Sparkplug Projects

How 180 Day Projects can Lead to Community Change

MML ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2015
Introduction

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*Public Service  |  Training  |  Community Engagement*
What we hope to accomplish

✴ Have Fun
✴ Won’t leave here an expert
✴ Today’s session
  • What is our Sparkplug Approach?
  • How is it helping Mississippi communities?
  • Is it a good fit for you?
  • Walk you through our process/approach
What changes do you want to see?

be the CHANGE you want to see

- Mohamad Gandhi
To Make Change Happen...

WE CANNOT SOLVE OUR PROBLEMS WITH THE SAME THINKING WE USED WHEN WE CREATED THEM

-Albert Einstein
Our Experience

A CLP

APPALACHIAN COMMUNITY LEARNING PROJECT

Stennis Institute | Mississippi State University
Why a different approach?

✴ Traditional approaches have fallen short
✴ Too many plans sitting on shelves…
✴ A community issue requires a community response
✴ People are more important than plans, analysis, evaluations, or money
✴ Lead change by example
Conventional Wisdom

- Requires extensive upfront planning
- Leave development to the experts
- Change takes a long time
- It’s the process that counts
- Start with a needs assessment
- Organize first, then act
- Big impact requires big bucks
Our Unconventional Approach

✴ Results focused
✴ Leave development to the community
✴ Experimentation (Aim - Fire - Ready)
✴ Time compression
✴ Mini-investment and maxi-support
✴ “Sparkplug” individuals and self-help
How we implement

Sparkplug Projects:  

★ A self-help, results based efforts to community and economic development

• Small in scale - big in impact

• Incremental

• Moving from talk to meaningful action

• Get plans/goals off the shelf
What have they accomplished?

24,000+ LIVES IMPACTED

750+ NEW VOLUNTEERS

20,000 VOLUNTEER HOURS

35 GEDs

13 JOBS

50 increased ACADEMICS

$188,700 DIRECT

$107,000 IN-KIND

$300,000 OVERALL IMPACT
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Results

Eupora, Mississippi

* Down on Dunn

- **Aimed at increasing number of visitors to the BLY Theatre and merchant sales in Downtown Eupora.**

  - **764** visitors to the BLY Theatre
  
  - Over **10 new residents** volunteered over **600 hours**
  
  - In-kind **landscaping improvements and sound system**
  
  - Formation of a **new downtown merchants association**
  
  - Increased sales of downtown merchants by over **$33,000**
Louisville, Mississippi

Drop In, Not Out

- Aimed at assisting residents of Louisville and Winston County obtain their GED and either gain employment, attend college, or join the military.

- 30 people obtained their GED
- 6 gained employment
- 5 participants completed the TABE test making them eligible for employment at local industries
- 22 received job skills training
- Over 30 residents volunteered over 760 hours
Results

Walnut, Mississippi

* Destination Downtown

- **Aimed at attracting more visitors into the downtown area.**
  - 2,000+ visitors attended various events
  - New downtown park (converted eyesore gravel lot)
  - New farmers’ market
  - 5 new events
  - $8,240 vendor sales
  - $4,200 increased merchant sales
Key to Sparkplug Projects

3S

Sparkplugs
Structure
Support
Key to Sparkplug Projects

Sparkplugs
Who are sparkplugs

“Sparkplugs” are...
- Local people, outside professional mainstream
- “Get it done” people
- Energetic and optimistic
- Passionate
- Willing to take controlled risks
- Takes responsibility
- Able to work with others committed to the community
- Result focused
- Have Faith
Who are sparkplugs are not
Why Elected Officials Should Care?

- Limited resources
- Unrealistic expectations on elected officials
- Looking for help carrying out vision
- Engages more cities
- Results in Real-Time
- A sparkplug is an elected officials best friend!
Key Sparkplug Characteristics

1. Energy
2. Bias to Act
3. Results Focus
4. Personal Responsibility
5. Belief in Common Good
6. Inclined to Teamwork

*Sparkplugs are everywhere!*
I. Energy

✶ **Stamina**

✶ **Enthusiasm**

✶ **Sense of Humor**

*Debbie Downer, SNL*
2. Bias to Act

- Solution focuses
- Sense of urgency
- Opportunity-driven
- They do something - not complain
3. Results Orientation

✴ Need for achievement
✴ Outcome over process
✴ Clear and compelling vision for success
4. Personal Responsibility

- Acknowledge errors and mistakes
- Focus on personal accountability (more so than group)
- Take responsibility before it is delegated

Sure glad the hole isn't at our end.
5. Belief on Common Good

* See effects in other people

* Appreciate differences

* See a shared fate among community
6. Teamwork

✴ Drive teams by targets
✴ Form teams from differences
✴ Seek creation, not agreement
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Structure
Structure

What we typically see
Structure

Project idea

Support

Implementation
Structure

Project idea

Walking track

Support

Implementation
Structure

Project idea
Walking track

Support
Grant writing & action plan

Implementation
Structure

Project idea  Walking track

Support  Grant writing & action plan

Implementation  Completed walking track
What is the result of this process?
IN THIS CASE...
result = completed project
How is our process different?
A completed project is not a result.
RESULT

✴ What you really want to achieve.
✴ Often overlooked.
✴ Answers the question:

WHY?
Example

“Start a downtown farmer’s market.”

