

G3840



Building Community Capacity

**Environment, Structure, and Action
to Achieve Community Purposes**

David G. Hinds



Contents

Introduction	1	III. Purpose-based action	17
A note on community development	1	Descriptive versus prescriptive	17
Development <i>in and of</i> the community	2	Defining purpose-based action	19
Transforming communities	3	Purposeful activities	20
Community capacity—Introduction	4	Total approaches	22
The need for knowledge	5	Specifying a five-factor approach for each purposeful activity	23
The importance of purpose	7	Skills and tools	24
I. Communities as environment	8	Roles	25
Defining communities	8	Using purpose-based action	26
Neighborhoods and communities	10	Community Capacity Element 3: Purpose-based action	27
Community Capacity Element 1: Community Environment	12	Conclusion	28
II. Community structures	12	References	29
Function and form	12	Appendix	31
Defining community structure	13	Primary and supporting roles	31
Structure follows purpose	16	Primary roles	31
Community Capacity Element 2: Community structures	17	Important supporting roles	35

Abstract

The concept of community capacity is central to community development and the transformation of communities. This publication reviews the difference between development in a community and development of a community, the importance of knowledge and purpose, and key distinctions between form and function.

The publication proposes a model for conceptualizing community capacity, comprised of three inter-dependent elements: (1) community environment; (2) community structures; and (3) purpose-based action. Ways that communities may be defined and a discussion of the significance of neighborhoods are presented to support the concept of community environment. Community structures presented include individuals, organizations, networks, and interim structures. The work concludes with presentation of a framework for purpose-based action, comprised of five purposeful approaches, accompanied by a discussion of the skills, tools, and roles needed to pursue them in achieving community purposes.



Introduction

Over the past several decades University of Wisconsin-Extension Cooperative Extension faculty and staff, in concert with their clients, have designed and developed new programs that go beyond transmitting content. These high impact programs deliver important and measurable results to communities. In recent years, UW-Extension has challenged itself to carry its efforts even beyond producing high impact programs. Extension professionals now are working to bring about lasting, positive changes, or **transformations**, in client groups, organizations and communities themselves.

As Extension takes up this new challenge, it is recognizing what many community groups and organizations have realized—that “knowing about something” is not the same thing as “being able to do something.” In turning to Extension for guidance and help in the 21st century, many community groups and organizations are not seeking more information and data; nor are they asking that something be done for them. Instead, they are looking to Extension for the knowledge, professional guidance, training, and practice they need to acquire the capacities, abilities, competencies, and confidence to achieve the mission and purposes they set out for themselves. In other words, they are looking for ways to increase their capacity and capability to identify, address, and successfully deal with issues, problems, and opportunities.

A note on community development

The concept of **transforming communities** and its inherent idea of **community capacity** is an outgrowth of the broad field of community development. The knowledge base for this field is broad, coming from a diverse body of research and experience in economic development, family and children’s issues, human and social services, education, local government, law, urban and regional planning, geography, sociology and rural sociology, demographics, political science, history, psychology, systems science, civil engineering, industrial engineering, banking and finance, architecture and landscape architecture, public safety, recreation, and natural resources. It includes knowledge and experience from work with every sort of “community” including cities, villages, rural areas, neighborhoods, subdivisions, institutions, ethnic communities, migrant and immigrant communities, enclaves, reservations, planned communities, and communes.

Recently, attention has been given to additional types of “communities,” such as virtual, religious, business, special interest and other important communities that are being identified, defined, and studied.

This broad base of work has produced over time a wealth of information, knowledge, and experience regarding how communities are identified and defined, how they function, how their constituent parts interrelate and communicate, how they interrelate and communicate with other communities, and much more. As would be expected, though, communities are seen in a variety of different ways by the various disciplines that comprise “community development.” This has, naturally, produced a wide variety of observations, theories, viewpoints, terms and definitions regarding communities and their development. Consistency is not a term that can be used comfortably to describe the knowledge base and literature of community development, and no one discipline can lay claim to possessing core knowledge or universal truths.

What seems to be true is that each of the various disciplines comprising the field of community development has gained important insights and provided valuable contributions to the broader field. What seems to be the case as well is that much of this valuable work has been neither recognized nor shared across disciplines and interests for the greater benefit of the field. There is much that each discipline does not know about the work of the others.

A recent scan of the literature in several of the community development disciplines seems to show that, more recently, scholars in some of the disciplines are reaching across disciplines to incorporate knowledge, ideas, definitions, theories, and insights from other disciplines into their work. In these cases, the result seems to have been not only better communication between disciplines, but some success in filling gaps in theory and knowledge, and a cross-fertilization that is helping to produce better and more comprehensive insights into communities and their development.¹

Development *in* and of the community

Mark Brennan (2003, p.1) cites Wilkinson (1991) to say that community is important in that “it contributes to individual and social well being by establishing and maintaining channels of communication, organizing resources to meet local needs, and providing a framework where the collective is more than the sum of its parts.”

Wilkinson (1991) and Luloff and Bridger (2003) say that community development can be seen as an action that is purposively directed towards altering local conditions in a positive way. Brennan (2004, p. 1) adds that “When specific projects are pursued with an emphasis on building social relationships and communication networks, community development has occurred. Community and community development are based on the assumption that

they contribute to the social well being and the self actualization of community members.”

To some involved in community development, especially those whose efforts focus more on physical and economic development, ideas concerning social relationships and networks may be unfamiliar and largely unexplored. To others, like those concerned with establishing and developing relationships in communities and some concerned with the delivery of social services and programs, these ideas may be familiar, but concepts of carrying out targeted community development projects, such as those done in physical and economic development, may be less well known. In reality, though, if community development is to succeed and be effective, ideas and concepts from understandings from these and other sources are important and necessary.

One way to help understand a major difference in perspective can be found in knowing the difference between **development *in* the community** and **development of the community** (Summers, 1986; Luloff and Swanson, 1995).

In development *in* the community the community is seen as a given, and development is viewed as enhancing this existing entity (Wilkinson, 1991). Clearly defined outcomes are envisioned and their achievement means success and the end of development. Often this form of development includes growth, modernization, and the enhancement of organizational structures. Its results can often be seen in new industry and jobs, new buildings and infrastructure, new social programs, and expanded and revitalized institutions and organizations. Brennan (2003, p. 3) concludes that

The development of specific community areas and systems, while contributing to enhancements of the local community, is not sufficient enough to lead to the emergence of community. Simply enhancing local economies or structures does little to increase the social and cultural connections between residents or to communicate needs and opportunities throughout the locale.

¹ This paper will incorporate knowledge, insights, and ideas from several community development-related disciplines. It will attempt to use terms and definitions that are more universal than they are unique to a particular discipline, but this is not always possible, especially in cases where a particular concept is not widely known in disciplines other than by its originator. Scholars and other professionals are encouraged to think also in the broader scope of community development, and to prepare publications that are more “sharable” across disciplines, in addition to the ones they write strictly for those who understand their profession’s unique language.



The development of community, on the other hand, tries to enhance the social realm and relationships between people (Summers, 1986). Wilkinson (1991), Luloff and Swanson (1995), and Luloff and Bridger (2003) all say that it is a process of interaction, communication, and collective mobilization that signals the development of community that is important, and that central to this is the establishment of relationships and networks between diverse community members. Its results include more effective communication between community members, effective functioning networks, and organizations and individuals with the means (approaches, skills, tools, and resources) to carry out purposive activities. Here, Brennan (2003, p. 3) says that

Through the purposive assessment of skills, needs, and opportunities for action, locally based plans for community and economic development that reflect the community can be prepared. The success of individual plans in this setting is irrelevant. Through this development of community, a framework is presented that allows future efforts to be attempted. This model allows for long term community based collective action to take place. Such efforts are purposive and serve as the basis for interaction that benefits the overall community.

Brennan cites Luloff and Bridger (2003) in saying that "Through community action and the purposive interaction of community members the development of community takes place." Most importantly, he concludes his paper by stating that "The development of community and in community can, and should, take place together. One does not preclude the other."

Development of and in the community are both critical to effective community development. Carrying out specific program-related projects, such as physical, social program, and economic development, does not, in itself create a community. It does not enable participation of community members nor create the kinds of informal and formal networks needed by functioning communities. Conversely, giving attention solely to establishing relationships, creating networks, and enabling communication does not necessarily produce the beneficial, concrete results a commu-

nity may be seeking. As professionals work to help communities develop they need to address development both in and of the community.

Transforming communities

Transforming communities is a term that expresses the concept of the development of communities while carrying out development in communities. It involves high impact, results-producing programs in communities and involves the development of community capacity to function effectively. It means addressing community needs, concerns, issues, and opportunities while at the same time bringing about positive change in the abilities and ways individuals, groups, organizations, networks, communities, and ultimately the larger community, understand, function, and interrelate. When successful, community transformation results in work accomplished and in a community that is more prepared, equipped, and able to take on whatever challenges it decides to address. In short, a major purpose of transforming communities is to produce **capable communities**.

True transformation occurs when a community develops a sufficient organizational and network base that enables effective participation, communication, and collaboration. It occurs when a community acquires and becomes proficient in the knowledge, abilities, skills, and tools needed to successfully address challenges and achieve desired purposes. Success in transformation at the larger community level can be confirmed by evaluating changes in individual, organizational, and relational effectiveness, and by observing whether new capacities and capabilities are being successfully shared and propagated to new projects and efforts both within and across geographic, interest, socio-economic, ethnic, and other community boundaries.

Because communities, their constituent components, their collective abilities, and their resources are dynamic and continually changing, community transformation is, necessarily, an ongoing effort.

