

Community Development

For a grant maker to have a community development focus they must be aware of, and practise exemplary grant making. While this process that is respectful of the grant seeker is important, it is also necessary to understand the way that communities work. The grant making process is often focussed on the individual grant seeker. If we are to work towards building stronger communities this will also involve an understanding of how community organisations work with other organisations and institutions within the community and the processes that will result in stronger, more resilient and sustainable communities.

What is Community?

The term community has multiple meanings. It can refer to geographic location, people working together towards a common goal or people with some form of psychological tie that binds them together. An example of each style of definition is below. The definition required will often be situational.

Definitions include:

...people that live within a geographically bounded area and who are involved in social interaction and have one or more psychological ties with each other and the place in which they live (Christenson and Robinson, 1989:5).

Community is whatever sense of the local common good citizens can be helped to achieve. This perception of community is an achievement, not something given by reason of geographic residence. It is not fixed, it changes as a result of experience or purposeful effort. It may even shift according to the problem that catches the attention of the citizen (Biddle and Biddle, 1965:12).

Community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together (McMillan and Chavis, 1986:7).

What is Community Development?

Definitions tend to fall into two categories, those that emphasise the process of bringing people together, building networks, and improving community capacity while others focus on the achievement of improvements in the community. The following definitions illustrate the various perspectives used:

An educational approach which would raise levels of local awareness and increase the confidence of community groups to identify and tackle their own problems (Darby and Morris, 1975, cited in Christenson and Robinson, 1989:14).

Community development is the process of local decision making and the development of programmes designed to make the community a better place to live and work (Huie, 1976, cited in Christenson and Robinson, 1989:14).

The following definition integrates the two previous approaches:

Community development aims to educate and motivate people for self help; to develop responsible local leadership, to inculcate among the members of rural communities a sense a sense of citizenship and among the residents of

rural areas a spirit of civic consciousness; to introduce and strengthen democracy at the grass-roots level through the creation of and / or revitalisation of institutions designed to serve as instruments of local participation; to initiate a self-generative, self sustaining, and enduring process of growth; to enable people to establish and maintain cooperative and harmonious relationships; and to bring about gradual and self chosen changes in the community's life with a minimum of stress and disruption (Khinduka, in Cox et al., 1979:12).

Closely allied concepts are community organising and community building which can be considered to be components of community development. Definitions are as follows:

We conceive of community organising as a long-term relationship-building and capacity building process that attempts to identify, include and build upon a range of key resources, both internal and external to the community....The process includes: the identification of key local resources, the gathering of information about the community context, the development and training of local leaders to prepare them to serve effectively as representatives of the community and as full partners in an initiative, and the strengthening of the network of the various interests both internal and external to a community (Joseph and Ogletree, 1996:22).

Another connection to community development is that of community competence, the result of community development. This definition is helpful in that it could be used to assess a community. However it should be noted that it is possible for a community to behave competently on some issues and less competently on others.

A competent community is one in which its various parts are able to:

- *Collaborate effectively in identifying the problems and needs of a community*
- *Achieve a workable consensus on goals and priorities*
- *Agree on ways and means to implement the agreed-upon goal*
- *Collaborate effectively in the required activity (Cottrell, 1976:8).*

In order to be involved with community development from a practical perspective there are a number of factors that must be present. Munford and Walsh Tapiata suggest the following factors:

- In the Aotearoa/New Zealand context no community development practice can be truly valid without an understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi as the founding document of New Zealand and the subsequent history that has led to popular discourses that need to be challenged.
- Community development practitioners need to have an awareness of their own issues to avoid "dumping" on the community. If community development practitioners have unresolved issues they are in danger of seeing community issues through a distorted lens.
- Because so much of community development is about power relationships there must be a good understanding of the dynamics of power.
- Making a difference with communities requires a commitment to being an agent for social transformation through educating, empowering and providing access to resources.
- A vision of social justice is an essential element that underpins community development practice.

- The group needs to be seen as the paramount unit in community and the role of the community development practitioner is to always come back to group processes and group decision making that is inclusive.
- Above all there must be respect for the right of the community to determine its own vision and future. While this is often a long and complex process respecting this right will mean that the journey with a community will result in sustainable community development. (Munford and Walsh-Tapiata 2000)

Mary Ann Zehr (1996) suggests that the way we look at communities has a subtle effect on them. This relates to ensuring that as community development practitioners we do not subscribe to discourses that can be disempowering. She proposes a way of looking at communities involving three points;

- Notice the connective structures, ad hoc and informal groups, not just big and formal structures.
- Be aware of community processes, not just legislative, official and programmatic ones.
- See people as citizens solving problems, not just clients.

John Kretzmann and John McKnight in their book *Building Communities from the Inside Out* (1993) use an approach that is parallel to strengths based approaches in counselling and social work and have coined the term, ABCD (Asset Based Community Development). This is an attractive approach in that it avoids the negative connotations so often associated with deficit models where what is wrong is ascertained and strategies are formulated and implemented to fix the problem. They suggest tools such as a capacity inventory that lists the talents and skills that are available to a community. They also give attention to the thorny issue of including and mobilising the talents and skills of those in communities who are often the “invisible voices”. The approach can work on a macro or micro level; that is the community can create a capacity inventory or an individual organisation can compile a list of its own resources that can be used for community development. This approach, when applied to a grant maker, would mean that the grant maker will consider all of the resources it has that can be used for the benefit of the community such as money, intellectual capital, connections and influence and other assets such as building and equipment. When compared with Mary Ann Zehr’s (1996) points above it can be seen that connective structures and community processes could be considered to be assets within this concept of an asset. Moreover the concept of seeing people as citizens solving problems links well with the idea of mobilising the “invisible voices.”

Community development is a process that leads to the empowering and strengthening of communities. It is often slow and iterative rather than having a sequential flow. It is important that the process is controlled by communities and that it recognises the diversity of community.

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