FRAMEWORK for ACTION

Building the Fully Coordinated Transportation System

Facilitator's Guide

Department of Transportation (2003). Framework for Action: Building the Fully Coordinated Human Service Transportation System. Federal Transit Administration. Washington, D.C.

Chapter 1

BUILDING THE FULLY COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Introducing the Framework for Action

TIP

The Framework for Action and other resources can be found on the web at http://www.fta.dot.gov/CCAM/www/index.html or www.ccam.gov.

This document augments the Framework for Action: Building the Fully Coordinated Transportation System. It is written for those who will be helping to lead their state or community through the assessment and action planning process. It helps you understand the genesis of this tool, the strategic choices in designing the process, and provides guidance for each step of the meeting.

Genesis of the Framework for Action

Those who are immersed in building coordinated human services transportation systems can enumerate the steps, the challenges, and the opportunities. Unfortunately, many of those who are partners in the coordinated effort – providers, client agencies, sister agencies, public officials, advocates, and others – are rarely able to develop this bird's eye view. They understand the system from where they sit; able to provide incredible detail on specific issues, but often lacking a full understanding of the big picture.

The lack of shared perspective can inhibit efforts to move forward. Each person or agency has their agenda, their priorities, their needs and views with others for moving their efforts forward. Sometimes that works. A passionate advocate identifies a problem, helps others focus their attention, and a solution is found. But when the challenge is coordination, everyone needs to tackle the problems and define the solutions together.

The Framework for Action: Building the Fully Coordinated Transportation System – a Self Assessment Tool for Communities and States helps stakeholders build a shared perspective and determine how they will move forward together. As the title suggests, there are two tools here. One is designed to help a community assess its progress in developing a coordinated transportation system and develop a plan to move forward. The other helps states accomplish the same task.

While both assessment tools can be completed by individuals, their real value is in enabling groups to better understand the challenges and take a leadership role in addressing those challenges. It helps groups that are comprised of individuals with much specific knowledge develop shared understanding.

The Framework has been built on several premises that are important to understand:

- There are identifiable core elements of a fully coordinated transportation system. The core elements, which are reflected in the questions and the answers, have been drawn from the guidance of an Expert Panel convened by the Federal Transit Administration, guidebooks, case studies, and the research literature. The questions and answers have been drafted in ways that seek to recognize the differences among states and communities while focusing on the underlying element.
- There are numerous tactical, strategic, policy, and systems advances that states and communities can make to strengthen transportation systems. States and communities have substantial latitude in developing transportation systems. This Framework helps states

and communities fully realize these possibilities. The federal government also plays a critical role and is pursuing parallel improvements to support work at the state and local level.
- People in states and communities know their area best. Therefore, the Framework is designed to elicit what people know and guide their knowledge toward action.
- Process precedes action; process does not substitute for action. Using this tool well requires a group of people to conduct a shared analysis and plan for action. This meeting may generate more meetings. The tasks of meetings – finding common ground, doing collaborative problem solving, and building consensus are all important – and they need to lay the foundation for action and change.

Building a fully coordinated human services transportation system that solves access, quality, and cost issues is a challenging enterprise. Sometimes, people can be overwhelmed by the challenges and do not know where to start. The Framework helps participants develop a list of action areas based upon assessing their state or community's progress against an established list of core elements. Once this step is completed, participants can establish priorities and plans for moving forward, bringing focus and strategy to their efforts.

When to Use this Framework

This Framework can be used in a half-day meeting, a day-long retreat, or over a period of several meetings. It can be used with a group that meets regularly such as a board of directors or with a group especially convened for this activity. The Framework is well suited for use by people who are at least somewhat familiar with the existing coordinated human services transportation system; it is not designed for use by customers whose only experience with the system is using the service. The Framework can be used in newer or maturing systems.

The Framework will most commonly be used on its own to guide an assessment and action planning effort. It can also be used to augment a strategic planning or work plan development process. It can be used as part of an annual checkup to gauge progress. In other words, it is a flexible tool that can be used in a broad range of settings.

How to Use this Guide

This guide has been developed to help you design and manage a self assessment and action planning process. It offers guidance on:

- The Four-Step Model for Change
- Planning and Designing the Process
- Facilitating the Meetings
- Moving from Priorities to Action

Additional resources can be found on the federal Coordination Committee for Action and Mobility web site at http://www.fta.dot.gov/CCAM/www/index.html or www.ccam.gov.

Chapter 2

FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

A Four-Step Model for Change

The Framework for Action uses a straightforward planning and action process. The steps are:

Process Planning

Effective Process Planning ensures you have the right people together in a meeting friendly room with a clear agenda to do the work. During this stage, the foundation for action is laid. Therefore, clear thought as to who will move efforts forward is essential.

Assessing

Assessing is the stage where participants, first individually, and then collectively, use the assessment tool to evaluate where their human services transportation system does well and where it needs improvement. There are two tools; one for communities and the other for states. The individual work ensures each person understands the elements of fully coordinated system and assesses progress. The group work builds a shared sense of strenghts and weaknesses.

Prioritizing

Prioritizing is essential. In most places, a fully coordinated system is a goal, not a reality. Targeted efforts to move forward are likely to have the most impact. During this stage, participants explore strategic options and develop a clear and tight focus for moving forward.

Action Planning

Priorities without a plan only lead to frustration. The action planning process ensures there is a clear sense of who is expected to do what and by when. Clear outcomes are identified to create an accountability framework.

Together, these four steps lay the foundation for action and outline steps toward a more fully coordinated human services transportation system. The remaining sections of this document provide guidance and clear outcomes for each of the steps.

