery communities may request on-site technical assistance intended to support a community’s planning process. Several tools have been developed to help guide a Discovery group’s thinking, deliberation and planning, including:

- **Planning Tool A: A Community Planning Technical Assistance Pathway**
- **Planning Tool B: A Readiness Assessment Checklist**
- **Planning Tool C: Discovery Technical Assistance Supports**

The next section, **An Illustration of a Discovery Community Planning Framework**, summarizes the elements that the Memorial Fund has identified as essential to the process of developing and implementing a community plan in keeping with Discovery values. The elements have been adapted from the *Building Capacity for Local Decision-making* Learning Guides developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy and supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation

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### **B. An Illustration of a Discovery Community Planning Process**

No two communities are exactly alike. Each community that embarks on a planning process will be starting in a different place and is likely to approach the work in a different way. However, research into promising practices show that each of the components of a community plan described in this section are necessary to ensure a successful effort.

#### **I. Establishing a Diverse Leadership Work Group**

A Leadership Work Group (LWG) provides direction for development of a community plan and maintains the community's interest and commitment over time. This group must, at all times, be inclusive and able to reach out to and consult with all segments of the community to build broad-based ownership of the planning process. The LWG must maintain momentum while providing a sense of continuity to the work over time. Clarity, transparency and perseverance are hallmarks of an effective Leadership Work Group.

##### **Elements:**

- A mirror of the "face" of community
- Diverse representation along a number of dimensions including: economic class, cultural background, racial heritage, age, gender, religious/faith affiliation, family configuration, work and life experiences, neighborhood associations, professional affiliations and sectors
- Clarity about group purpose, roles and responsibilities
- Acknowledgement of self-interests
- A dynamic feedback process that supports effective communication among members and with the broader community

**Product** – Statement of purpose, roles and responsibilities, and representative matrix.

#### **II. Setting the Community Agenda**

The Leadership Work Group's task is to lead a community process to articulate a vision for a community's children birth to age eight and to set the direction a community will follow to make the vision a reality. A community agenda includes issues to be addressed, realistic priorities, and an inventory of formal and informal assets that can be mobilized for change. A successful community agenda is based on sound information and reflective of a broad range of community interests and perspectives.

##### **Elements:**

- Data on community conditions; quantitative data focused on root causes
- A plan for communicating and promoting the community planning process
- Community perspectives on children's lives collected through diverse methods (e.g., focus groups, interviews, surveys, community forums)
- A mapping of community assets including existing services, resources and the knowledge, skills, expertise of community residents
- Consensus on the community vision and agenda among diverse stakeholders and constituents
- A dynamic feedback process that incorporates multiple voices and opinions

**Product:** Community report on the status of children, a summary of community assets and a community vision for young children.

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### III. Developing Strategies to Achieve Results: Using a Systems Approach

The first consideration in developing strategies is to use a systems approach, one that understands the inter-relationships among services, programs, organizations and policies, as well as the process of change as it affects individuals and institutional practices and policies. Systems thinking helps a community envision a holistic, coordinated system of services and supports that are aligned to community outcomes and results instead of fragmented or independent program outcomes. Looking at the “larger picture” and understanding all its parts will provide more comprehensive information for making decisions and setting realistic priorities.

#### Elements:

- Analyzed data on community problems and solutions
- Knowledge of promising practices that have been successful in other communities
- Clear and realistic priorities
- System change strategies aligned to measurable results
- Use of interest-based negotiation techniques among stakeholders and partners
- Ownership of plan and responsibility for results
- A dynamic feedback process that supports accountability

**Product:** Report to the community on strategies and desired results and timeline

### IV. Aligning Resources to Results

As the LWP guides the community in developing strategies to achieve results, it will need to take into account a broad array of resources and align them to the desired results. The goal is to create a non-categorical budget across multiple funding streams that supports and enhances “systems” of services and how they can improve results rather than how many new programs can be developed. Linking funds to results is a rigorous task that requires collaboration and negotiating with partners and stakeholders for the best use of existing and new resources to achieve the results defined by the community plan.

#### Elements:

- A comprehensive scan of what resources already exist based on facts, not just perceptions or opinions
- A fiscal inventory that maps federal, state and local funding from all sources, across all agencies and institutions into the community
- Financial data for each strategy, with expected results
- Assessment of funding gaps and other needs as well as potential funding and resources to fill them
- Results-based budget linking strategies and multiple funding streams to results
- Financing plan that includes redeployment of current resources, as appropriate, and provides for sustainability
- Dynamic feedback process that reports to the community on how resources will be used

**Product:** A Community Plan or Blueprint for Action.

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#### **V. Implementing the Plan**

The hard work of implementing a community plan begins once a community has built a solid foundation for a systems approach to improving conditions for children and their families. It is important to remember that a community plan is never a finished product but rather a living document that is continually updated in response to changing community conditions including the achievement of results. It is in the process of implementation that all the essential ingredients – leadership, a culture of inclusiveness, savvy use of resources, results-based accountability, and clear communication – are integrated into the way a community continues to do business.

