



GETTING THE ACTION OUT OF YOUR PLAN

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INTERNET RESOURCES!

Resource	URL	Notes
Internet Nonprofit Center	www.nonprofit-info.org	Check out the great “Frequently Asked Questions” link, with links to hundreds of resources on the internet to answer your nonprofit questions.
MAP for Nonprofits	www.mapnp.org	A great local resource (MAP is based in St. Paul). The Management Assistance Project has a great web site with many resources. Especially useful is the Free Management Library, with hundreds of documents on nonprofit issues.
Minnesota Council of Nonprofits	www.mncn.org	Another great local resource. MNCN has great links, including Management, Legal and Fundraising; How to Start a Nonprofit; and Job Openings.
National Center for Nonprofit Boards	www.ncnb.org	Great resource for books and publications on nonprofit boards, plus links to informative resources.

1. Getting Your Organization Ready

a. Understand your organization's Mission and Purpose:

- **Make sure everyone in your organization is clear on the Mission and Purpose of your organization.** Knowing your mission statement can help provide and maintain focus for your organizations work and direction, so that you can utilize your organizations energy and resources as effectively as possible.
- **Take every opportunity to publicize and promote your mission statement.** Place it in newsletters, letterhead, business cards, pass it out at meetings, print it on poster board and display it in your office and at meetings.
- When evaluating new projects, or reviewing on going proposals, the first question should always be: **“how does this support our mission and purpose?”**

b. Be clear on your expectations:

- **What are your expectations for each other as board members?** The board should have explicit discussions about their expectations for one another.
- **What are your expectations for committees and committee chairs?** Establish policies in advance that will let them know how to work with the Board of Directors and how to implement Action Plan strategies.
- **What are your expectations for staff and volunteers?** Your organization should prepare reasonable job descriptions and policies for staff and volunteers, which includes minimum qualifications, time commitments, and desired outcomes.

c. Set aside time for planning and evaluation:

- You can't do everything at once! **Take time to review and prioritize your Action Plan strategies.** Determine in advance what you will and won't do this year, or over the next two or three years.
- **Evaluate and document your projects at regular intervals,** and when you finish. For example, when preparing a payment request for your neighborhood's implementation contract, take time to prepare a narrative summary of what you have accomplished since the last payment request. Ask vendors and committees to do the same.
- **Regularly review your Action Plan** to make sure it still fits your community's priorities. If your organization is regularly doing plan modifications when implementing strategies, it is probably time to step back and review your Action Plan!



d. Establish reasonable Risk Management Policies

- **Effective Risk Management Policies can help your organization move forward** with confidence and energy. Nightmare scenarios rarely occur, but when they do, your organization can and should be prepared.

- **Make sure the organization is appropriately insured** for the activities you carry out. NRP requires that your organization carry Directors and Officers insurance, as well as General Liability insurance. However, not all policies are the same, and your policy may have some restrictions and limitations (i.e. does your policy cover your organization if you recruit volunteers to drive kids to a summer program?). When in doubt, call your insurance agent and ask whether particular activities or projects will be covered.
- **Develop clear personnel policies and job descriptions** for paid staff and volunteers. Your policies should include a process for screening and hiring. You may not always have to screen volunteers, but there are times when it is appropriate and necessary (e.g. screening volunteer bus drivers for past driving offenses such as reckless driving or DWI offenses).
- **Develop sound financial policies to protect the organization's assets and public confidence** in the organization. Good financial policies will cover basics, such as how payments are approved, who writes checks, segregation of duties, but may also cover issues such as investment practices.
- **Have effective Board practices and policies in place.** The board should enact policies to provide for effective keeping of Board minutes and other records, clear expectations for board members (attendance at meetings, keeping informed, participation in committees, etc), and Conflicts of Interest.
- **Provide regular training for board, staff and volunteers.** Effective training can help your organizations most valuable assets (its people!) keep on top of current trends and practices and make the best use of their time. Training may include taking time at board meetings for briefings, setting aside time for board retreats, participating in workshops and classes, and attending conferences.

2. Working With the Community

a. Prepare your board for the impact of working with the community

- **Involving the community at large has many benefits, and many consequences,** for your organization. Increasing community participation may mean more volunteers, more energy, greater capacity, and more clout. It can also mean more difficult decision making, differences of opinion, and less control for the board.
- **Working with and empowering volunteers also brings rewards and risks.** When you ask someone to volunteer, there is always a risk that they may not get something done, they may not do it right, or they may not do it the way you want it done. When they do succeed, however, you have expanded their ability and sense of ownership and participation, and built your organization. By failing to ask, you may be losing opportunities to build your organization, and demonstrating a lack of trust.



b. Be prepared to communicate regularly with the community and volunteers.

