A Developmental Guide For Communities

Communities (geographic, communities of interest, etc) gain resiliency & capacity as they move clockwise through the phases. Movement through the stages and phases is not necessarily linear. No community is static; once a stage has been attained, conscious thought and effort must be expended to maintain or move beyond it. (See over for more information on the Matrix.)

Disintegraton Stage
Can occur at any time from internal or external changes.

Conflict Stage
Truly conflicted community; people cannot gather to accomplish anything; low self-esteem.

Non-cooperation Stage
Gathering of people is possible but working together effectively is not; lack ability to listen to one another.

Paralysis / Unfocussed Stage
Community is working together but setting goals or making simple plans impossible.

Coping Stage
Planning for day-to-day & infrastructure needs possible.

Simple Planning Stage
Preliminary community planning & visioning possible.

Strategic Stage
Community becomes strategic in their planning; some longer-term planning possible.

Vision Stage
Able to undertake & follow-through on vision & comprehensive strategic planning.

Integration Stage
Business, education, government, and NGO communities work together.

Innovation Stage
Innovation occurs in community & at an individual citizen level; sense of opportunity permeates community.

Learning Stage
Learning culture present in core values of people and organizations.

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.

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.

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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.