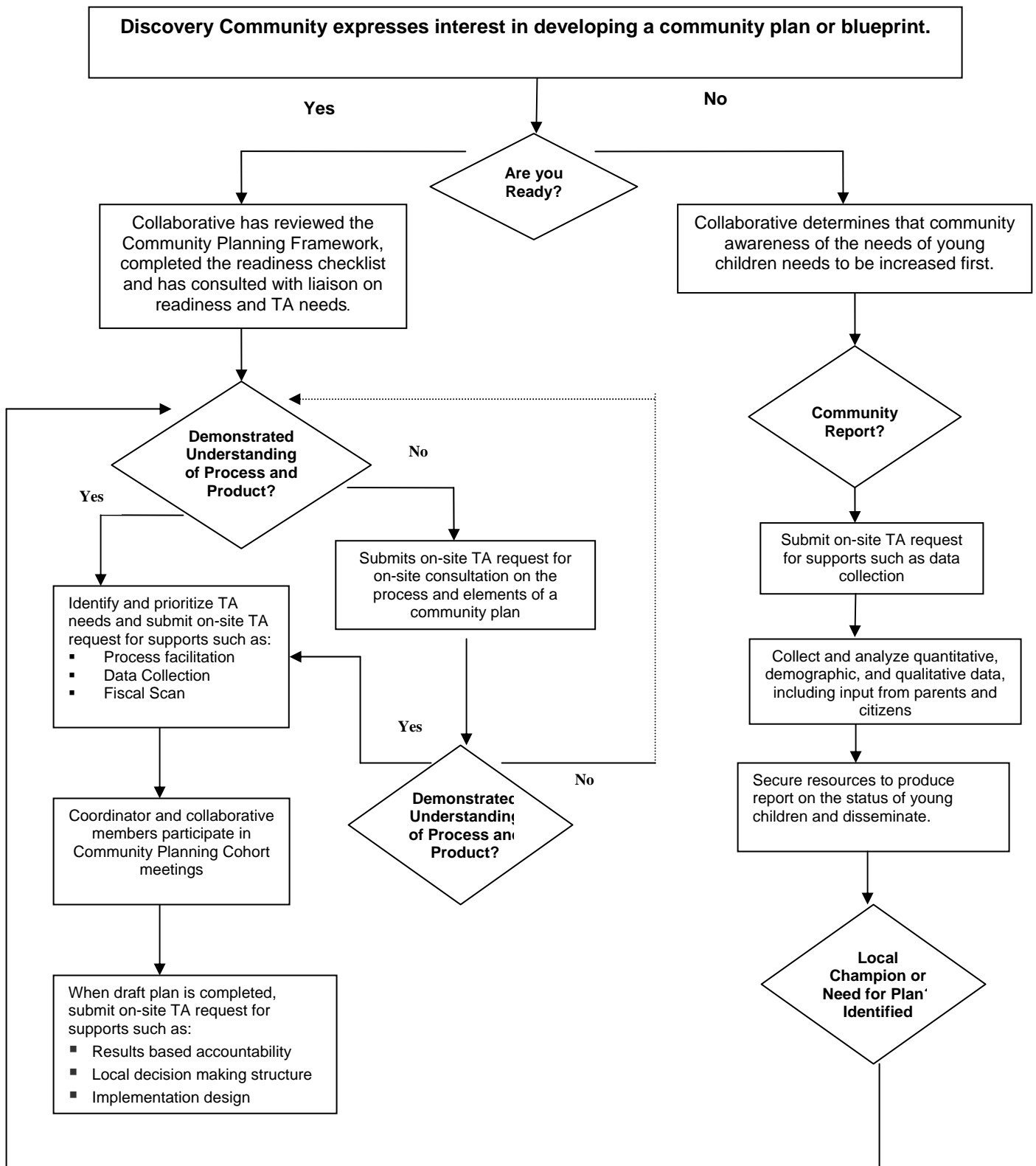
#### **Elements:**

- Community endorsed, local decision-making structure and leadership process
- Monitoring of local and state-wide conditions that impact the Plan
- A shared accountability system across agencies and institutions
- Process to continually engage parents and residents in decision-making and implementation
- Dedicated staff capacity to facilitate and manage implementation
- Interagency agreements or mechanisms for ongoing data collection to measure progress
- Method to report progress to the community
- Communications plan and capacity to sustain visibility and gather feedback from consumers, parents, residents and other key stakeholders
- Opportunities to acknowledge and celebrate a community's accomplishments at every step of the way

**Product** – Annual results-based accountability report to the community, and feedback system.

**PLANNING TOOL A: A Community Planning Technical Assistance Pathway**

**Requests for Community Planning Technical Assistance will be considered based on community readiness and available Memorial Fund resources.**



## **PLANNING TOOL B: A READINESS ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST**

**There is leadership to steer the development of a community plan.** (all should be in place)

- Community members want to be part of a leadership work group
- There is clarity and transparency about the purpose and role of the leadership group
- The group is widely regarded as representative of the community.