- **Establish a regular means of communication** to let the community know what you are doing and maintain their interest.
- **Keep in touch with volunteers and establish recognition programs** to reward their work, such as annual celebrations and community events, articles in newsletters about volunteers, letters from the board, and thank you cards.
- **Establish mentors** who can help orient new volunteers and board members, and help them to understand the culture and history of the organization.
- **Provide brochures, meeting minutes, and other materials** to help provide a history and context for people who are just getting involved for the first time.
- **Be “Good Will Ambassadors” for your organization.** Greet people on the street, talk to your neighbors, extend a helping hand, pay a to visit new residents.
- **Know who other constituencies and players are in your community, and visit them regularly.** Often, as community organizations, we get the attitude of “they should come to us if they need something.” However, if other organizations or constituencies and institutions feel that you have no interest in them, they are likely to feel that they have no interest in you. Be prepared to go to them, listen, and provide information when asked!

c. **Respect the decisions of the community**

- **Trust the community with big decisions.** The community members are ultimately the neighborhood organization’s “boss.” Throwing decisions out to the community can sometimes be the best way to resolve internal problems within the organization, as well as to establish trust within the community.



- **Rely on the authority of “the group.”** When a single individual is trying to dominate a meeting, let the group decide whether to continue with the meeting agenda, or whether to change the agenda for a new purpose.
- **Create opportunities for community leadership.** Don’t carry out projects unless someone in the community is willing to take leadership and responsibility for it. If no one steps forward, ask yourself whether this project is important enough to the community to carry forward.
- **Involve the appropriate stakeholders.** Don’t make decisions in a vacuum. Take time to go out and talk to people who may be impacted by a decision of the organization, get their feedback, and ask for their participation.

3. **Working with Partners**

a. **Be clear on your expectations.**

It is important that you know ahead of time what you want to get out of a partnership, and are clear on what you outcomes you want to achieve and how you want to be involved in the project. Think about what benefits you can get from the partnership. Also, you should have a sense of how you want the community to be involved.

- **Know what you bring to the table.** Often, the most visible asset you bring to the table is your NRP funds. You may also carry neighborhood support for projects, volunteer power, or special knowledge about the neighborhood's needs and intent.
- **Know what your partner brings to the table.** You probably are seeking partners because they can bring something to the table that you don't. Most commonly, this is expertise on an issue, but may also include additional funding, access to other decision making bodies, special equipment, etc.
- **Know what the exchange is.** Every partnership is explicitly or implicitly about an exchange, for example, you exchange money for services.
- **Understand the benefits and consequences of partnerships.** You can gain a lot from an effective partnership. For example, a partnership of neighborhood groups working on a common project can help build the capacity of all of the organizations to a greater degree than if they all worked individually. However, when working in a partnership, you may give some decision making power or control (for example, hiring a contractor means giving up control on how management of a project is carried out).
- **Understand the duration of partnerships.** No partnership should be expected to last forever. In some cases the duration of a partnership may be defined in terms of the time necessary to complete the project. However, some partnerships do not have clear beginnings or ends. A partnership should not outlive its usefulness for your organization, and you should always be prepared to let go.

b. Document and clarify

- **Get it in writing.** Follow up any verbal agreements with a letter that states your understanding of the agreement, and ask for a response in writing. This can help avoid any misunderstandings down the road, and provide direction for those who follow in your footsteps.



4. Starting With the Basics: What needs to be in place prior to implementing a strategy?

a. An Approved Neighborhood Action Plan:

Before starting any NRP project, you should have an approved Action Plan, First Step Plan, or Early Access Request. As time passes, the neighborhood may want to regularly review the Action Plan to make sure that it still meets the neighborhood's needs. If not, the neighborhood may follow a specified process for changing and updating the plan called a Plan Modification.

b. The NRP Strategy:

A strategy is the most basic element of your neighborhood's Action Plan. It should identify the action that the neighborhood (and possibly others) will take to achieve the Goals and Objectives identified in the neighborhood's Action Plan. A good strategy will indicate the intended outcomes; identify the partners and sources of funding; show how neighborhood NRP funds will be used; and provide a general timeline for starting and completing the project.

c. **The Scope of Service:**

A Scope of Service is generally a written agreement between the partners involved in implementing the strategy. The Scope of Service will provide more specifics about when and how money will be used; how partners will be involved; and the expected outcomes (more about Scopes of Service below). A Scope of Service becomes part of a Contract.

d. **The Contract:**

The NRP contract is actually a contract between the MCDA (which acts as a Fiscal Agent for NRP) and one or more of the parties named in the Scope of Service. There are three basic types of NRP contracts (explained below). You should not begin actual implementation of any NRP strategy until a final contract has been completed, signed by all parties, and originals returned to MCDA.

5. The Scope of Service

a. What do we do prior to developing a Scope of Service?

- **Talk to your Neighborhood Specialist at NRP.**

They can help you strategize, give you ideas, point you to other neighborhoods which have implemented similar strategies, and help you avoid pitfalls.

- **Be clear about what you want**

Your neighborhood should have a clear idea about what it wants to achieve, how it wants to achieve it, and who you want involved prior to approaching others. This begins with explicit discussions at the board and committee level prior to approaching potential partners.