Community capacity— Introduction

Central to the concept of Transforming Communities is the idea of **building community capacity**. Robert Chaskin (1999, p. 3) provides an introduction to this idea by first saying that “The word capacity denotes both the idea of *containing* (holding, storing) and the notion of *ability* (of mind, of action).” Moving ahead and applying the idea of capacity to communities, he writes that

... the notion implies the existence within [communities] of particular capabilities, faculties, or powers to do certain things. These capabilities may have an impact on a number of aspects of community functioning, but in the context of community building are all concerned with ways to help promote or sustain the well being of the community and its components (individuals, informal groups, organizations, social interactions, the physical environment). Community capacity defines, in a general way, communities that “work”; it is what makes well-functioning communities function well (Chaskin, 1999, p. 3).

Chaskin (1999, p. 3), in reviewing the literature, observes that there are relatively few, and all relatively recent, attempts to conceptualize community capacity. He groups these conceptual efforts into several categories:

- The existence of commitment, skills, resources, and problem-solving abilities, often connected to either a particular program or institution.
- The participation of individual members in a process of relationship-building, community planning, decision making, and action.
- The application of the concept to be applied relatively narrowly within particular fields such as public health, or to the productive and organizational capacities of community development organizations.
- Building from constructs such as community competence and empowerment, a definition of the concept generally as a “community’s ability to pursue its chosen purposes and course of action.”

- The aggregate of individual and community-level “endowments” in interaction with conditions of the environment that impede or promote success.
- A set of specified “assets” that exist within communities’ individual members, local associations, and institutions.

There is also, Chaskin says, “... substantial literature that is relevant for developing an understanding of community capacity by providing insight into its likely components and the relationships among them.”

Chaskin (1999, p. 4) provides, as a starting point, a summary definition of community capacity:

Community capacity is the interaction of human, organizational, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of a given community. It may operate through informal social processes and/or organized efforts by individuals, organizations, and the networks of association among them and between them and the broader systems of which the community is part.

Chaskin (1999) says that there are four fundamental characteristics of community capacity: (1) a sense of community; (2) a level of commitment among community members; (3) mechanisms for problem solving; and (4) access to resources. He notes that “Different communities may have different levels of each, and most communities will have some positive level of all four. Although the existence of these characteristics is a matter of degree, there are likely threshold levels along the continuum that are necessary in order for the community to accomplish certain specific ends.”

Mancini, Martin, and Bowen, too, have offered a definition of community capacity, built on a social organization framework:

Community capacity is the degree to which people in a community demonstrate a sense of shared responsibility for the general welfare of the community and its individual members, and also demonstrate collective competence by taking advantage of opportunities for addressing community needs and confronting situations that threaten the safety and well-being of community members. (Bowen et al., 2000, p. 7).



They stress the word “demonstrate” in their definition, saying that “Community capacity is more than a willingness to think or feel in a particular way; it is seen in observable results.” They believe that “... community capacity mediates what transpires between the social capital² that is generated by formal and informal networks, and achieving community results.” (Mancini, et al., 2003, p. 323)

Community capacity, they say further, “... is active and ... ultimately leads toward achieving community results ... [and] community capacity is not just a sentiment about doing good for the community and its members. It is the actual demonstration of shared responsibility and of collective competence.” (Mancini et al., 2003, p. 323) They further state that “Community capacity as an aspect of social organization focuses on a set of process elements that leads to an explanation of how change occurs in communities and how communities are mobilized.” (Mancini et al., 2005, p. 575)

Still another way of looking at community capacity is advanced by Alexander Marre and Bruce Weber (2006). They quote Ziembrski, et al. (2005, p. 5) that community capacity “focuses upon how people and groups become committed to and involved in strategic thinking and planned activities in places where they live.” Their model is presented as a “dynamic model,” where community capacity is a collective concept which “seeks to define the context within which communities organize their resources to achieve common goals.”

Such a framework ... views communities as production units that produce a particular outcome or meet a certain goal. A community might have three types of inputs: human capital, social capital and other resources such as physical capital and financial resources. Each community coordinates these resources towards meeting, or producing, a goal. Community capacity in this framework is analogous to technology. That is, each community has some knowledge or “know-how” to coordinate these inputs (community resources) to produce the output (community goal) (Marre et al., 2006, p. 6).

Marre et al. cite Lyons and Reimer (2006) to observe that the community capacity concept has been developed in different ways in various literatures. “One view is that community capacity is a condition, some static resource to be used as the community wishes. A second, different view is of community capacity as a process. Most definitions of community capacity see it as a dynamic process, either by changing conditions or changing ways in which the community uses its resources.” Lyons and Reimer argue that “defining community capacity as a condition discourages an examination of the way it works.”

The need for knowledge

Knowledge is the cumulative body of information, facts, truths, ideas, concepts, and principles acquired through investigation, observation, or experience—the sum of what is known. Knowledge is the foundation for generating understanding, the power of comprehending—especially that of the relationships between various elements or particulars (after Merriam-Webster, 1993). Having knowledge is not the same as possessing data or information.

Community development employs several types of knowledge bases. Knowledge about the substantive matter of an issue is used to provide understanding and the basis for action with regard to the subject content of an issue, such as the knowledge base for early child development, economic development, housing, caring for the elderly, natural resource management, or starting small businesses.

² Social capital is defined here as “the sum of resources (information, opportunities, and practical support) that develop from reciprocal relationships that are embodied in the social networks among people in both formal and informal settings.” (Mancini et al., 2003, p. 323) The authors say that social capital “... supports the development of community capacity and provides its ‘fuel!’”

Important, too, is knowledge about how communities are defined and function, and knowledge about community structures and how they function, including knowledge bases on organizational development, running non-profit organizations, and maintaining networks.

A third type of knowledge base that is essential to community development includes knowledge bases developed by the various disciplines that deal with purposeful action, such as research, planning, learning, education, evaluation, and leadership and management. Closely related to these knowledge bases are others that deal with specific methods and techniques that support purposeful action, including decision making, conflict resolution, organizational learning, and group processes.

Bringing timely and appropriate knowledge to bear in community development accomplishes many things, including:

- Enabling all members of a group, organization, or community to share knowledge and participate on an equal basis.
- Enabling a community to better identify and define its issues.
- Expanding the “solution space” for problems by creating greater awareness of what may be possible.
- Making processes, including decision making, more objective.
- Increasing confidence in community decisions.

For UW-Extension, knowledge is especially important, since it is the essence of its core mission. Extension is concerned with knowledge in several ways: (1) participating in the generation of knowledge through applied research and program experience, and (2) facilitating community learning of all types based on the cumulative knowledge in many subjects and disciplines.

It is through learning, of course, that communities acquire the knowledge and capabilities and capacity to be effective, sustainable and viable. Then, in addressing issues, communities can develop knowledge-based criteria, combine them with local knowledge, customs, values and norms, and seek research-based solutions that fit the unique community environment and achieve desired community purposes. Failing to take advantage of available research-based knowledge may mean that a community could instead base its criteria and seek solutions on the basis of local perceptions or myths, misunderstandings of concepts and experience, or simply a lack of key substantive matter or process knowledge. To a community this can mean missed opportunities, wasted resources, and loss of community member confidence.



The importance of purpose

The concept of **purpose** is essential to any successful effort. Purpose means “intent,” and in community development this involves focus and decisions and consensus around **what** is to be done. Purpose is also what brings content or concern into what is to be done. Purpose is usually expressed by a subject and action verb.³ Some examples of community-related purposes are:

- To create jobs for semi-skilled workers
- To provide children with health screening
- To develop low- and middle-income housing opportunities
- To provide for around-the-clock public safety
- To create a transportation service for elderly and handicapped persons
- To educate small business owners on anti-theft systems
- To create and maintain a city-wide network for extended care providers

Purpose has everything to do with function. Both words have similar meanings: what is to be done.⁴ Purpose is function at a larger scale. Functions are the smaller “whats” that contribute to achieving purpose.

In the remainder of this paper, a three-element model for community capacity will be proposed, involving **community environment**, **community structures**, and **purpose-based action**. Purpose is at the base of all three of these elements.

At their broadest level communities exist for one or more purposes. Some communities exist to provide services to an agricultural area, some to provide recreational opportunity to visitors. Still others exist primarily to serve their resident population. Other types of communities unite people with a common interest to pursue special purposes, such as educating children, providing services for special populations, or preserving ethnic language and customs.

When a community’s purpose is no longer valid or necessary, it either must undergo modification to be able to achieve a new purpose or discontinue its existence. One need not look far to find communities that have transformed themselves to serve new purposes.

Within communities various specific purposes are identified as well, usually as a first step in addressing issues. Purposes thus identified then serve as a guiding means for decision making throughout the process of responding to issues.

Purposes also guide community structure. Organizations and networks should be created to achieve specific purposes, and when these purposes change or are no longer needed the structures need to change also. Day-to-day operations of organizations and networks should also be carried out with the ultimate achievement of one or more specific purposes in mind.

Lastly, the specific actions a community takes, through individuals, organizations, and networks, need to be guided by purposes in two ways: the actions should be carried out to achieve community purposes, and the actions themselves should be purposeful.

³ It is usually good practice to eschew “measure” type words like “increase,” “decrease,” “reduce,” “improve,” “expand,” etc., and the lack of clarity they introduce, in purpose statements. Measurement needs are best addressed in specific goals that are set for each purpose. Thus, purpose covers what, and goals cover how much, by when, and, if needed, at what cost.

⁴ Mission is a third word with this meaning. Mission is most often used when discussing what an organization intends to do.

I. Communities as environment

Defining communities

Understanding what is meant by the term **community** is foundational to understanding the concept of community capacity and community capacity building. The idea of community can mean different things to different people, and defining a community can be a challenge in many situations.