Chapter 3

PROCESS PLANNING

Setting up a meeting well is as important as running a good meeting

Process Planning

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Participants Invited
- Links Made to Existing Planning Processes
- Agenda Developed for Meeting(s)
- Logistical Needs Addressed

Successful meetings, most people know, require a significant amount of pre-meeting homework. In this type of effort, the pre-meeting homework is especially important because there are many critical decisions to be made prior to sitting down, conducting the assessment, and building the Framework for Action. This section describes the key pre-meeting tasks that need to be accomplished.

Determining Who to Invite

Stakeholders abound in a coordinated human services transportation system: transportation providers, customers, client agencies, citizens, local governments, state transportation agency, state human service agencies, regional entities, and brokerages, only begin the list. Then, for many of these entities, one can think about whether to include members of the boards of directors, directors, management, or front-line staff. Inviting an appropriate set of stakeholders to the table for assessment and action planning is one of the keys to success.

WORKING IN COMMUNITIES

This section is written for those who will be initiating an effort in a community. If you will be doing this work at the state level, please skip ahead to the next section, Working in States.

Different communities work differently – each has a unique way of doing business when it comes to making change happen. The first step in considering how to use the Framework in your community is to revisit your own history.

- How have major steps forward in improving your coordinated human services transportation system occurred? Were they driven by an individual, an organization, a partnership, or a coalition? Are those individuals and organizations able to continue to assume a leadership role? Is there a table around which these key individuals come together, a board of directors, advisory board, or coordinating council, for example?

> Understanding how change happens in your community is one of the keys to success. This is particularly important because, in some communities, the group of people needed to lead change efforts is often different than the people needed to manage a coordinated system. If this is the case in your setting, it is important to figure out how to create a forum for building your framework for action that involves leaders and managers.

- How do transportation and human service agencies – including aging, child care, employment, health, human services, and others – work together in your community? Are the linkages made at the appropriate level in the respective organizations?

> Successful efforts to strengthen coordinated human services transportation systems require joint action by transportation and human service agencies. Ensuring your forum has an appropriate mix of agencies, each represented by senior staff, is one of the keys to success.

- When you do a quick scan – using the Framework – of your community and identify issues where participants are likely to say more action is needed; which organizations or individuals from the community need to be involved to make progress on those issues?

> Before you use the Framework for Action with a group of community stake holders, it will be helpful to pilot the assessment in a staff meeting or with others who can help illuminate where stakeholders are likely to say more progress is necessary. Then, in examining these issue areas, consider who needs to be involved in order to build an effective action plan.

- If typical transportation issues in your area transcend a single service area (e.g., the area you serve is adjacent to another service area and customers need to regularly move between both service areas), how do coordination conversations occur with those responsible for adjacent or overlapping service areas?

> Occasionally the barriers to more fully coordinated systems are rooted in the ways service areas have been defined. Coordination is effective within service areas but not across service areas. If this challenge is present in your community, consider how to involve representatives from all appropriate service areas.

- Are there ongoing formal or informal transportation planning processes in your community whose scope covers the same issues you will be assessing in building a Framework for Action?

> Informal planning processes, such as building a Framework for Action, can fail to gain traction when they are not linked to related planning processes. If there are existing planning processes underway in your community, consider how to involve the principals from those efforts in building the Framework for Action. Then, ensure that the outputs from this effort are incorporated into those planning processes.

An Existing or Constructed Group?
Based upon the information you gather answering the above questions, it is possible to make the key decision for bringing people together – whether to use an existing or a constructed group. An existing group could be a board of directors of an organization like a transportation brokerage, a coordinating council, or perhaps a planning group that is convened under the auspices of a metropolitan or rural planning organization.

You have the perfect existing group if it has:

- Historically shown that it can take a leadership role in moving efforts forward;
- An appropriate mix of transportation and human services agencies;
- Membership that is likely to be able to respond to the issues that are raised; and
- A geographic service area that transcends common jurisdictional issues.

If there is not an existing group that fits the bill, there are two choices. First, you may wish to augment an existing group with additional participants. Additional participants can be used to

GUIDE TO CONSTRUCTING AD HOC PLANNING GROUPS

One of the best is free. Planning Together: How (and How Not) to Engage Stakeholders in Charting a Course can be found on the Community Problem Solving web site (http://www.community-problem-solving.net/CMS/viewPage.cfm?pageId=200).

Others include The Collaborative Leadership Fieldbook by David Chrislip (San Francisco: Jossey Bass 2002) and Managing Public Disputes by Susan Carpenter and W.J.D. Kennedy (San Francisco: Jossey Bass 2001) bring important perspectives to the table. They might be senior public officials, agency clients, advocates or others who bring viewpoints that are not reflected in the existing group.

The second option is to construct an ad hoc planning group that draws from a range of stakeholders. This will require significantly more work, but may be essential if an existing group does not meet the need. The lack of an existing group may also suggest that appropriate forums for addressing coordination issues do not currently exist in your community. If that is the case, it may be appropriate to think of constructing a group that may become ongoing after the assessment and action planning is completed. If you are constructing an ad hoc group, please refer to the guides listed in the sidebar as well as the resources in the "Governance" category on the CCAM web site.

You have now completed the section on Working in Communities. Skip ahead to Managing Group Size.

WORKING IN STATES

Each state is unique – each has a unique way of doing business when it comes to making change happen. The first step in considering how to use the Framework in your state is to revisit your own history.

- How have major steps forward in improving your coordinated human services transportation system occurred? Were they driven by political leadership, civil servants, external leaders and advocates, or a combination? Are those individuals and organizations able to continue to assume a leadership role? Is there a table around which these key individuals come together, such as an interagency coordinating council or statewide coalition, for example?