- **Talk to potential partners**

Begin to talk to partners to identify how they want to be involved and to ensure that you have compatible goals. You may want to document your agreements by following up conversation with letters that state your understanding of outcome of the discussion. This can help clarify intentions and roles, and avoid misunderstandings later.

- **Talk to potential stakeholders**

Make sure you have talked with people or organizations in your neighborhood to make sure you have given them an opportunity to be informed and involved. You may identify other partners and bring in new volunteers. Plus, you don't want to begin implementation just to be derailed by opposition later.

- **Keep the community informed**

Keep the community involved through regular newsletters, door-knocks, community hearings, and special events.



b. Who should be responsible for drafting the Scope of Service?

Sometimes the neighborhood organization (staff, volunteers or committees) will draft the Scope of Service. At other times, one of the NRP Jurisdictions or City agencies will create the initial document. In either case, the draft Scope should be read, approved, and signed by all parties involved in the agreement. The neighborhood organization Board should give

final approval of any Scope prior to signing.

c. What are the basic elements of a good Scope of Service?

- **Plan strategy name, goal, objective, and strategy and page #**
List the strategies, including the strategy number, page number of your Action Plan and language from the plan, if possible (remember, not everybody who sees this Scope or works with it is as familiar with your plan as you are!). A single Scope of Service may have just one strategy, or it may have more than one strategy from one or more neighborhoods. For example, streetscape projects often involve several strategies from several neighborhoods.
- **Summary of what you want to do (narrative form)**
A good narrative can help provide insight for others who may be involved later of what you are trying to accomplish with the project and what the final outcomes should be. Projects often outlast the original partners, and the Scope of Service should be written in a manner that provides guidance about how to proceed, finish, and evaluate the program.
- **Indicate start date and completion date**
- **Identify the Partners**
Describe in detail how you will carry out the project—who is involved, what their roles will be, what specific tasks they will perform, staff and volunteer time involved.
- **Evaluation**
Describe how and who in the neighborhood will monitor the strategy and evaluate the results.
- **State how NRP funds will be used and when**
Is it your intention that NRP funds are used first as seed funds, throughout the project as matching funds, or at the end when the project is completed? Can they be used for staff or administrative support, or only for program or construction costs?
- **Provide a budget**
Start by providing a breakdown of income. What are the sources, including a breakdown of strategies involved, and other funding. Then provide a listing of expenses, indicating how funds will be used.
- **When things go wrong**
You may also want to include a section which indicates how decisions will be made when something goes wrong. How will cost overruns be paid for, and who will have authority to make changes when required.



d. Getting Approval

- **Make sure all of the partners read and agree with the Scope.** Each of the parties should review the Scope to make sure it accomplishes what they need. It should then be approved by the appropriate body.
- **Send the Scope of Service to NRP.** Your NRP Neighborhood Specialist will begin the process of turning the Scope of Service into a formal contract.

6. Understanding Contracts

a. What is the contract?

The NRP contract is essentially an agreement between MCDA and the agency responsible for implementing the strategy. The Contract may be between MCDA and the neighborhood organization, but not always. Contracts are often between the MCDA and the jurisdiction, such as Public Works, the Park Board or the School Board, and the neighborhood association is not part of the contract (because it does not receive payment).



b. What are the basic kinds of contracts

- **Implementation Contracts** (managed by NRP) are between MCDA and the neighborhood organization. They are usually cover implementation of the neighborhood's Action Plan, and other programs or services that the neighborhood organization itself will be reimbursed for.
- **Housing or Economic Development Contracts** (Managed by MCDA) may be between the MCDA and neighborhood organizations, or may be with another entity (a contractor, another jurisdiction, etc.)
- **Inter-jurisdictional Contracts** (everything else-e.g. Park Board, School Board, Public Works, etc.) are contract between MCDA and the jurisdiction which is responsible for implementing the project (e.g. Public Works on a streetscape project).

c. How do Contracts relate to Scopes of Service?

There are 5 common elements in the basic contract.

- The contract itself, which explains the general terms and conditions of the contract. Usually a standard off-the-shelf contract.
- Exhibit A, usually the Scope of Service
- Exhibit B, usually the budget.
- Exhibit C, usually the Payment Request Forms
- Exhibit D, usually the NRP funding Agreement Guidelines, which also include attachments such as the City of Minneapolis Conflict of Interest ordinance, regarding Minneapolis Neighborhood Organizations; the NRP Audit Policy, and the NRP Acquisition, Inventory, and Disposition Policy.

The contract has a series of “whereas’es”, plus the following sections:

- Section I, Scope of Service
- Section II, Time of Performance
- Section III, Disbursements
- Section IV, Use of NRP Funds
- Section V, Performance Monitoring



- Section VI, Notices
- Section VII, General Conditions
- Section VIII, Personnel and Participation Conditions

d. Finalizing the Contract

- As with Scopes of Services, make sure the Contract is approved by the appropriate entity. A contract may not always require a signature from the neighborhood, but for those that do, you should require Board approval prior to signing.