A good starting place is to explore what is meant by a “sense of community.” Chaskin (1999, pp. 5-6) says that it is “...a degree of connectedness among members and a recognition of mutuality of circumstance. One component of a sense of community may be the existence of a threshold level of collectively held values, norms, and vision. It may include both an affective dimension (including the existence of a sense of trust, “ownership,” belonging, and recognized mutuality) and a cognitive dimension (including the ways in which community members ascribe meaning to their membership in the group).” Chaskin et al. (2001) add that shared social interests and characteristics (for example, language, customs, class, or ethnicity) can be used to define a community.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary provides several useful definitions of community:

1: A unified body of individuals: **a:** state; commonwealth; **b:** the people with common interests living in a particular area; *broadly:* the area itself <the problems of a large *community*>; **c:** an interacting population of various kinds of individuals (as species) in a common location; **d:** a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society <a *community* of retired persons>; **e:** a group linked by a common policy; **f:** a body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests <the international *community*>; **g:** a body of persons of common and especially professional interests scattered through a larger society <the academic *community*>.

Small and Supple (2001, p. 162) say that community refers to “social relationships that individuals have based on group consensus, shared norms and values, common goals, and feelings of identification, belonging and trust,” and that this conceptualization is consistent with dictionary definitions, the root origin of the word, and previous conceptualizations from community psychology and developmental psychology literatures.

Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley (2002) note that local areas are nested in larger and more complex settings, and say that a focus on locally anchored definitions of community must also take into account the larger settings.

Small and Supple (2001, p. 164) take this idea a step further and say that it would be more fruitful and instructive to focus on the mechanisms or processes by which communities affect human development rather than spatial features, structural characteristics, or demographic markers. They argue for viewing communities as complex **systems** “comprised of smaller interacting subsystems that are organized in unique ways.” They add that this may seem obvious, but that their examination of the literature shows that such a concept is “rarely incorporated into either theoretical models or research strategies.” They conclude that “Conceptualizing communities as complex systems, rather than as the sum of isolated parts, calls for attention to several important processes that occur at different levels within the community and that typically have been overlooked.”

The idea of viewing communities as systems, coupled with the idea of focusing on the processes communities are engaged in has important implications for the concept of community capacity. Viewing communities as complex systems engaged in processes enables a better understanding of:

- The various communities that exist within the larger community.
- The constituent components of communities, such as individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, networks, etc.



- The various ways communities and components of communities communicate and work with each other.
- The processes by which communities are transformed into capable communities.
- The capacities communities need to have to be considered capable.

Taking a systems view of communities adds depth to the definition and understanding of a community. There is first the recognition that a community can be described and defined in its various dimensions, such as demographic, social, economic, physical, and its issues. A systems view also calls for developing an understanding of the larger system in which the community exists and functions.

Perhaps at the most basic level, communities can be defined in three general ways. First, are **communities of place**, which are defined by geographic boundaries that may delimit governmental units, such as cities, towns, villages, counties, reservations, school districts, or even states. They may be based on smaller parts of governmental units as well, such as neighborhoods, subdivisions, wards, etc. They may also be defined by other, non-governmental geographic areas, such as river basins, valleys, economic regions, or natural areas.

Second, are **communities of interest**, a group of people united, cooperating, or interacting with regard to a common topic, concern, interest, or shared history, culture, ethnicity, etc. Examples include "the conservation community," "the lake property owners' community," "the farming community," "the African-American community," and "the Roman Catholic community." A specific shared geographic location (community of place) may or may not be a factor in defining a community of interest. Communities of place and communities of interest may overlap, and, in some instances, coincide.

Third, are **communities of practice**. This term is often used to describe a group of persons in a particular profession or discipline interacting around their common interest. An example of this might be a "community" of health care professionals meeting and communicating for the purposes of sharing information, coordinating efforts, and learning from each other. To avoid confusion with a "community of interest," comprised primarily of lay people or citizens interacting around a shared interest, etc. (see above), it is useful to refer to groups of professionals or persons in the same discipline interacting as a "community of practice." Many communities of practice are denoted by specific names, such as the "academic community," the "banking community," the "medical community," or the "social services community."

As might be expected, in the real world communities are often defined as a combination of two of the above categories. We can find, for example, the "Maplewood School Community," which combines a location with an interest definition. Or we can imagine an "Illinois Society of Thoracic Surgeons," combining location and practice definitions. Still, it is possible to identify communities that are almost entirely defined by locational factors, such as some suburban residential areas, where residents may have nothing more in common than the place where they happen to live.

Small and Supple (2001, p. 162) call to our attention, too, that "socio-technical changes have created the possibility for people to become part of communities that are outside of their immediate physical environs." Indeed, the Internet has seen rise to many communities of interest almost completely without locational bounds, such as support groups, hobby and collector communities, car owner communities, and other types of "virtual communities" that deal with a wide variety of interests. Television and radio, too, have created locationally unbounded communities, such as religious "telemistries" and listener/viewer groups.

Neighborhoods and communities

One particularly significant type of community is the **neighborhood**. These communities are especially important in the functioning of urban areas, and are critically essential to some groups of people who depend on them for much of what they need for survival.

In the literature one can find a variety of definitions of neighborhood that involve the social cohesion that results from interaction and proximity (Rockefeller Institute, 1997, p. 11). Chaskin (1995), for example, says that a neighborhood is “clearly a spatial construct denoting a geographically bounded unit in which residents share proximity and circumstances that come with it.” Korbin and Coulton (1996) say that “The concept of neighborhood implies local communities that are bounded spatially.”

The literature is rich with definitions of and descriptions of work done in neighborhood communities. This is most likely because of their importance, the fact that this is the level at which much community development takes place, and because they are reasonably sized and locationally fixed, and thus relatively convenient for researchers to observe and study.

For professionals engaged in community development several things are important to keep in mind regarding neighborhoods. First is the difficulty in determining how the spatial boundaries of neighborhoods are determined. Coulton says that their geographic boundaries can be phenomenological, interactional, statistical, or political. Here, phenomenological means that each resident has a sense of boundaries that is personally meaningful.

Interactional is defined by friendship patterns and locations of daily activities. Statistical often involves definition by Census tracts or block groups. Political can involve official precinct, ward, or official neighborhood designation. (Rockefeller Institute, 1997, p. 11).

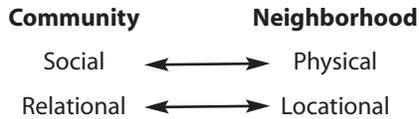
Second, in some definitional schemes not all neighborhoods qualify as true communities. Small and Supple (2001, p. 162), for example, consider neighborhood to refer to a “physical place, defined by socially shared boundaries, that include a population of people who usually share similar life chances, socioeconomic status, and physical proximity.” This differs from their definition of community, presented above, as referring to “social relationships that individuals have based on group consensus, shared norms and values, common goals, and feelings of identification, belonging, and trust.” What community development professionals can learn from this is that it should not be automatically assumed that a physical neighborhood is a community, and that often efforts will have to be made to transform a neighborhood into a community in the sense of these definitions.

Third, neighborhood boundaries and definitions are likely to vary between individuals and are most likely related to individuals’ social class, developmental status and race and ethnicity. In the case of children, the boundaries of their neighborhood expand as they grow older and become involved in more activities, some of which are likely located several neighborhoods away or even across town. With regard to a family’s financial status, wealthier families are likely to have the means (money, transportation, access) to participate in activities far from home. For them, the combination of these locations constitutes their “neighborhood.” (Small and Supple, 2001, pp. 162-163)

Small and Supple (2001, p. 162) provide also a fourth important point to consider. They cite Heller (1989) to call attention to the fact that while a neighborhood can be a physical place where a community can occur, a community is not necessarily tied to a physical place or locality. Rather, a community is a “more relational and psychological construct that goes beyond physical boundaries.”



So how should we view the relationship between communities and neighborhoods? This diagram may help provide a way to envision that relationship:



Small and Supple (2001, p. 163) recognize this relationship—that there is a community dimension to neighborhoods—and advise that “... before we can derive meaningful measures of an individual’s neighborhood, we must first understand how they define their community.”

Mancini et al. (2003, p. 322), in a more general way, reflect this same view and say that “If a community is to be mobilized and if its capacity to improve itself is to be strengthened, then the parameters of that community must be known.”

One of the things that a community should fully understand—and be mobilized around—is its basic overall purpose or purposes. Purpose is the fundamental community consensus and understanding that should be central to the community’s definition and a focus for further description. Purpose, too, is the foundation for moving on to creating structure and taking action.

A significant question remains regarding communities: What is the nature of communities? Some sources in the literature have attempted to describe communities as forms or structure. Others, perhaps reaching a bit, have tried to portray them as function or process. In reality, they doubtless incorporate and make use of, in varying degrees, both form and function, but are, in themselves, neither. Small and Supple (2001) describe a community as a “setting.” Another, more generic, term that may be used is an “environment.” With either term one gets a sense that communities are not the means but the milieu or context in which form is created and function carried out. Environment, though, may more clearly include the

systems concept that a community’s environment is comprised of its community-wide setting, its smaller constituent settings and the “larger settings” referred to by Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley (2002).

Adding such a systems view and thus creating the idea of **community environment** enables more depth and breadth to be added to the definition and understanding of community. There is first the realization that a community can be described and defined in its various dimensions, such as demographic, social, economic, physical, and issues. Second, it enables a better understanding of what components exist in a community, and an understanding of the larger systems in which the community exists and functions. Finally, it calls attention to the need for understanding the relationships between all levels of a community’s environment.