> Understanding how change happens in your state is one of the keys to success. This is particularly important because, in some states, the group of people needed to lead change efforts is often different than the people who have day-to-day management responsibilities. If this is the case in your setting, it is important to think through how to create a forum for building your framework for action that involves leaders and managers.

- When you do a quick scan – using the Framework – of your state and identify issues where participants are likely to say more action is needed; which organizations or individuals need to be involved to make progress on those issues?

> Before you use the Framework for Action, it will be helpful to pilot the assessment in a staff meeting or with others who can help illuminate where stakeholders are likely to say more progress is necessary. Then, in examining these issues areas, consider who needs to be involved in order to build an effective action plan.

- Have efforts to foster more coordinated human services transportation planning process involved all of the agencies who fund and/or provide transportation services in your state?

> In some states, those who work together to foster more coordinated systems may reflect only the largest agencies or where personal relationships exist that have

> transcended bureaucratic barriers. If that is the case in your state, this is an excellent opportunity to reach out to additional partners because the process of building the Framework for Action will also build relationships and a shared understanding of the interdependence.

- How have state officials and other external stakeholders such as business leaders, advocates, leaders from local systems come together in the past?

> Effective action for states usually requires a multi-sectoral effort. Understanding how these sector-spanning efforts have come together in the past can guide your current effort. If your state has not created these kinds of cross-sectoral deliberations in the past, this tool provides an effective platform for starting now.

- Are there ongoing formal or informal transportation planning processes whose scope covers the same issues you will be assessing in building a Framework for Action?

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The second option is to construct an ad hoc planning group that draws from a range of stakeholders. This will require significantly more work, but may be essential if an existing group does not meet the need. The lack of an existing group may also suggest that appropriate forums for addressing coordination issues do not currently exist in your community. If that is the case, it may be appropriate to think of constructing a group that may become ongoing after the assessment and action planning is completed. If you are constructing an ad hoc group, please refer to the guides listed in the sidebar as well as the resources in the "Governance" category on the CCAM web site.

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MANAGING GROUP SIZE

Whether you are working in a state or community, the number of participants who might be involved can easily move into the dozens, creating questions about how large of a group is feasible. Factors to consider you weigh the size of the group are:

- Candor. Sometimes there is increased candor in smaller groups, there also may be unspoken boundaries in ongoing small groups and more people are needed to put tough issues on the table.
- Information. It will be helpful to have sufficient information "in the room" to work effectively.
- Buy-in. One of the most important desired outcomes will be support for moving forward, how will size of the group impact this?
- Speed of Process. A larger group will take more time to work through the steps, what time commitments will participants be willing to make?

Based upon these factors and the scan of stakeholders you will need to make choices about the size of your group you wish to invite. The size of the group will impact your choice of room and table configuration, which is discussed below.

USING A PLANNING COMMITTEE

It is usually helpful to engage a small number of people from the group that is getting together to help plan the event. A planning committee can:

- Advocate for the use of this tool within the group.
- Help explain the purpose and goals of the exercise to their peers within the group.
- Help refine the agenda to reflect the perspectives of participants.

Using a planning group need not be a lengthy process. It can be one or two meetings held two-four weeks before the event. A planning committee may need to meet several times if it is involved in helping to construct an ad hoc group.

If you are working with an existing body, the planning group could be comprised of current leadership or an executive committee, perhaps augmented by the chair or members of committees that are likely to have responsibility for moving the product forward.

If you are working with a constructed group, the planning group often represents the different major perspectives – a transportation provider, a client agency, a customer advocate, etc. The group should be kept small however, and it is important to engage people who are seen and trusted as leaders in their respective communities.

The planning group can help with determining who should attend, finding a meeting space, inviting participants, designing the agenda, linking the action planning to existing planning frameworks, developing implementation mechanisms, and providing guidance in how to navigate tricky or contentious issues.

Building the Agenda

Building a Framework for Action can happen in one longer meeting or two shorter meetings. Here are the basic choices:

Assessing

The completion of the assessment by individuals can happen prior to the meeting or at the meeting. It is more desirable to have participants do this work at the meeting to allow questions to be answered and to ensure everyone completes the work. If participants are asked to complete the assessment prior to the meeting, assume some persons will not have completed their work. Development of the shared assessment by the group is obviously a step that needs to occur in the meeting.

Prioritizing

Prioritizing is a group process and should immediately follow the assessment. This is likely to be a longer conversation since it will explore a number of strategic questions such as: Where is the best place to start? How many priorities can we work on simultaneously? Where are we likely to make progress? Will enough participants commit to change?

Action Planning

Action planning can immediately follow the prioritizing or small groups can be assigned to come back with proposals at a subsequent meeting. It is important to have sufficient time for action planning; the most frequent mistake made in these types of efforts is hurrying through this step when everyone is tired or there is not sufficient time and then failing to complete an implementable action plan.

TIP

If you are thinking of a one-day retreat, Retreats That Work : Designing and Conducting Effective Offsites for Groups and Organizations by Sheila Campbell and Merianne Liteman (San Francisco: Jossey Bass) offers much useful advice.

A sample agenda for a one meeting process, which can be easily modified for a two-meeting process, can be found in the appendices. If you are working with a planning committee, it will be helpful to distribute the sample agenda as a starting point and for you to thoroughly read the next section to understand what needs to be accomplished in each module.

The advantages and disadvantages of a one-day or two-day effort can be found in the chart. Whichever you choose, do not try and overly compress the process. If you skip steps or do not allow sufficient time for conversation and planning, participants will be unlikely to fully embrace the outcome and contribute the energy that will be needed to implement the action plans.

