

# Community Planning and Capacity Building

## Choosing Project Champions

### *Who will provide leadership for each project?*

#### **What is a Project Champion?**

Project Champions are members of municipal recovery committees -- such as the Housing Committee or the Economic Development Committee -- who advocate for and sometimes assist in the development and implementation of a specific project. Project Champions can be residents, business owners, or non-profit representatives.

Project Champions can be important positions in both the Planning and Implementation phases of Long Term Community Recovery. Project Champions are usually identified during the Recovery Planning Process and often continue their involvement with the project until it is implemented.

#### **Role of the Project Champion**

Initially, a Project Champion will:

- (1) Propose projects
- (2) Persuade other residents and community stakeholders to join in and help bring the project to fruition
- (3) Speak before political bodies and the media to demonstrate local support for the project

When a Town can afford to hire paid staff to manage projects, the Project Champion may be asked to assist employees to further those projects the Town has chosen to implement. In Towns where a staff person cannot be hired, a Project Champion may be asked by Town leadership to act as the Project Manager of a particular project. In this case, the Project Champion may be tasked with:

- (4) Researching project costs, feasibility, and other jurisdictions which have implemented the project
- (5) Flesh out the details of how the project would be funded, implemented, and managed.
- (6) Find ways to attract funding to the project
- (7) Serve as project coordinator/leader

#### **What constitutes a good Project Champion?**

A good choice for a Project Champion is someone who has shown past interest in the issue, topic or its solution. A good champion will understand the needs of the project and will not pursue inefficient courses of action or go off-course. They will have a clear understanding of the politics that it could take to get the project started and to keep it going. They will be familiar with and able to work with the appropriate entities to accomplish the project. A good champion also will have support within the community – from politicians and general public alike.

*The person should not have a direct financial interest in the project although indirect benefits are acceptable.* For example, it would be acceptable for a local business owner to be the Project Champion of a broad downtown redevelopment initiative. However, it would be unacceptable for the Project Champion to be the owner of a parcel of land that is the focus of that redevelopment.

A Project Champion can be an individual or agency, but one person should be designated as the point of contact if an agency or organization is named as champion.

### **Where do you find Project Champions?**

Project champions can be found in a variety of places, and it is up to the Recovery Committee, local government, or Recovery Steering Committee to help identify them.

- An emeritus local official, such as a past Mayor
- Community members involved in the Recovery process
- Local volunteer, such as head of the local historical society or community group
- Active or influential member of the community
- Local entrepreneurs and influential business people and the people they recommend
- A community organization, especially on projects related to their interests
- Municipal employees
- Community activists or interests groups
- Members of local professional organizations
- Non-traditional sectors of the community, such as neighborhood associations, the arts community, or other local organizations – depending on project types
- People who participate in the public meetings and speak passionately about a particular project or subject matter, or this person may be helpful in identifying a champion

### **Look at the big picture.**

While a good champion for one project may be a good champion for many projects, resist the temptation to name one person as champion for several projects. A champion's ability to implement a project will be reduced when time and energy are diluted across several projects.

Some projects may not have champions until the implementation phase has begun, but you should strive to identify a Project Champion as early as possible in the development of the Recovery Planning process.

### **Keeping the Project Champion Engaged**

Once a good candidate is identified, engaging him or her in the project is important. They must buy into the project or they will not carry it forward. Here are several ways to achieve, and they work well in tandem:

- (1) Get the champion involved in shaping the project – help outlining the details
- (2) Involve the champion in public meetings – meetings focused on their particular project will help to shape details and identify others who may share an interest in the project
- (3) Connect the champion with potential funding sources for the project. This will make the project more likely to succeed