Perhaps one of the most important things involved in learning about and understanding a community’s environment or setting is developing an understanding of and an appreciation for the community’s uniqueness. This helps in many ways, including increasing the ability to recognize and avoid situations where a community is asked to adopt, without significant investigation and consideration, practices or structures that may work well in another environment or setting, but are inappropriate or unworkable in their unique, and therefore different, environment.

**COMMUNITY CAPACITY ELEMENT 1:
Community Environment**

The literature reviewed so far has provided some essential insights into what constitutes community capacity. It has helped to frame the concept of community environment or setting, and has contributed significantly to an understanding of how environment may be defined and understood in community development. As such, this work has so far explored and added to the knowledge base of the first element of community capacity:

- 1. The capacity and ability to define a community, describe and understand its unique environment, and take responsibility for community issues and common purposes.**

Exercising this capacity is often iterative. Communities often find that not only does community definition, description, and understanding lead to issue definition and determination of common purposes, but that identifying issues and common purposes helps define the community as well.

Having only the capacity for understanding the environment and community and neighborhood concepts is not sufficient, though, for communities to address issues and achieve their purposes. Understanding community environment is the base or foundation capability upon which the two additional major areas of capability, both related directly to action, are built.

II. Community structures

Function and form

The field of architecture has been involved in community development work since it was created in ancient times. A key concept in architecture deals with the relationship between form and function, where it is axiomatic that **form should follow function**. Today this is expressed in an important planning and design principle: Purpose or function should be determined before decisions are made regarding what form or structure will be created to achieve the purpose or function. A corollary to this axiom is that purpose should guide decisions regarding structure and action. Decisions, thus, should be made only after satisfactorily answering the questions “Are we working to achieve the right purpose?” and “If so, will this help to achieve our purpose?”

Often, more than one purpose may be involved in a community development effort. Also, purpose may change over time. These realities should cause communities to understand that one type of form or structure may not be adequate to deal with all purposes that need to be addressed, and that as purposes may change over time, and also the solutions designed to achieve them, the type or nature of community forms or structures in use may need to change as well. (See, especially, sections on “Networks” and “Interim Structures,” that follow.)

In this and the next section, function and form, and their relationship in community development, are presented and discussed. The table below provides an initial outline of this discussion.

Purpose	
Form	Function
■ Community structure	■ Purpose-based action
■ Individuals	■ Purpose, Mission
■ Organizations	■ Function
■ Networks	■ Purposeful activity
■ Interim structures	■ Purposeful activity approach



Defining community structure

The community structures element of this community capacity model is concerned with form.⁵

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary provides a good idea of what is meant by structure in several of their definitions:

2b. Something arranged in a definite pattern of organization. **4b.** The organization of parts as dominated by the general character of the whole. **5.** The aggregate of elements of an entity in their relationship to each other.

From these definitions, then, we get a sense that structures have a definite organization scheme, that they are comprised of elements that all relate to the character (and, we would hope, to the purpose or mission) of the whole, and that their elements exist in relationships to other elements in the structure.

Chaskin (1999, pp. 7-8) first looks at structure by asking "Where does community capacity reside, and how is it engaged? In this sense Chaskin is viewing structure as the first part of his perception of the word "capacity": the idea of "containing (holding, storing)." In answering his question he proposes that capacity resides in three levels of social interaction, or social agency: **the individual, organizations, and networks of association.**

Individuals

"The individual level concerns the skills, knowledge and resources of individual residents in the community." "The existence within communities of human capital among its residents contributes to community capacity through its availability as a collective resource and through specific, individual contributions." (Chaskin, 1999, p.7) Many refer to these attributes as **human capital.**

Individual persons are the basic building blocks of community structure. Those working to strengthen the capacity of individuals need to understand and take into account individuals' needs in working in the community environment, and understand the various roles that individuals may and should play in communities and in community development. They also need to help individuals acquire and develop the knowledge, skills, and techniques that enable individuals to function effectively in these roles. Group membership skills, leadership skills, and conflict resolution skills are examples of individual skills that are essential to capable individuals.

Just as one can view other structures as being either "formal" or "informal" (see below), one may view individuals in the same manner. Individuals who have no professional or other recognized direct role in community development, other than being a citizen or community member, could be considered informal individuals. Those who are directly involved could be viewed as formal.

Organizations

In his community capacity model, Chaskin's "organizations level" looks at organized collectives, including community-based organizations (service providers, businesses, development organizations), local branches of larger institutions (banks, schools, major retail establishments), and smaller organized groups (neighborhood associations, social clubs, tenants, and homeowners' associations). Organizational capacity, Chaskin says, "might be reflected in the ability of such collectives to carry out their functions responsively, effectively, and efficiently as part of the larger system of actors and processes to which they are connected, within and beyond the community." Chaskin adds that as a component of and a mechanism for creating community capacity they will necessarily have to go beyond production of outputs to "incorporate issues of constituent representation, political influence, and the ability to engage in instrumental interorganizational relationships." (Chaskin, 1999, p. 8)

⁵ The axiom of function preceding form is suspended in the organization of this paper. For purposes of comprehension and understandability form is discussed first, followed by function. In community development work purpose/function are determined first, and then appropriate forms or structures are created (or existing structures designated or modified) to achieve the selected purpose/function.

Organizations are the means or vehicle through which communities take action. They are, the primary means for “containing” community capacity. Community capacity at the organizational level is often referred to as **organizational capital**.

Organizations are created with specific core missions or purposes in mind, and can be found in many alternative configurations. They may be created for purposes even beyond that suggested by Chaskin, including religious, medical, recreational, environmental, public safety, governmental, political, and many others to meet community needs. Organizations may be temporary or permanent, informal or formally incorporated, for-profit or not-for-profit, governmental or non-governmental, membership or non-membership.

Organizations may be either informal or formal. In most communities, groups can be found in varying degrees of formality and informality. Informal groups frequently perform important community functions by carrying out activities where a formal organization is unnecessary or by serving as an early step in the process of forming a formal organization.

Sometimes, too, organizations may be non-existent, or long dormant, or they may be in such a state that they are incapable of achieving their mission, and are thus ineffective.

In addition to those mentioned by Chaskin, above, organizations level capacity includes skills, knowledge, and resources that enable effective organizational design, development, and maintenance and those needed for achieving its mission.

Networks

Networks, Chaskin says, concern “social structure—networks of relationships among individuals and organizations or other collectives,” and he says that “positive social relations among actors that provide a context of trust and support and represent access to resources (information, connections, money) is known as *social capital*.” Putnam (1995, 2000), cited in Mancini, et al. (2003), say that **social capital** includes two key terms: reciprocity and trust, and also ascribe to it cohesion and lubricating characteristics.

Within a community system organizations can be seen as “nodes within the structural space ...” (Laumann, Galaskiewicz and Marsden, 1978) Chaskin adds that “While human capital and organizational capacities exist within individual nodes of a social system, social capital and its counterpart among organizations are collective phenomena, inherent within the structure of relations within the system.” (Chaskin, 1999, p. 8). Putnam (1995, 2000) supports this idea by saying that social capital belongs to the collective rather than to an individual. He adds that social capital allows the community to achieve results otherwise not achievable, and that it increases the more that it is used.

At the network level, then, capacity focuses on the ability to bring about cohesion and interaction between community organizations and individuals, to generate and maintain trust and support between them, and to foster cooperation and sharing of access to information and other resources.

Networks, too, can be either informal or formal. The most informal networks may require little more than the desire to communicate, and not need many of the capabilities of formal networks. Formal networks, on the other hand, usually require more deliberate design and management of some organizational features to meet network needs, like meeting venues, communication technology, and other means of interrelating.



Mancini et al. (2003, p 324) believe that informal networks “continue to be a relatively untapped source in building healthy communities.” They say that even though the recognition of informal networks’ significance is nothing new, most communities “have not been sufficiently intentional in building these networks.” They feel that supporting informal networks is a “primary responsibility of the formal network, which includes agencies, organizations, and generally people and structures that function out of obligation.” The formal network, they say, can “more readily achieve its objectives by mobilizing and empowering the informal community.”

Informal networks often are needed to play key roles in the early stages of the development of community and development in a community, as an interim structure (see below).

Network-type relationships can differ in their degree of integration (and their purpose, structure, and process) as well. Hogue (1994) identifies five levels of this type of relationship, from low to high integration:

- **Networks** — function to primarily exchange information and foster communication.
- **Alliances** — a bit more formal in process and serve to reduce duplication of efforts.
- **Partnerships**⁶ — involve sharing helpful resources to support each others’ interests and goals and some joint planning and activity, while still maintaining autonomy.
- **Coalitions** — bring members together to work toward complementary goals through coordinated efforts and sharing of resources
- **Collaboratives**⁷ — entail working towards a common vision, jointly taking action, and sharing the decision making process

Futris (2006, p. 4), in presenting alternative levels of relationship, adds, importantly, that “In some cases collaboration is the ideal relationship, while in other cases a partnership or coalition may be more appropriate. What’s important is that members understand and agree upon the mission or purpose of the group.”

Interim structures

One type of community structure not often recognized as such in the literature is that of **interim structures**. These structures play an important role in community development. They are often created to accomplish short-term purposes, including identifying and evaluating alternative courses of action and designing and creating permanent structures as a part of a broader solution. They are created during a stage in community development when a permanent structure is not necessary or is undesirable. Some familiar examples of interim structures include study committees to identify and frame community issues, informal sponsor groups to assemble resources for special efforts, study groups to assist in gathering information and conducting community learning regarding a particular topic or interest, planning and design committees to create new community systems or propose changes in policies, and special task forces to investigate and correct specific problems.