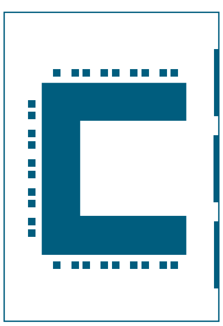
One Day Process

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Builds momentum and sense of success by completing in one day.	Will most likely require a meal and the better part of a day to complete effectively.
Reduces need to find two days that work for participants.	If the participants in the room are not knowledgeable about the issues that surface, it may be difficult to do effective action planning.
Eliminates the issue of some persons being able to participate on one day and not the other.	

Two Day Process

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Allows for two shorter meetings which may be possible to fit in a regular meeting schedule.	Some individuals are likely to appear on one day and not the other, perhaps making it difficult to maintain continuity.
Likely eliminates the need for a meal.	Momentum may be lost between the first meeting and the second.
Creates opportunity for a more deliberative approach to the action planning process and engage additional individuals.	

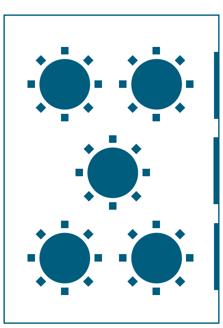
Managing the Logistics



Logistics include sending invitations, finding a meeting space, obtaining supplies, and orchestrating staff support.

MEETING SPACE

Finding a comfortable and productive meeting space is a key to success. If you are in a meeting room that is too small or inappropriately arranged, it will be more difficult to complete the work.



Ensure that the space offers good accessibility (including meeting the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act). Beyond the legal requirements, look for sufficient space to move around the room and between the tables.

If the size of your group is under 25 people, the most effective arrangement will be in a "U", with the open end of the U facing a wall where you can hang flipcharts or use a projection screen. The room should have moveable chairs to allow people to easily form small groups. If your group is larger than 25 people, you will need a meeting space that has round or square tables that can seat six to ten people at a table. If you are in a rectangular room, the "front" of the room should be set on one of the long walls to minimize the distance between the facilitator and the back of the room. This wall should also make it easy to hang flipcharts.

Also, consider the location of the meeting room. Is it transit accessible?

INVITATIONS

This is a special meeting; the invitations to participate in the meeting should reflect its importance. If you are working with an existing group, consider how to elevate the importance of this meeting in the minds of the participants: Is it a letter from the chair? A personal phone call? A paper invitation instead of an email?

If you are working with a constructed group, care should be taken to extend an invitation that explains the purpose and goals of the meeting and how the group was constructed. The invitation should also include a list of participants, a draft agenda, and a request for participants to indicate if they need alternative formats. You may also wish to include a copy of the assessment tool. It is often helpful for each person to receive a phone call to follow-up on the invitation.

SUPPLIES

As you read the guide to managing the assessment and priority setting process, you will see several options that will determine if you need additional supplies. At a minimum, you will need:

- Copies of the assessment (either state or community) and the agenda for all participants and some pens or pencils.
- Flipchart paper, masking tape (if you have not purchased self-stick paper), and magic markers (Watercolor markers are best.)
- Flipchart easel (Unless you can use a wall to post the paper.)
- Name badges and name tents (Unless this is an existing group where each person knows everyone else.)
- Bright colored, one-inch stick dots.

Also, assess whether any of the written materials need to be made available in accessible formats (e.g., Braille, large print, or electronic.)

FACILITATION AND STAFF SUPPORT

Managing the meeting process and the flow of paper requires two to three people, none of whom are participating in the action planning process. The three roles are facilitator, facilitator's assistant, and notetaker. You may also need interpreters and should plan to engage them based upon the requests of members of your group.

Facilitator and Facilitator's Assistant

This process is designed to be managed by a facilitator, someone who is familiar with all of the steps of the process, keeps the group on track, guides the conversation, and is not participating in the assessment. While the facilitator needs strong "people skills," you do not need a professional facilitator although you may choose to select one. The next section provides detailed guidance to allow either a person with good people skills or a professional facilitator to effectively manage the process.

Possible facilitators could be a staff person, a planner from a local agency, someone from the community mediation center, a college professor, an extension agent, a former board member, or someone from a similar setting. The person should have some knowledge of transportation and coordination and some experience in guiding group work.

The facilitator will need an assistant or there could be co-facilitators. The tasks of the additional person include writing notes on flipcharts, summarizing forms, and assisting with the flow of paper. This person needs to be able to write clearly and reasonably quickly on flip charts.

Notetaker

It is helpful, although not essential, to have an additional person taking notes during the meeting. This person takes notes during the conversation, transcribes the information on the flipcharts, and tracks all of the agreements and commitments. Ideally, they will use a laptop computer so the information can be quickly used to develop a meeting summary.

Chapter 4

MANAGING THE PROCESS

Becoming familiar with the tool and the steps for using the tool will create a better experience for participants.

RESOURCES ON FACILITATION

If you seek guidance on facilitation, some of the best resources are Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making by Sam Kaner (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers), Great Meetings: How to Facilitate Like a Pro by Dee Kelsey and Pam Plumb (Portland, ME: Hanson Park Press), and The Skilled Facilitator: Practical Wisdom for Developing Effective Groups by Roger Schwarz (San Francisco: Jossey Bass).

This section provides you with step-by-step guidance for each part of the process. There are, of course, many ways to adapt this process, especially if you are incorporating the tool into an existing planning process.

If you want to ensure you are comfortable with the agenda, it will help to pilot the assessment with a smaller group such as staff who work on transportation issues in your state or community. In any case, it will be helpful for you to walk through every step of the process your self.

