

Communities Life Cycle Matrix

Actualization Phase

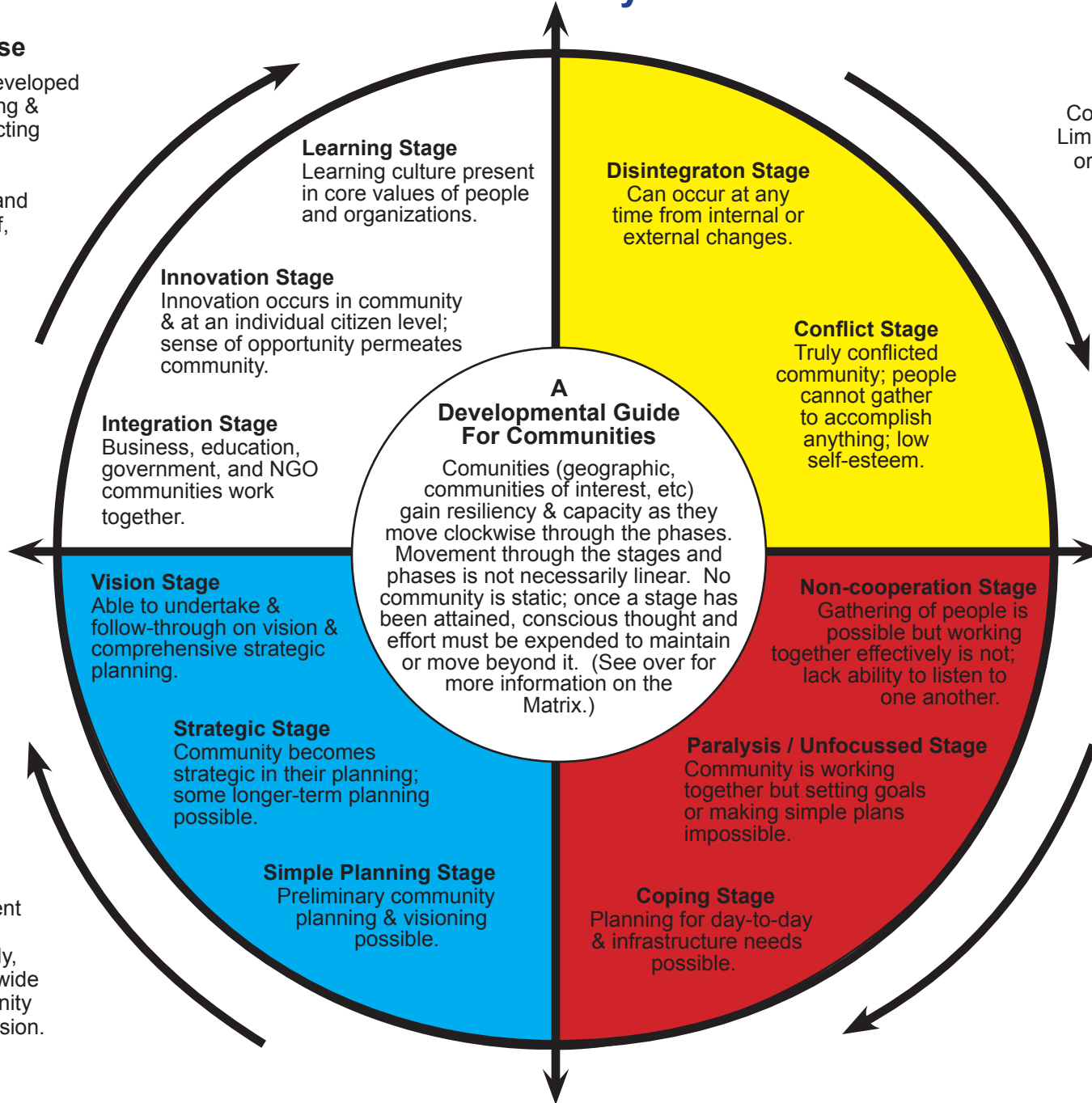
Community is highly developed and encourages learning & innovation while respecting history and culture. Community shares resources with others and regularly monitors itself, continuing to enhance capacity.

Action: Community undertakes regular reviews and reflection activities to maintain or enhance stage / phase.

Vision Phase

Community recognizes the importance of vision and long-term planning; is able to move in this direction.

Action: Community can engage in planning, meaningful consultation of its members, & working towards the development of strategic thinking & planning, and, ultimately, identifying community-wide values, distinct community characteristics and a vision.



Pre-Community or Chaos Phase

Community is undeveloped. Limited sharing of resources or recognition of value of a community.

Action: Community can (re)form through the identification of and action of influential and respected leaders (elected or unelected).

Emergence Phase

Community exists but has significant problems, making anything but survival & fulfilling short-term needs impossible.

Action: Community can advance through focus on small, non-political, trust-building projects to build success, respect, confidence, relationships & skills.



Why the Matrix

The challenge of developing innovative and entrepreneurial communities is in ensuring that the communities have a clear picture of where they are at and where they want to go. This enables a better match of the tools available with both the capacity of the community and the hoped for goal. For example, while strategic planning may work for some communities, the planning process may also lead to frustration and failure in other communities that do not have the necessary trust, social capital or capacity.

Who can use it

Anyone within a community or organization can begin this conversation. The Matrix can be used for geographic communities, communities of interest, or even communities within communities. One city manager used the Matrix for polling city councilors about the state of local social, arts, business, and cultural communities.

The Matrix-based process can be undertaken by a group that represents the diversity within the community. Or, it can be used to assess the differences in perceptions among various groups in the community: seniors and youth, long-time residents and new-comers; business leaders and social service agencies; service providers and clients.

How to use it

Use the Matrix to simulate conversation in your community: Which phase are we at? Are different sectors of the community – youth, arts, business etc. – at different stages? How far have we come?

Members of the community participate in a conversation to determine together what phase or stage their community is at on the Matrix. This can be a formal or informal process. Each phase of the Matrix is accompanied by suggestions for action to progress through the stages.

Community members can identify where they want the community to be (there is an alternative!) and the incremental steps that can be taken in

order to get there. Our experience has taught us that communities, like families, feel they are more dysfunctional than they really are. Knowing there are others out there like you is a liberating thought. The Matrix also provides some common language and terminology that allow those conversations to take place and it seems to be an excellent way to show progression.

The Matrix can be self-administered or CIEL staff can facilitate a session with individuals or community groups. The Matrix works as a rough gauge to enable a community to develop a self-portrait, as it were. The Matrix harnesses the perceptions of citizens and leaders to gain an understanding of the community.

Outcomes

Most importantly, the community together can identify where they want to be and the incremental steps that can be taken and the resources needed by the community in order to get there. Communities can move forward or backward around the Matrix cycle. Progress can be uneven and is not necessarily linear. Some communities require huge leaps or paradigm shifts to move from one stage to another.

Additional Resources

CIEL recognizes that no community is one-dimensional and that once the conversation gets started, it can be useful to assess the different characteristics that make up a community or organization. We have entitled these “Connections and Co-operation”; “Vitality”; “Inclusivity & Community Values”; “Leadership”; “Strategic Capacity”; “Community Sustainability”; and “Community Entrepreneurship”.

For those who wish to delve more deeply in to what “makes their community tick”, CIEL staff can guide a Matrix-based process that examines each of these characteristics. We are also developing a free on-line assessment that can enable a community to assess their vitality across these categories and match them with some suggested tools.

Contact the CIEL office or visit our website for more information.