One type of structure that deserves special attention is the **informal network designed and used as an interim structure**. At first glance, creating such a structure early in a community development effort may appear to violate the function before form principle. This is not the case, though, because the purpose of such an informal interim network is not to produce goods, deliver services, or other purposes that might be expected of networks that are designed as a part of a solution that addresses a community issue. Instead, the purposes that informal interim networks are intended to achieve are related to building social capital and creating the means for action (other interim or permanent structures, resources, etc.)

⁶ Partnerships may involve joint and legal rights and responsibilities between participating parties.

⁷ This writer prefers to use the idea of “collaboration” (working together) to describe one possible function of the link between two nodes in a network (much like “sharing information,” “sharing resources,” and “coordination”) rather than using the term to characterize an entire network.

Here informal interim networks can:

- Begin to define, gather knowledge about, and develop a shared understanding of their unique community (see Community Capacity Element 1, above).
- Include various community stakeholders and begin to establish familiarity, understanding, trust, cohesion, and motivation (see Community Capacity Element 2).
- Create, find resources for, legitimize, and in some cases “sponsor” interim structures that are needed to seek community results, such as special study groups, community awareness groups, task forces, planning and design groups, etc. (see Community Capacity Element 2).
- Enable community learning of essential issue-related, research-based information (see Community Capacity Element 3).
- Initially frame community issues and call them to the attention of the community with education and information programs (see Community Capacity Element 3).
- Develop the means to go about seeking community results. This means developing a plan for what initial actions a community should take and the means by which they should be taken, such as a “plan for learning,” a “plan for planning” (see Community Capacity Element 3).

After community development work is underway an informal interim network may decide to continue its work in other ways, or to take on other purposes, and convert itself into either a permanent informal network or a permanent formal community network.

Communities can sometimes make a very serious mistake by ignoring the need for and utility of an informal interim network and by jumping several steps ahead to create a permanent structure before purpose and functions are clear, and before alternative permanent structures are carefully weighed as to their capabilities for achieving a desired purpose and their appropriateness for the unique community.

Communities can also create problems for themselves by creating networks intended to build social capital as permanent structures, and later finding that they are not capable of carrying out subsequently identified functions and producing specified results. Two lessons are often learned here: (1) A community can waste considerable time and resources trying to get a structure to do what it was not designed to do, and (2) permanent structures, once created, are not as easy to get rid of as one might think, even if they prove to be non-functional, unnecessary, duplicative, or even obstructive.

Because informal interim structures are most often not created by a formal act of an official body, through incorporation, or by means of enabling or direct legislation, the concern for establishing and maintaining their legitimacy is greater than that for other, more permanent types of structure in community development.

As a part of creating an interim structure, specific attention needs to be given to when and how the particular structure will either terminate its existence or, if desired, transition into a permanent structure.

Structure follows purpose

An important thing to remember when considering structures is that their creation should not precede all other actions. Instead, they are solutions—the products of actions, such as a planning and design effort, where an appropriate structure is created and designed (or an existing structure is modified) to accomplish a specific, established purpose. In other words, structures are created as a means of fulfilling purposes, and not the other way around. They are created as a result of many actions and decisions leading to their creation. Once a structure is created, additional actions will certainly follow, as the structure then strives to achieve, as it was designed to, its community purpose.



Interim structures are somewhat different in that they are often formed to achieve purposes that help a community acquire the capacity to seek results or purposes involved with seeking results rather than purposes associated with implemented results like programs, services, goods, etc., where a permanent structure is needed. Their creation and use, like the uses of permanent structures, is still guided by purpose—only their purpose is usually different from those of permanent structures.

Structures need also to be created or modified in light of the environment or setting in which they will exist and operate. Since each community is unique, a type of structure that may be appropriate and work well to accomplish a given purpose in one community may be inappropriate or unworkable to accomplish the same purpose in other communities.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY ELEMENT 2: Community Structures

In the previous section a second element of community capacity, community structures, was presented, both as the means for containing abilities and to serve as vehicles for action in community development. Community structures, too, can be seen as the places where Bowen, Martin, Mancini, and Nelson’s “shared responsibility” and “collective competence” can be further focused and nurtured.

Although Chaskin did not ask it, he could well have asked “If community structures are that which ‘contain (hold, store)’ community capacity, what ‘abilities (of mind, of action)’ should they contain?” Chaskin did say that the notion of capacity “implies the existence within [communities] of particular capabilities, faculties, or powers to do certain things” (Chaskin, 1999, p. 3), but he did not provide specific information on what these might be.

The elements of community capacity discussed so far, then, are:

1. **The capacity and ability to define a community, describe and understand its unique environment, and take responsibility for community issues and common purposes.**
2. **The capacity and ability to create, manage, and maintain appropriate community structures that address community issues and achieve community purposes.**

Having the capacity for understanding the environment or setting and having community structures like organizations and networks are still not sufficient conditions for communities to achieve their purposes. A third element of community capacity—the part that operationalizes function—remains to be discussed: **Purpose-Based Action.**

III. Purpose-Based Action

Descriptive versus prescriptive

Many of the sources cited in this paper have referred, in one way or another, to “actions” to be taken. Chaskin, as quoted in the section above, noted the need for “particular capabilities, faculties, or powers to do certain things.” He also saw capacity as “dynamic,” and identified, as one of the four characteristics of community capacity, “mechanisms for problem solving.” (Chaskin, 1999).

Mancini, et al. (2003, 2005) call for being “deliberate,” and cite the need to demonstrate “observable results.” Marre et al. (2006) note, too, that community capacity needs to be a “dynamic process,” and that “some knowledge or know how is required. Small and Supple (2001) call attention to “mechanisms or processes.”

Brennan perhaps gets closer to addressing action when he says that:

Through the purposive assessment of skills, needs, and opportunities for action, locally based plans for community and economic development that reflect the community can be prepared. The success of individual plans in this setting is irrelevant. Through this development of community, a framework is presented that allows future efforts to be attempted. This model allows for long term community based collective action to take place. Such efforts are purposive and serve as the basis for interaction that benefits the overall community (Brennan (2003, p. 2)

Brennan concludes by citing Luloff and Bridger (2003) that “Through community action and the purposive interaction of community members, the development of community takes place.”

Researchers writing in the works reviewed so far reveal a perception that community capacity must include the capacity for action, and also a perception that understanding environment or setting and having community structures are not sufficient to carry out successful community development. In their efforts they have succeeded in contributing significantly to an understanding of **what** needs to be done and **why** it needs to be done. To some extent, too, through their research on community structures, they provide information and knowledge of **who** carries out community development. It is in dealing with the specifics of **how** community structures (that is, individuals, organizations, and networks) should take action and conduct community development that much of the community-related literature is insufficient.

Mancini, et al. (2005, p. 573), referring to Sampson, et al. (2002) seem to recognize the need for more work in this element when they say that

These authors point out inconsistency in how processes are operationalized or theoretically situated, so although there is improvement in this area of study, the need to improve conceptualization and research remains. A central theoretical challenge is differentiating social organization structure from social organization process. Generally structure refers to interconnecting parts, a framework, organization, configuration, and composition; process refers to a course of action, functions, operations, and methods of working.

It is understandable that research efforts struggle with this element of community capacity. Research, relying on a “research approach” (see below), and augmented by observational and evaluation tools, studies phenomena and artifacts (in this case, related to environment and structure), and tends to produce results (descriptions, definitions, frameworks, models, templates, etc.) that are **descriptive** in nature. Sometimes research efforts produce results that move somewhat beyond the descriptive, like a set of observation-based, evaluated experiences or recommendations, presented

in some fields as “lessons learned,” and in others “best practices” or “models.” The message of these works is “We have studied cases in the field. This is what we have learned. Try to apply or replicate what was learned.”

This type of research is important, of course, in that it forms a basis for understanding and a foundation for means that help inform and support community action. Another way to look at this work is that it creates the context in which action can take place. The framework for community action, presented below, on the other hand, is a framework of community action itself.

Research, by its nature also, focuses on phenomena and artifacts that already exist or have happened in the past. It is difficult to observe, measure, evaluate, and study something that does not yet exist. One can see this reflected in the literature’s language. When discussing networks, for example, Small and Supple and Mancini et al. speak of different levels of “effects” occurring. Effects are like results: they both are what are observable and measurable after action has taken place.

In contrast, purpose-based action is **prescriptive** in nature, and deals with the specifics of **how** a purpose should be achieved and **how** a structure can act. Where a person concerned with descriptive-type work might ask “**What** was the **effect** of that interaction, decision, policy, action, etc.?,” a person acting from a prescriptive standpoint would ask “**How** can we **affect** that decision, policy, action, etc.” Purpose-based action also deals with when action is to take place, and with more specifics regarding **who** is to be involved and **how they are to be involved**.

Purpose-based action conforms to Chaskin’s “ability (of mind, of action),” half of his initial concept of capacity. It is, as Mancini and others point out (see above), process, functions, a course of action (strategy), operations, strategy, and all the methods of working (approaches, skills, tools, etc.) that go with it.



Defining purpose-based action

Just as there needs to be a context or framework for “community,” and a context or framework for “structure,” a framework is needed for understanding and engaging **purpose-based action**. For this framework, and for component action approaches in the framework, additional disciplines and literatures need to be called upon and incorporated into the community capacity knowledge base.

Some writers try to define action in terms of structure, saying that organizations or networks are the “process” that carries out community development. While structures are the means for containing and fostering, and even enabling action, they are not processes or courses of action in and of themselves.

Other writers define and describe action in such narrow and specific terms, like “interventions in family health situations” or “fiscal restructuring for housing renovation” that their work is not meaningful nor useful to persons engaged in other types of community development work. While definition of this type—so closely related to content—may ultimately be needed in some form, it is not the best place to start when trying to define what is meant by the purpose-based action element of community capacity.