Using Technology

Technology is increasingly being used as a way of making meetings more effective. However, there is nothing like a technology disaster to ruin the momentum of a meeting. Some audio-visual aids that you may wish to consider using are:

- Laptop computer, LCD project and screen. You can pre-enter each of the assessment questions and categories into a program such as Microsoft's PowerPoint© and then manipulate the list as the group establishes priorities and creates an action plan. This requires a person who is very skilled at the computer. It can speed the process by eliminating the time for writing on a flipchart and make the items easier to read.
- Overhead project and screen. You can use an overhead projector similarly to the laptop, but it will be much more difficult to manipulate the information.

If you do not have access to or are not comfortable with technology, do not worry, this process can be run well using only flipcharts and magic markers.

Managing the Agenda

TIP

Consider asking a senior public official in your state or community to contribute to the welcome as a way of demonstrating top political support for this effort.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

If you are working with an existing group, the welcome should include:

- An appreciation for everyone's participation,
- An explanation of the purpose of the meeting,
- Information about the tool,
- The goal of an action planning process, and
- A statement about why this is important.

If this is a new group or an existing group with additional members, the welcome should also explain how the group was constructed.

Whether you are working with an existing or constructed group, it is often helpful to have a warm-up exercise as a part of the introductions. There are many possibilities.

One easy to use and often funny warm-up is "Two Truths and a Lie". The steps are:

- Ask participants to pair up with someone they do not know well.
- One participant starts by telling two truths about themselves (Ideas: past jobs, number of grandchildren, where they were born, skills, hobbies, etc.) and a lie. Then the other person guesses which statement is a lie. Then they switch roles.
- It often helps if the facilitator shares two truths and a like about him or herself and then asks the group to guess the lie,
- The facilitator can then ask the group questions like: What was the most interesting truth? What was the most outrageous lie?

TIP

When you review the agenda using the flipchart, use the opportunity to assess whether every member of the group can read the flipchart. If there are individuals who can not read the flipchart, you will need to read items that are written on the flipcharts as you proceed through the meeting.

Whether or not you use a warm-up exercise, for constructed groups it will be necessary to have each person introduce themselves to the group. If observers or support staff are present, it is also important to indicate their roles.

AGENDA REVIEW AND GROUND RULES

The facilitator then describes the agenda to the participants, asking if there are any questions. It will be helpful to have the agenda posted on a flipchart. During this explanation, the facilitator should also cover logistical information (e.g., food, restrooms, etc.) as needed.

The facilitator can then discuss ground rules. Whether the ground rules are formal (e.g., written on a flip chart and discussed) or informal (e.g., guiding comments from the facilitator), it is important to consider how to help the group speak candidly about tough issues that may not be discussed in open meetings.

The facilitator may do this by:

- Giving an example: "I know I have been a part of hallway conversations about _______ and ________, how do we make it OK to talk about those issues today?"
- Use formal ground rules and emphasize those that deal with openness and disagreement.
- Ask leaders in the group to make comments about the importance of dealing with tough issues.

In this segment, it will also be helpful for the facilitator to describe his or her role, for example: "I will be guiding us through this process today, explaining the steps, guiding the conversation, and making sure we stay on task." Refer to the Appendix for sample ground rules.

Assessing

INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENTS

Ensure each person has a copy of the assessment form and a pencil or pen. Take a sample question and using the decision helpers, give an example of how a rating might be selected. Remind participants that "done well" refers to levels of excellence that are characteristic of a fully coordinated human services transportation system.

If you have persons who do not read English well or for whom English is not a language in which they are fluent, ask those individuals to work in pairs.

COMPLETED INDIVIDUAL ASSESSMENT

Development of a shared assessment, especially around areas where we need to do better.

Walk around the room as individuals complete their work, ensuring there is enough time for everyone to finish.

WHAT DO WE DO WELL?

There are two ways to approach this conversation depending upon the size of your group. If you are working with a group of 15 people or less, start the conversation with the whole group, asking individuals to name a category where they believed the community or state has done well. After the first person offers their nominee, ask if others in the group scored that item the same to gain a sense of whether the analysis is shared. Then ask the person who initially offered the category to discuss how they scored the specific items in that category. Then check with others in the group to see if they concur.

If you have a larger group, add "buzz groups" to start. Buzz groups are a way to get everyone talking (since everyone will not have a chance to talk in the large group). It also allows people to validate their analysis before they go "public" in a large group. Ask participants (without moving around the room) to find one or two partners and share with each other their "Done Well's". Then start the whole group conversation by asking where there was an agreement in a small group and then follow the process as described above. Do not forget to go back and ask where there was disagreement in the small groups.

TIP

In states or communities where there has not been much progress or efforts are relatively new, there may not be any "done well's." If that is the case, ask participants identify those areas where they marked as "need to do better" and celebrate the progress that has been made.

There are several goals for this conversation:

- Help the group establish a sense of accomplishment by identifying areas where they have made progress.
- Gain a sense (not consensus) of specific areas where there has been success and progress.
- Help the group recognize that there are different and conflicting perspectives and it is important to recognize those and work with the differences. It is only by doing so, that the group will be able to move effectively to action.

It is likely that there will be a desire to continue the conversation beyond the time allotted. In particular, participants are likely to want to discuss the disagreements. Work to end this conversation on time and carry the disagreements into the next part of the agenda.

WHERE DO WE NEED TO DO BETTER?

Begin by reminding participants about the purpose of this part of the conversation:

- To develop a list of areas where we need to start our efforts or do better;
- Prioritize that list to identify places where we wish to start; and
- Develop action plans for high priority issues.

Several ways you can start the conversation are:

- If you have a large group, it may be helpful to start with buzz groups again.
- Ask the group to nominate a category where they scored it as "needs substantial action" or "need to begin" and then discuss that category with the group.
- Start with a category or area from the prior conversation where some individuals scored it as either "Needs to Begin" or "Needs Significant Action"

Explore each category as described in the previous module.