Why are you starting a market?

- Access to healthy food
- Increased activity downtown
- Increase revenue of merchants
- Provide outlet for local farmers
RESULT

Project idea  Walking track

Result?  WHY?
Structure

RESULT

Project idea  Walking track

Result  More people walking
EXERCISE 1

PROJECT IDEA

✿ What change do you want to see?

Workbook: Exercises 1 - Page 1
EXERCISE 2

RESULT

✴ What do you really want to achieve?
✴ Think deeper than the project
✴ Answer “why?”

Workbook: Exercises 2 - Page 1
Structure

RESULT: What you really want to achieve.
RESULT: What you really want to achieve.

✴ How do you accomplish the result?
✴ Use of TARGETS
TARGET

- Connect to the larger result
- Clear & specific
- Focused on the **result** not the project
- Are verifiable
- Time-bound & have a deadline
- Do-able with a stretch
- Do not change

What can I accomplish in 6-months?
Target Setting

Why set targets?

- Drive and focus action
- Define “Success” for your project
  - How will you know that you have achieved it?
- Inspire and motivate others
- Groups that set them outperform those who don’t
Structure

GOAL

• Too broad
• Often a project not a goal
• No deadline
• Not verifiable

TARGET

• Specific & focused
• Focus on the result not the project
• Time-bound
• Verifiable
Example Goals

“Have a vibrant downtown.”

“Improve local education system.”

“Continue an ongoing member retention and recruitment effort.”
Example

“Continue an ongoing member retention and recruitment effort.”

OR

Increase $500-level members from 10 to 15 by November 1, 2015.
Every target will have:

1. What are you changing?
   - The result

2. Where are you starting?
   - Baseline

3. Where are you going?
   - Destination
   - The target that you want

4. When will you finish?
   - Deadline
Every target will have:

1. What are you changing?
   - Number of people walking 3-miles/week

2. Where are you starting?
   - 0 people

3. Where are you going?
   - 100 people

4. When will you finish?
   - September 1, 2015
Increase the number of people walking 3-miles per week from 0 to 100 by September 1, 2015.
Increase the number of people downtown from 1,000 to 3,000 by September 1, 2015.
Increase the revenue of downtown merchants from $2,000/mth to $4,000/mth by September 1, 2015.
Increase the number of people with GEDs from 0 to 10 by September 1, 2015.
Increase the number of 3rd graders performing "Basic"

from ______ to ________

by September 1, 2015.
EXERCISE 3

TARGET

✶ What part of the result can you achieve in 6 months?
✶ Doable with a stretch?
✶ Inspiring to others?
✶ Can you verify?

Workbook: Exercise 3 - Page 2
Structure

**SPARKPLUG PROJECT**

- How will you achieve your target?
- What is the most:
  - Efficient
  - Cost-effective
  - Impactful

- Answers the question:

  Is this the most efficient route to the target?
Brainstorm all potential projects & strategies

What is the most efficient, cost-effective, & impactful route to the target?
ROADMAP: Detailed action plan

- **Milestones**: Key checkpoints toward target achievement
- **Key Steps**: Outline steps toward achievement
- **Verification**: Track progress
- **Learnings**: What will we do differently next time?

Are we on track?
Roadmap

Target:

*Increase the number of people walking 3-miles/week from 0 to 100 by September 1, 2015.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Project Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5/1/15</td>
<td>Project begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/1/15</td>
<td>25 people walking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/1/15</td>
<td>50 people walking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/1/15</td>
<td>75 people walking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/1/15</td>
<td>100 people walking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Structure

PROJECT IDEA

RESULT

TARGET

SPARKPLUG PROJECT

ROADMAP
Key to Sparkplug Projects

3S

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Support
Why project support matters?

✴ Key to successful implementation
✴ Encourages accountability
✴ Provides road-block assistance
  • Plans are only a starting point
✴ Motivates and uplifts
How we provide it?

✴ Regular update calls
✴ On site visits
✴ Peer-learning calls / meetings
✴ Connection to other resources/partners
Let’s Review

- How our approach is different
- What are Sparkplug Projects
- How Sparkplug Projects have helped communities
- Importance of Sparkplugs in your community
- The need to shift from Projects to Results
- How to begin to see results happen (Targets)
- What it takes to be successful
- Is this right for you?
Your Feedback

*Please help us by completing your session feedback form*
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