Nor is it unusual to read papers that present a case study of “community development” describing the action of one specific tool, such as an issue identification tool, or an analytical tool, or a visioning tool, where no knowledge is expressed of what actions preceded (or should have preceded) the use of the tool, what will happen with the work produced by the tool, or what overall purpose the tool is supporting. Often, an author will spend considerable effort to try to demonstrate how this single tool constitutes “community capacity” and carries out “community development.”

To avoid these and other problems, depiction of an effective framework for purpose-based action (and its component approaches) can begin with a focus on three main characteristics:

1. It should be **universal**. The terms and concepts should apply to all types of actions, regardless of the content-related application. Universal

also means that the framework should cover all types of action at the most basic level.

2. It should be **understandable**. The terms and concepts should be such that professionals from all fields can understand them and communicate freely between fields and content applications. Terms and concepts should also be sharable with community members, so their capacity for action may be developed and increased.
3. It should be **prescriptive**. The concepts, components, skills, and tools should be designed to carry out actions to achieve specific purposes. (Nadler, 1981)

In the 1960s Gerald Nadler, then a professor of industrial engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison specializing in the purpose-based planning and design of socio-technical systems, began work on such a framework. Nadler, taking a systems view, realized that planning and design systems were not only comprised of various factors, they were also a component of a larger system or framework of essential activities. His work with communities of many types facilitating the design of systems and structures for schools, hospitals, local, state, and federal governments and their agencies, as well as non- and for-profit corporations, helped him develop a purpose-based framework for action.

Nadler’s framework for a larger system of essential activities is the one of the only works available that attempts to explain the specific “actions” needed at this level in community development, and the way they work together to achieve purposes. As such, it is the basis for a “purpose-based action” element of community capacity that specifically addresses **how** action may be carried out by individuals, organizations, and networks.

Nadler’s framework begins with the idea that action at its most fundamental level can be described as “fundamental purposeful activities.” While these purposeful activities are similar in the type of factors they incorporate, they are quite different in the specifics of their individual approaches. No one purposeful activity is seen as most important, and individuals, organizations, and networks must have some capacity to perform them all to be effective over time.

Purpose-based action is a way of providing a framework for organizing and describing the approaches, strategies, skills, tools, and roles required in taking action and achieving results. It is a way to understand the action-related abilities and capacities in the community capacity model. It is upon this basic framework of understanding and action that more specific, content-related courses of action are later designed and included.

In this section of the paper the word **purpose** is used in two ways. Used alone, as a noun, it is intended to mean the overall purpose of a community or a structure, or of a program or project—in other words a **content-related purpose**, addressing what is intended to be achieved. Used as an adjective with a noun (as in purposeful activity or purposeful approach) it means that that activity or approach is intended to achieve a particular **action-related purpose**.

Here, **purpose-based action** is intended to incorporate the idea of purpose in both senses of the word. It is action that is based on and guided by the overall purpose to be achieved and by the individual purposeful activities and approaches pursued to accomplish that purpose.

Purposeful activities

This framework is based first on the concept of **purposeful activities** (Nadler, 1981, pp. 19-21), which incorporates two necessary elements of action: “purpose” relates to aim or intention, and “activities” are the behaviors associated with aim or intention. Seven fundamental purposeful activities have been identified:

1. **Self-preservation** — assure self-preservation and survival of the species
2. **Operating and Supervising** — operate and supervise an existing solution or system
3. **Planning and Design** — create or restructure a situation-specific solution or system
4. **Research** — search for causes, seek generalizations, and attempt to disprove hypotheses
5. **Evaluation** — evaluate performance of previous solutions or other purposeful activities

6. **Learning** — gain skills and acquire knowledge about existing information and generalizations

7. **Leisure** — enjoy free time from work or duties

In the case of self-preservation and leisure, experience has shown that once begun, pursuit of these two activities quickly converts to pursuing one or more of the other five purposeful activities. For purposes of the framework described in this paper five fundamental purposeful activities will be considered:

1. **Operating and supervising** — operate and supervise an existing solution or system.
2. **Planning and design** — create or restructure a situation-specific solution or system (see also Nadler, 1994, 1995, 2004.)
3. **Research** — search for causes, seek generalizations, and attempt to disprove hypotheses.
4. **Evaluation** — evaluate performance of previous solutions or other purposeful activities.
5. **Learning** — gain skills and acquire knowledge about existing information and generalizations.

This classification is different from most classifications by type: it does not focus on issue or object. Any given issue or problem, could be associated with all five. The classification enables the practitioner to determine whether, for example, health care poses a problem of planning and design, learning, or evaluation. In relation to health care, he or she could be designing a neighborhood clinic, evaluating one, or operating and supervising it.

It is, of course, necessary to introduce and share the appropriate content knowledge relating to the substantive matter of concern. No purposeful activity can claim to be successful and effective if incomplete, dated, or unsubstantiated knowledge is being used. It is not difficult to find examples where communities were motivated and actively involved in addressing an issue, but failed in their efforts because they lacked sufficient and correct knowledge of the substantive matter of the issue. This is sometimes referred to colloquially as “shooting in the dark.” There is, too, another saying about “not reinventing the wheel.” Communities who do not take the time to seek out needed



knowledge can waste much of their resources and energy trying to generate the knowledge themselves, often through trial and error and without success.

Ultimately, bringing appropriate knowledge to bear in a timely manner, and via the right purposeful activities, will contribute significantly to timely and well-considered decision making.

Communities have to take care, though, to use knowledge wisely, not adopting solutions or ideas from elsewhere whole, without adapting them to meet specific community issues and purposes, to the community environment, and to local customs, values, and norms.

The five purposeful activities are not mutually exclusive: each may be involved with, or even depend on another. For example, a successful community planning effort often requires, at various points in the project, research, learning, evaluation, operating and supervising.

Nor is any one purposeful activity more important than any other. They are all important, and, in many cases, all five are pursued over the course of a program or project. Deciding which purposeful activity or activities to pursue and when it or they should be pursued in an overall effort should always be based on relevance and appropriateness. These are critical decisions about action and how something should be done, and should be made only after a careful **diagnosis** is made of the particular situation.

Each purposeful activity is unique in the approach it takes, and the strategy, skills, and tools, and roles that are required to pursue it. Thus, pursuing the wrong purposeful activity or pursuing a particular purposeful activity at the wrong time will, most often, yield unsatisfactory results.

Fundamental purposeful activities may include important **secondary purposeful activities**, which are not exclusive to any single primary purposeful activity, and can be employed in all of them.

They include:

- Make a decision.
- Maintain a standard of achievement.
- Resolve a conflict.
- Make a model of or abstract a phenomenon.
- Develop creative ideas.
- Establish priorities.
- Practice and exercise.
- Focus and motivate individual efforts.

The context for employing secondary purposeful activities is provided by the fundamental purposeful activity selected, and answers the question “To what end is this being done?” Make a decision about what—operating and supervising or evaluation? Resolve a conflict about what—planning and design or learning? Develop a creative idea about what? Establish priorities for what reason?

Once it is clear which fundamental purposeful activity is being pursued, and which secondary purposeful activities are also needed, decisions about which specific skills and tools to employ and which roles to play become clear and can be made more effectively. Often, different sets of skills and tools will be chosen to accomplish a secondary activity, depending on which fundamental purposeful activity is being pursued. For example, one set of skills may be used to resolve a conflict in planning and design, and a different set chosen to resolve a conflict in an operating and supervising context.

Total approaches

For each fundamental purposeful activity there is a unique **approach**, consisting of principles of action and a methodology for operationalizing them. A decision to act should automatically trigger the question “How is this to be done?” The key word here is **how**—how to formulate a problem, how to proceed, how to seek and implement solutions. How means explicit methods, and not just exhortation. We can think of approaches as deriving from the fundamental purposeful activities:

1. **Operating and Supervising Approach**
2. **Planning and Design Approach**
3. **Research Approach**
4. **Evaluation Approach**
5. **Learning Approach**

Each approach is based on a well-developed discipline, each rich with its own axioms, principles, research, experts, literature, and specialized skills and tools.

To be considered a **total approach**, an approach must simultaneously address five **factors**:

1. **Pursuing a strategy**
2. **Specifying and presenting the solution or results**
3. **Involving people from the real world**
4. **Using information and knowledge**
5. **Arranging for continual change and improvement**

1. Pursuing a strategy

A strategy is a method of operating, a way followed in accordance with principles, a course of action or a process. The function of a strategy is to guide a person or group in achieving a purposeful activity through a set of sequential steps or phases. It is a time-based “road map” that directs how to proceed over time until an implemented solution is achieved. A strategy can often involve iterative and looping activities, and can signal when it is wise to begin at a different phase or step than the “first” one listed.

The approach for each purposeful activity requires a unique strategy. A corollary to this is that the correct unique strategy must be used to pursue each purposeful activity. This means, for example, that it is not effective to use a research strategy to carry out planning and design; nor is it appropriate to use a learning strategy to do evaluation.

For each approach the strategy determines **what** is to be done at each step, and sets the sequence and pace of activity. The remaining four factors in the approach, necessarily, are closely coordinated with, and support, the strategy.

2. Specifying and presenting the solution or results

Prescribing a format for the result expected for each purposeful activity enables specifications and details to be understood by peers, sponsors, clients, community members, and whoever else will receive the information. This format is a **solution framework** that identifies the factors, properties, and attributes, and their interrelationships that should be included in specifying a solution. Frequently, the **systems concept** is chosen as the desired format structure. Since research solutions, planning solutions, operating solutions, learning solutions, and evaluation solutions will differ significantly, though, it is reasonable to expect that they may require different system frameworks.