Start a flipchart page titled, "Possible Priority Areas" and start adding items to the list as they are discussed by the group. You may want to develop a shorthand such as listing the question number and a descriptive phrase.

If you are running out of time, propose to the group that the scoring be analyzed, without discussion, on the remaining items. Write items on the flipchart where some members of the group believe there is action needed. If there are questions about whether or not an item should be added to the list, suggest to the group that items be put on the list, and then decision be made in the priority-setting exercise, which is next.

TIP

It will be important to think through whether you are listing categories or specific items or both on the Possible Priority Areas list. If participants are scoring every item within a category as needing significant work, it will make sense to list the category. If the scoring is uneven across the items, it may make sense to list each item.

BREAK

The break provides an important opportunity to explore whether last minute adjustments are needed for how the group will establish its priorities. Prior to the meeting, develop a preferred model based upon the choices below.

At the break, perhaps with a couple of leaders from the group, examine whether your intended approach will work given prior discussions and the list of "possible priority areas." For example, if you had anticipated a long list of issues and planned to use a dot exercise, but now have a much shorter list, how will you adjust your approach?

If your list is not very neat, ask someone to make a clean copy of the list during the break.

Prioritizing

DEVELOPING PRIORITIES

Start by re-establishing the context, reminding the group about the goal of this segment, and describe the task by using phrases like:

- Efforts to build fully coordinated human services transportation systems is probably not measured in years but in decades
- All of the items on this list are important to complete at some point
- There will be a meeting summary which lists all of the items we have here, so we can keep track of this list
- Right now, we are looking for the top couple of items that should be our focus for the next year (you might choose a shorter timeframe than a year such as 6-9 months)
- We will be using a two-step process for this effort
- First, we want to narrow the number of items under consideration using a quick prioritization exercise
- Then, we will have some focused discussion about the remaining items before we see if we can build consensus around our choices.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Clear, short list of priorities, each of which will have an action plan.

Checking the list

Ask if all of the items on the list are clear to everyone. Ask the group if there any items that can be combined. Caution the group against combining too many items to ensure that items on the list can be accomplished within a reasonable period of time.

Establishing the Target Number of Priorities

Create a conversation with the group about the number of priorities that can be reasonably addressed at the same time. As you do this, it may help to create a picture of the next steps:

- We imagine that for each priority item, a workgroup will be established which meets fairly frequently to move an action agenda forward.
- There may be members of the workgroup who are not in this room, but we expect substantial leadership will come from those of you who are here.
- With that picture of the next steps, how many priorities can we handle . . . three? . . . two? . . . one?

Work to develop a desired range of target priorities with the group rather than a specific number. This approach addresses the reality that tackling some items will take more energy, others less.

Narrowing the List

It is likely that there will still be many items that will be on the "possible priority areas" list. Here are several ways to narrow the list. It is also possible to use a combination of these tools.

- Dot Exercise. This is the most common way for a group to narrow a list. Count the number of items and divide by three. This is the number of votes each person receives. Distribute the sticky dots. Advise the group that each person needs to vote for separate items with each of their votes. Remind participants of the goal: selecting items that should be our intense focus for the next year and will strategically advance our efforts toward becoming a more fully coordinated human services transportation system. After participants finish voting, examine the voting. In most cases, there will be a natural clustering. Propose moving all items in the top tier to the next phase of discussion.

- Level of Shared Analysis. You may wish to use the individual analyses from the initial questionnaire to narrow the list. For example, you can separate the items in the list that members of the group primarily scored "need to begin," "needs substantial action," or "needs some action" and then work within each category. You might also look for the strongest level of support within the assessment, items that, for example, everyone agreed "needs substantial action." This type of narrowing can be helpful because it draws directly from the group's work. There are two challenges in using this approach. First, the assessment questions do not provide firm yardsticks, so people who largely agree in their analysis may not always choose the same categories. The second consideration is practical. It will be very difficult to tally the worksheets without another break.

- Analysis which Reflects Current Environment. Sometimes the current environment can help inform which items are feasible and which are not. For example, a key agency that is needed to play a role in addressing a certain issue may be going through a leadership change, making it unlikely the agency will have strong leadership at the table until a new person is hired. A quick analysis of this type can often help narrow the list.

- Proposals from Leadership. Leaders in the group may wish to propose a set of items for further discussion based upon their analysis. Sometimes this can be an effective and quick tool for focusing the list and ensures items on the list are those that leaders support. At other times, some in the group may not wish to challenge established leaders and will continue the conversation but will not fully embrace the selection. If you suspect this may be possible in your group, you can ask the participants if they would add any items to the proposed list.

- Working from a Sense of the Group. The discussion in the prior module may offer a clear sense of where the group wishes to focus. You may wish to articulate these items back to the group and test the proposal.

Recognize that no matter which method you choose or develop, it will be important for the group to engage in open-ended discussion about strategy. Members of the group will likely revisit past efforts, current context, current energy for change, and other issues as they begin to think strategically about the next steps. This type of discussion is important and will help frame the next steps.

TIP

Evaluation tools often require multiple columns of data which are hard to fit on a typical flip chart. Many facilitators use 48" long rolls of paper and cut off large sheets to use for these types of exercises. If you put the words – art kraft roll 48 – into a search engine such as Google, you will find numerous vendors.