**There is local consensus about why you want to do a community plan.** (one or more may apply)

- A high-level community leader thinks it is important, wants to make young children a community-wide priority and is a champion for the process.
- A community group (or the Discovery collaborative) has determined that a community plan is a way to generate interest from high-level community leaders.
- It will position your community for potential new state funding.
- Parents want to create a demand for affordable and accessible services and draw attention to the needs of diverse families.

**You have assessed the local policy environment and determined that the timing is right.** (one or more may apply)

- There is an upcoming municipal election and you want to make young children a campaign issue.
- There is a new Superintendent and it is an opportunity to engage the school system.
- New public and/or private resources are available and it is an opportunity to leverage broader community commitment.
- The community collaborative has enough public credibility now to broaden their focus.

**You are prepared to engage in an inclusive planning process that vests ownership for implementation with multiple sectors and constituent groups.** (at least 3 factors should be present)

- A diverse leadership work group that consists of representatives of key and diverse interests and perspectives has been convened to oversee the community planning effort.
- Key public officials endorse the planning process and are providing access to local education and municipal data and resources
- A power-analysis has been conducted and both formal and informal leaders who have influence in the community have been identified.
- Partnerships have been established with groups and organizations to outreach to parents and residents (e.g., churches, PTA/PTO, senior centers, NAACP, neighborhood block watches).

**You have sufficient financial and staff resources.** (all should be present)

- The leadership work group has a community planning budget that includes a mix of resources including: cash (\$30,000 - \$50,000); 10 -20 hours a week of staff/consultant time devoted exclusively to the process; and redeployed staff support from local organizations and institutions (e.g., the city will collect data, the school system will write the plan, the Chamber of Commerce will conduct outreach to businesses, a local corporation will donate marketing staff).
- The leadership work group has identified a neutral moderator to support the process
- The leadership work group and its partners have the skills to facilitate community forums, organize parents and residents, and think strategically.
- The leadership work group has developed a realistic timeline (twelve months to twenty-four months depending on what is already in place)

## **PLANNING TOOL C: DISCOVERY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SUPPORTS**

On-site technical assistance will be available from the Memorial Fund to provide guidance and tools in support of local planning processes. The resources are limited, will be driven by demand, and will not cover the full costs of all the TA needs identified, planning, implementing or publishing the community plan.

Community liaisons will be available to help the Discovery collaborative understand the community planning framework and facilitate collaborative discussions of readiness. Community liaisons cannot function as moderators or facilitators for the community planning process.

### **Things to Consider When Requesting Technical Assistance:**

1. Has the Collaborative reviewed the Community Planning Framework, completed the community readiness checklist, consulted with your liaison, and developed a timeline for the community planning process?
2. Has the Collaborative identified and prioritized the type of technical assistance they will need and explored local resources to provide and/or support the technical assistance that is needed?
3. Has the Collaborative developed a technical assistance scope of work that outlines all the technical assistance they think will be needed to support the community planning process and thought about ways to track progress?

### **Types of Technical Assistance for Community Consideration:**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>
<i>Process Facilitator</i>	Experience from other communities indicates that a neutral moderator is an important resource. This person needs to be able to ask the hard questions about the process and help the group set priorities. A pool of consultants will be trained in the community planning framework and the list of consultants will be provided to the communities.
<i>Quantitative Data Collection</i>	A data consultant will be available to meet once with each community group to review their quantitative data needs and help the community develop a process for data collection and analysis. Based on community needs, each community may receive up to three (3) days of a data collection consultant's time.
<i>Fiscal Scan</i>	Each community will have access to a fiscal scan summary report of the state, federal and private resources that are currently coming into their community. Assistance on how to use the fiscal scan data and how to develop a process to collect and interpret local data will be available on a case-by-case basis based on demand and available resources.
<i>Results-Based Accountability</i>	Training will be developed to help community members, particularly parents, understand and implement a results-based accountability system.
<i>Decision Making Structure</i>	A pool of consultants will be trained in the core elements of a local decision-making structure and the list of consultants will be provided to the communities.

### **Peer Learning Cohort**

A peer learning cohort may be convened among communities who are actively engaged in developing a community plan, based on community interest and available resources. The learning cohort will meet periodically over the next 12 months to collectively develop best practices and new skills, problem-solve challenges and share lessons. New learning cohorts may be established based on community interest.

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