3. Involving people

When people are involved continuously from the beginning of a project they are significantly more likely to accept and support solutions and to become part of their implementation. Involving people can accomplish many things, including keeping entire communities informed; generating new, original, creative ideas, testing for the feasibility and acceptability of various alternatives being considered, or evaluating a program just completed. Involving people also recognizes that values, feelings, perceptions, and subjective data are an essential part of developing and implementing solutions.



People in the client's world should be given the opportunity to participate in meaningful and purposeful ways throughout the course of a program or project. For this to be feasible and effective a variety of means for participation may need to be available, each suitable for the type of participant and the purpose of the particular step when participation will take place, within the specific strategy being pursued (see Grabow et al., 2006). Consideration has to be given to create many more opportunities for involvement than the traditional two offerings found in many community structures projects: complete involvement through membership on the governing body or main project steering committee or minimal involvement at an annual general meeting or meeting at the end of a project to listen to a presentation of results or an already-decided course of action.

For each of the five approaches the type of people participating and the means through which they may participate will necessarily be different. Who participates as research is being conducted and how they participate, for example, will very likely be significantly different from who participates and how they participate as planning and design or learning is carried out, even though the subject matter may be the same in all cases.

4. Using information and knowledge

Information and knowledge regarding any problem or situation may come from many sources, such as professional literature, research studies, collection of raw data, past experiences, and experts—each with a wide range of usefulness. The nature of useful information will be different for each type of approach being pursued. Research and learning approaches, for example, rely on current and past information because pursuing them involves adding to, modifying, or creating new categories for existing information. Other approaches, such as planning and design, may seek information that will help predict the future status of phenomena or the consequences of deliberate actions or changes.

It is important to recognize that the state of knowing or possessing information does not include the ability or means to use it. Each approach uses information differently, depending on the other factors in the approach: pursuing a strategy, specifying a solution, and involving people. Decisions regarding what information to gather and use, and how and when to use it, must be guided by the approach being pursued, and by the other factors in that approach.

5. Arranging for continual change and improvement

Change is inevitable and any solution, however effective it is when it is implemented, must anticipate and deal with it. Specifying **how** change and improvement is to be addressed in the solution or results themselves avoids being surprised and unprepared in the future. Change for change's sake is irresponsible and ill-advised, but seeking continual change and improvement is necessary for long term growth and stability.

Arranging for change involves incorporating into the solution or results a structure for and means to periodically review and seek planned improvement to the implemented solution. It also requires techniques for auditing and evaluation, and for continual monitoring of environmental opportunities and challenges.

Specifying a five-factor approach for each purposeful activity

Each of the five total approaches listed above incorporates the five factors. But, because each purposeful activity has distinctly different ends and values, the strategies, methods for specifying and presenting solutions or results, means for involving people, use of information and knowledge, and arrangements for continuing change and improvement will be different for each. Similarly, the mindset and method of inquiry for determining how each factor will be operationalized will be different.

Skills and tools

Skills and tools are the specific means through which the approaches are carried out. They are chosen to achieve specific purposes, called for generally by the particular purposeful approach being pursued and specifically by the purpose of the specific step in the approach's strategy.

Skills

A skill is a learned power of doing something competently, a developed aptitude or ability. It can be thought of as a combination of applied knowledge, experience, and learned behaviors. Skills are best learned through training that includes observing the skill being used effectively and practicing its use to gain proficiency. Often, skills make use of certain subconscious actions or reactions, developed through practice and experience. The effective use of a skill involves knowing what to do, why something is to be done, how to do it, and also when and where to do it.

Community development professionals possess, and continue to acquire many skills needed for their work. Some important skills familiar to community development work are:

- Learning skills
- Teaching skills
- Leadership skills
- Group membership skills
- Listening skills
- Interviewing skills
- Diagnostic skills
- Facilitation skills
- Organizational skills
- Analytical skills
- Writing skills
- Presentation skills
- Conflict resolution skills
- Computer skills

Tools

Generally, a tool is something used in performing an operation or that is necessary in the practice of a vocation or profession. Nancy Tague, in her manual, *The Quality Toolbox*, says that "[T]ools are relatively small, often parts of a larger unit; they do something; each is designed for a very specific purpose." (See Tague, 2005 for descriptions of a variety of useful tools).

Many hundreds of tools have been developed to accomplish the wide variety of specific tasks needed to carry out the five purposeful approaches. Some examples of types of tools include tools to generate ideas and information (for example, brainstorming, surveys, observation tools), tools to organize information (hierarchies, diagrams, classifications), tools to aid decision making (decision matrix, decision tree), tools to analyze data (statistical tools, Pareto Charts), tools to evaluate performance (pre-test/post test analysis, performance index, surveys, focus groups), tools to enable learning (practice exercises, learning or study circles, systems thinking), tools to involve community stakeholders (Nominal Group Technique, Charette, World Café, public meetings), tools to manage projects (Gantt Charts, PERT/CPM), etc.

Tools are most effectively used in combination, in the context of an overall strategy. In this way, for example, one tool may be used to generate information in one step of the strategy, followed by the use of a second tool to organize the information generated into alternatives, followed by a third tool to evaluate the relative effectiveness and appropriateness of the alternatives, followed by a fourth tool to simulate and assess likely consequences of alternatives, followed by a fifth to assist in final decision making. Some tools combine two or more of these functions. Decisions regarding what type of tool is needed are dictated by the purposeful approach being pursued and the specific purpose of the step being carried out in that approach's strategy. Tools are also chosen to work well with each other as ideas and information being developed move from function to function and from step to step in the strategy.



Tools are not designed to be used singly, as ends unto themselves. They generally do not provide any kind of context or sense of overall strategy. Everyone involved needs to understand the overall approach being pursued and the purposes and tasks to be accomplished, and the need to design their work to employ a set of tools that work well together over the course of a project, a program, or day-to-day operations of a community structure. Some questions that need to be answered before a tool is put to use include “What needs to be done at this point in the approach?,” “What was accomplished in the previous step?,” “What is it we will be doing in the next step?,” and “How do we get what we have now in a form that is ready for and usable in what comes next?”

The idea of using the appropriate tools for the right purposes is critical in learning, planning, evaluating, research, and operating and supervising. It is equally important that a tool not be mistaken for an approach and its strategy, which provides the framework for the employment of a variety of tools.

It is very important to persons involved in community development that they have more than one tool of each type in their toolboxes. As professionals become more sophisticated in their diagnosis of situations, they also become aware that some tools are best prescribed for some situations and with some types of clients, while other tools will work best in other situations and with other clients. In many situations, too, the first tool deployed, for one reason or another, may not work as planned. In these situations professionals must be able to call upon alternative tools that can be used to accomplish the same purpose.

From a self-awareness perspective, an additional reason for having a variety of tools at hand, ready to be called upon, is to avoid being perceived as a “one trick act,” which not only limits effectiveness, but also can be very boring and tiresome to client groups. A related idea to consider is the old saying about those who have put only a hammer in their toolbox, and how now all the situations they encounter are tending to look a lot like nails.

The ultimate objective of a competent professional should be to be “approach oriented”; that is: (1) to understand what will be done in the course of pursuing an approach, from start to finish; (2) to be able to employ skills and tools as necessary and appropriate to accomplish the various tasks necessary along the way to successfully pursue the approach; and (3) to be ready to employ alternative tools to accomplish the same purposes if necessary. The opposite—being overly “tool oriented”—leads often to isolated or inappropriate results, disjointed tasks, gaps in process, partial or complete failure to reach desired ends in a program or project, or inability to manage or maintain a community structure.

Roles

Role, in the context of this paper, is used in the functionalist sense, meaning performing a given set of functions through a collection of appropriate, connected behaviors. It differs from **status** in that status is the position a person occupies, while **role** is a set of expected behaviors attached to that position. Thus, for example, a person may enjoy the status of being a community development specialist, or an Extension educator, but will necessarily play a variety of different roles in the course of his or her work.

During the course of a program, project, or other effort professionals can expect to play a series of roles that may include learner, diagnostician, planner, program/project manager, team leader, teacher, content expert, evaluator, applied researcher, publicist, and conflict resolver. Playing each of these roles will necessarily involve choosing an appropriate combination of behaviors, skills, and tools to perform the various functions required.

Critical to playing roles effectively is understanding the environment and situation in which the program, project, or effort is taking place. Understanding the community environment or setting, understanding the individuals, organizations, and networks that may be involved, knowing which purposeful approach is required and the various steps involved is foundational. Being aware of the purpose and functions of various roles,

knowing one's capabilities and capacity for playing each role, knowing how to play needed roles, and understanding when and in what situations roles should (and should not) be played is essential.

As is the case with tools, having only a limited number of roles to call upon, or becoming stuck in one or two roles during the course of a program, project, or effort, whether or not they are appropriate as work proceeds, can significantly limit the usefulness and effectiveness of the professional. Another way of looking at this is that while it may be appropriate for a professional to play the role of teacher, facilitator, or evaluator at some times during a community project, it usually is not appropriate for him or her to continue to play the same role or roles as a project progresses through steps that require new functions to be performed and new roles to be played. One example might be a professional who is an outstanding teacher and leader. These roles may be entirely appropriate in the early stages of a community project, but as the project moves on it may require professionals who can play the roles of planning facilitator, project manager, evaluator, conflict resolver, and others.

Using purpose-based action

Approaching action from a purpose-based action framework can offer a community many possibilities for identifying and carrying out what needs to be done. In employing this framework, a community, often with the help and guidance of one or more community development professionals, can move through a series of steps to decide what is to be done and how best to do it. In many situations these steps include:

- Establish initial legitimacy for beginning work (e.g. designation, sponsorship, community consensus).
- Convene an initial group of key community people. (Membership will vary depending on the nature of the issue initiating the work.) This can be considered a small, informal network.
- Acquire and share information and knowledge to define and describe the environment or setting and its unique characteristics. Limit data collection at this point to information to satisfy this need only.