Working with the Short List

There are numerous methods to help the group move from a short list of possible action areas to selecting their top priorities. However, no one exercise or analytic tool can address all of the factors that need to be considered in developing a change strategy. Therefore, it will be important to blend conversation and analytic tools in reaching closure. Two of the most common analytic tools are:

- Force Field Analysis. Force field analysis is a useful technique for looking at all the forces for and against change with regards to a specific issue or a decision. In effect, it is a specialized method of weighing pros and cons. To carry out a force field analysis, follow these steps: (1) list all forces for change in one column, and all forces against change in another column (2) (this step is optional) assign a score to each force, from 1 (weak) to 5 (strong) and (3) Assess whether progress can be made given the forces for and against change. Complete this analysis for each item on the short list. When this step is completed, ask the group to discuss where progress is most likely. Remember, that this tool helps a group assess the possibility of change; that data needs to be linked to a discussion about the importance of each issue. If you use this tool, the specific items with in each list can inform the development of your action plan, because one strategy will be to increase the forces for change and reduce the forces against change.

TIP

If you are considering using a two-meeting process, one appropriate point to end meeting one is after the development of criteria for evaluating the short list. A small working group or staff can apply the criteria to the short list, engage in additional fact-finding, and report back to the whole group at the next meeting.

- Develop Criteria and Apply. This is a more comprehensive analytic tool. Begin by asking the group to identify criteria that would help determine whether a possible action item should become a priority that is selected for action (e.g., progress is possible in the next year, there is energy to work on this issue, working on this issue will lay foundation for working on others, financially feasible, etc.). After the group brainstorms possible criteria, work with the group to refine and narrow the list of criteria. Then apply each of the criteria to each of the items on the short list of possible action items. One way to capture this information is in a matrix that looks like a checkerboard (See example). Put the items on the short list down the side of the matrix and then place each criterion in a row across the top as illustrated. Work with the group to complete the matrix. It is usually helpful to have a very simple scoring mechanism such as: plus sign, minus sign, and question mark. This approach allows one to quickly scan the list and see which item has the most "plusses."

Criteria	A	B	C	D
Issue 1	+	-	+	-
2	-	+	+	+
3	+	-	-	+
4	+	+	+	+
5	-	-	?	+

While the analytic tools and discussion can help a group think strategically it is also critical to explore whether there is a willingness in the group to fully commit to an idea – volunteer for a work group, commit staff time, and contribute financial resources. If there are two top issues and one generates energy and the other does not, the choice is clear.

Finally, if the use of tools and deliberation does not lead to a further narrowing of the list, you can use dot voting or straw votes to determine which items receive the most support. Straw voting is a non-binding show of hands to check for consensus within a group. Please note that if you use straw voting, you must also strongly emphasize to the group that the process is a way to monitor consensus and not a shift away from consensus decision-making to majority rule.

ACTION PLANNING FOR OUR PRIORITIES

Action planning is so important, it has its own chapter, next.

TIP

If you are using a two-meeting process, an appropriate spot to end the first meeting is after priorities are established, leaving action planning to the second meeting. If you are pursuing that approach, make sure the group is clear about next steps (e.g., There are two work groups who will develop ideas for a preliminary action plan and they will help us begin our next meeting.)

CLOSING REFLECTIONS AND ADJOURN

Closing reflections can serve a number of purposes for a group. They offer an opportunity for members to discuss and evaluate the meeting. Some members may choose to look forward, reflecting upon what it will take to successfully implement the action plan. Leadership often will express its appreciation and extend thanks to those who worked hard on the event.

You may wish to pose a specific question to the group, leave space for members of the group to comment, or go around the room, asking each person for a closing thought. Finally, whether you are working with an existing group or a constructed group, you may wish to set a date for a subsequent meeting that will be used to check progress on the action plan. The date should reflect the communication protocols and timelines of the work groups.

By leading a group through this kind of process, they will not only have moved through a great deal of strategic work, they hopefully will have built some new understandings and relationships. You can help crystallize the relationship-building by holding a small reception afterwards, giving people a chance to connect informally.

Chapter 5

MOVING FROM PRIORITIES TO ACTION

When efforts to improve coordination and improve services bear fruit, participants are energized. Moving from assessment to action in this experience will create a reservoir of good will for future efforts.

Action Planning

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

An action plan which includes:

- A clear set of steps
- Who will carry out the steps
- A timeline
- A communication strategy

Effective action planning is a strategy for managing change – change in governance, policies, resource allocation, and ways of doing business. Most organizational and political cultures are somewhat resistant to change – even if the proposed change makes perfect sense. Some proposed changes also creates perceived "winners" and "losers," with those who see themselves as losing something often naturally opposed to the proposed change.

An action plan creates a road map for navigating the change process. It defines the road to start on, selects the destination, offers detail on the first couple of turns, and discusses what happens when a selected road is closed for construction. Further, it defines who on the bus helps pick the detour (e.g., the driver, the driver and passengers, the dispatcher, or in other words, the workgroup chair, the workgroup chair and members, or the group that constituted the work group), and commits to the support that is needed for the journey.

In most cases, there are two interrelated processes, not only is the whole group creating an action plan, they are also chartering a workgroup to move forward on the action plan. A workgroup often seeks some autonomy, an ability to be creative and work flexibly.

As a facilitator, therefore, you are helping the group manage this creative tension – gaining enough specificity on the action plan that the intent and purpose is clear while giving the work group appropriate autonomy. The next two sections delineate these steps.

TIP

A fairly comprehensive guide to action planning can be found in Chapter 8 of the Community Toolbox maintained by the University of Kansas at http://ctb.ku.edu/.

Building an Action Plan

An effective action plan answers a series of questions such as:

- What is the desired goal, outcome, or change?
- What are major strategies that should be pursued or explored?
- What is the timeline for major milestones and the final product?
- What resources are needed and who will provide them?
- Who will carry out this work?
- What is the communication strategy?

There are two common ways to lead a group through an action planning process other than methodically answering each question (which is often effective):

Visioning. A simple visioning process can help generate answers to many of the above questions. Ask the group the following question: "Imagine, it is (name a date one year hence), we have had a workgroup that has been enormously successful working on (name the priority issue), navigating every challenge with ease, what will they have achieved and how did they get there?" It often helps if after you ask the question, there are a couple minutes of silence allowing people to think. As participants begin to talk, it is helpful if you are using a large sheet of paper and start writing outcomes on the right hand side and steps in the middle. After the first couple of answers, ask if anyone had anything significantly different. Then unveil the above questions (perhaps pre-written on a flipchart) and answer the questions that were not addressed.

Answering Key Questions. Another means of systematically exploring a future state is to ask the group to answer the following questions:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- What are we trying to preserve?
- What are we trying to avoid?
- What are we trying to eliminate?

If you are looking to generate some energy in the group, you can quickly form small groups of three to four people and then assign a question to each group. After the group explores these questions unveil the above questions (perhaps pre-written on a flipchart) and answer the questions that were not addressed.

TIP

As a means of managing the time-consuming nature of answering all of these questions with some level of consensus, it may be helpful to capture ideas and then ask the new workgroup as their first order of business to create a draft action plan and charter document to circulate back to the whole group for review.

Chartering a Workgroup

A charter, according to the dictionary, is a declaration or document setting forth the aims and principles of a group.

The charter is specific enough to get the workgroup started in the right direction, but does not overly dictate process or specific outcomes at the outset. Workgroups, once they have an opportunity to comprehend the scope of their work may need to re-negotiate some elements of the charter with the large group.

The charter serves as a contract between the workgroup and its sponsor and assures a common objective among team members. It can be formal written document or a short statement that is captured in several bullet points. A full charter typically includes a statement of mission, objectives or statement of work; background; authority or boundary conditions (constraints, decision making authority, resources, and schedule); membership; and a communications protocol.

In settings such as this, the chartering statements are often included in the action plan. Elements of the charter can be developed by asking the group the following questions:

- Do you have any advice or requests of this group as it moves forward?
- How should the workgroup communicate with the larger group? Do you want the workgroup to check in with the larger group at any point?
- Are there any constraints the workgroup needs to know?

Informal chartering of workgroups is good practice. It ensures everyone has a shared sense of the role and goal of the workgroup. Formal chartering may be appropriate if the workgroup is going to have substantial authority, work with funds from multiple sources, or going to be addressing an issue that is perceived as contentious. A formal charter would, in most cases, be developed subsequent to building the Framework for Action.

Identifying Members of the Workgroup

Finally, it is important to identify members of the workgroup. They can include people at the meeting as well as others. You will also need to identify a convenor, someone who will take responsibility for organizing the first meeting.

Effective action planning is a key to success. Taking the time to do it well will pay many dividends as you move forward.

SAMPLE GROUND RULES

Here are ground rules drawn from a variety of settings. Select a small number that seem most relevant for your group.

- Listen to all perspectives respectfully.
- Seek understanding before responding.
- Speak concisely to make the best use of limited time.
- If there is disagreement, disagree respectfully and openly, not in private.
- Explain the reasons behind your statements.
- Share all relevant information.
- Stay focused. Discuss a topic enough for everyone to be clear about it.
- Ask questions when you don't understand.
- Give new voices a chance and ensure no one dominates the discussion.
- Correct misinformation about the myths and stereotypes about our own groups and other groups.
- Keep our discussions here confidential, and respect people's privacy.
- Listen and do not interrupt while one person speaks at a time.
- Do not blame, accuse, or make generalizations.
- Don't take cheap shots.
- Treat people as individuals, not as representatives of an entire group or organization.
- Be on time returning from our breaks.
- Focus on the subject.
- Don't be defensive.
- Treat members as equals despite position or rank.

BUILDING OUR FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION SAMPLE AGENDA

Meeting Time: 3 hours and 30 minutes to 5 hours and 15 minutes

Agenda Topics

Welcome and Introductions We will review the purpose of the meeting and take a moment to get to know each other better.	Chair or Leader or Facilitator	10 - 30
Agenda Review Our facilitator will walk us through the steps of building a Framework for Action.	Facilitator	10
Individual Assessments Our work starts with each of us completing an assessment of how well we are doing using an assessment that covers each of the core elements of building the fully coordinated human services transportation system.	All	20 - 30
What do We do Well? It is important to understand what we do well, since most successful efforts build upon their strengths to address their weaknesses. We will start by discussing the categories and then specific elements within the categories.	Facilitator	20 - 30
Where do We Need to do Better? Like our previous discussion, we will first focus our discussion on the categories where we believe we need to do better and then specific elements within those categories. We will end this segment by developing a clear list of areas where we wish to do better.	Facilitator	30 - 45
Break		
Developing Priorities We will take our list areas where we wish to do better and think strategically, and exploring questions such as: Where is a good starting place? How many priorities can we work on simultaneously? Where do we have leadership to move forward? Where are we likely to have success?	Facilitator	45 - 60
Action Planning for our Priorities We will take our top priorities and develop action plans: Who, what, when, where, and how? We will develop working groups for moving forward and immediate next steps.	Facilitator	60 - 90
Closing Reflections and Adjourn We will take a moment for closing thoughts and adjourn.		

Notes

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Federal Transit Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
400 7th Street
Washington, DC 20590
www.fta.dot.gov

Administration on Aging
U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
Washington, DC 20201
202-619-0724
www.aoa.gov

Office of Disability Employment Policy
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20210
www.dol.gov/odep/welcome.html