- Perform a self-diagnosis of the situation.
- Identify the overall content-related purpose, desire, or vision to be achieved.
- Prescribe which purposeful approach is needed at this time. For example, if much is unknown about the community and its values and desires, a research approach may need to be pursued. If an important issue has arisen, but there is no support for addressing it, a learning approach may need to be pursued to increase awareness and inform community members. If no system exists in a community to transport elderly persons to medical appointments, a planning and design approach may need to be pursued to create one. If a public housing system exists but is not meeting community needs, an evaluation approach may need to be pursued. Or if a new youth recreation center has been designed and built, an operating and supervising approach may need to be pursued to implement and run it. Often, several purposeful approaches may need to be pursued at the same time. Frequently, though, situations may require that one approach be completed before another can begin. As a program, project, or effort moves along, additional purposeful approaches may be pursued as appropriate.
- Using a planning and design strategy, design a community-based system to pursue the approach selected. Incorporating the particular principles, general strategy, and other factors of the purposeful approach selected, as well as the specific requirements of the community environment and the content-related purpose, design a customized system to pursue the approach. Thus, the community will "design a planning system to plan a new community center," or "design an evaluation system to evaluate its social services network," or "design a system to help young people learn to prepare for job interviews." These plans may call for involving existing community structures or for creating new interim or permanent structures to carry them out.



- Enable/modify/create needed structures, incorporate research-based, solution-oriented substantive matter knowledge, and begin pursuing the purposeful approach(s).

Several things are important to understand when pursuing purpose-based action. First, purposeful approaches and their included strategies, skills, and tools, when applied by community development experts, can produce results or output in a community. This is “development in the community,” and will not necessarily make a substantial contribution to a community’s individuals’, organizations’, and networks’ knowledge and abilities, and thus not significantly contribute to community capacity.

Second, to achieve “development of the community” community individuals, organizations, and networks must acquire for themselves the ability to pursue operating and supervising, planning and design, research, evaluation, and learning.

Generally, a community will require and make use of specific strategies and tools to pursue purposeful approaches that differ from those various professionals may themselves employ. The community will still be pursuing the purposeful approaches, but the approaches and their tools will be adapted to accomplishing specific community purposes and to work in a specific community environment. A professional educator, for example, might pursue an evaluation approach to evaluate the effectiveness of an educational program he or she recently presented. A community, on the other hand, may need and follow an evaluation approach to assess the performance of its taxi service, using a modified evaluation strategy and a completely different set of data collection and evaluation tools.

In another example, a professional researcher may design a project that pursues a research approach to study the nature of interaction between networks. A community, though, may pursue its version of research with a somewhat modified strategy and alternative tools to collect and analyze information on community attitudes and needs in an effort to expand understanding of its environment or setting.

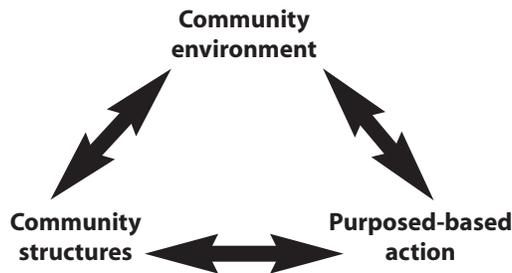
COMMUNITY CAPACITY ELEMENT 3: Purpose-based Action

In the previous section a third element of community capacity, purpose-based action, was presented as a framework for action at the most basic level in community development.

1. **The capacity and ability to define a community, describe and understand its unique environment, and take responsibility for community issues and common purposes.**
2. **The capacity and ability to create, manage, and maintain appropriate community structures that address community issues and achieve community purposes.**
3. **The capacity and ability to take appropriate actions to address community issues and achieve community purposes.**

The community capacity model is thus complete: three capacity elements, all of which are essential. If a community is to be a capable community it must be able to apply the elements together, so that understanding of community environment, community structures, and purpose-based action can work together.

A better way to portray the three interdependent elements of this model is:



Conclusion

To achieve maximum effectiveness a community must strive to acquire and maintain competency in all three community capacity elements. This is a challenge since communities are dynamic and their relative capacities are continually changing. Such a challenge calls for ongoing learning efforts of many types at the individual, organizational, and network levels. Communities will have to develop the means for understanding their environments and settings, and for monitoring them over time. Essential to community capacity, too, is the need to perform accurate diagnoses and prescribe appropriate purpose-based actions. Needed, too, is a continuing effort to improve community understanding of alternative community structures and the ways they can be designed to act and interact in achieving community purposes.

It is instructive to observe communities that are deficient in each of the community capacity elements. Communities that lack an understanding of their environment or setting, or how it has changed significantly in recent years, for example, often incorrectly frame issues, develop solutions for the wrong problems, or try to meet challenges experienced by the community that existed in the past. Communities that are unable to develop and maintain effective community structures often find themselves with an understanding of their environment and situation, but lack the means for focusing and taking effective action. Communities that have an understanding of their environment and have functioning structures but lack the capacity and ability to pursue purpose-based action frequently find themselves continually gathering data about themselves and/or trying to fine tune community structure and form, with little understanding of function and how to take specific actions to achieve their purposes.

Can any one individual or organization be completely proficient in all three elements of community capacity? It's very unlikely. It is not likely either to expect that any person or structure will be able to master all five of the purposeful approaches involved in purpose-based action. Community development professionals should, though, be aware of what constitutes community capacity and how these three elements must work together continually to produce community results. They should be able to help communities develop a shared understanding of their community and its unique characteristics. They should also be ready to help create and work with community organizations and networks to help in producing not only results, but in strengthening those structures. They should be able to assist communities in self-diagnosis, framing issues, identifying purposes, and deciding on and pursuing appropriate purpose-based action.

In their definition of community capacity Mancini, Martin, and Bowen (Bowen, et al., 2000, p. 7; Mancini et al., 2003, p. 323) include the concepts of shared responsibility and collective competence. It is not unreasonable to view these terms as referring to the fact that, for a community to be competent, responsibility for action must be shared across the entire community—including its individuals, families, organizations, and networks. And that even though competence in all the elements of community capacity is usually not to be found in one, nor even several places, nor often in an entire community, a community may be able to achieve collective competence by mobilizing capacities and abilities in and beyond the community, as needed, using the means they have at hand: community development professionals and community structures. In their capacity and ability to meet this need community networks may be one of the most valuable assets a community possesses.



References

- Bowen, G.L., Martin, J.A., Mancini, J.A., and Nelson, J.P. (2000). Community capacity: Antecedents and consequences. *Journal of Community Practice*, 8, 1-21.
- Brennan, Mark A. (2003). *IFAS Community development: Toward a consistent definition of community development*. FCS 9207. Gainesville, Florida: Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Online February 2007 at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/FY722>
- Chaskin, Robert J. (1995). *Defining neighborhood: History, theory, and practice*. Chicago: Chapin Hall, University of Chicago.
- Chaskin, Robert J. (1999). *Defining community capacity: A framework and implications from a comprehensive community initiative*. Chicago: The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. Online February 2007 at <http://www.chapinhall.org>.
- Chaskin, R.J., Brown, P., Venkatesh, S., and Vidal, A. (2001) *Building community capacity*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Futris, Ted G. (2006). *Building community collaborations to support healthy and stable marriages*. Paper presented at the 2006 Annual Family Life Electronic Seminar Series: Relationship and Marital Enrichment Education. Online February 2007 at <http://hec.osu.edu/eseminars/RME/modules/module8/module8-transcript.pdf>.
- Grabow, Steven H., Hilliker, Mark, and Moskal, Joseph. (2006). *Comprehensive planning and citizen participation* (G3810). Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin-Extension publication.
- Heller, K. (1989). The return to community. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 17, 1-15.
- Hogue, T. (1994). *Community based collaborations—Wellness multiplied*. Oregon Center for Community Leadership.
- Korbin, Jill and Coulton, Claudia. (March 1996). Evaluating change in the community context: Developing a reliable measure by aggregating perceptions of neighborhood residents. *Final report to the Foundation for Child Development*. Case Western Reserve University.
- Laumann, E.O., Galaskiewicz, J., and Marsden, P. (1978). Community structure and interorganizational linkages. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 4, 455-484.
- Luloff, A.E. and Bridger, J. (2003). Community agency and local development (pp.203-213). In Brown, D. and Swanson, L. (Eds.) *Challenges for rural America in the twenty-first century*. University Park Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Luloff, A.E. and Swanson, L. (1995). Community agency and disaffection: Enhancing collective resources (pp. 351-372). In Beaulieu, L. and Mulkey, D. *Investing in people: The human capital needs of rural America*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Lyons, Tara and Reimer, Bill (2006). *A literature review of capacity frameworks: Six features of comparison*. Paper prepared for the National Research Network. Twingate, Newfoundland, June 8, 2006.
- Mancini, J.A., Martin, J.A. and Bowen, G.L. (2003). Community capacity. In T. P. Gullotta and M. Bloom (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of primary prevention and health promotion* (pp. 319-330). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum. Online February 2007 at: www.humandevlopment.vt.edu/graphics/documents/Mancini,%20Martin,%20and%20B.pdf.
- Mancini, J.A., Bowen, G.L., and Martin, J.A. (2005). Community social organization: A conceptual linchpin in examining families in the context of communities. *Family Relations*, 54. 570-582.
- Mancini, J.A. (2006) *Social organization theory, families, and communities: Implications for evaluation science*. Paper presented at the Joint International Conference of the UK Evaluation Society and the European Evaluation Society, London. Online February 2007 at www.europeanevaluation.org/download/?id=1408352&download=1.

- Marre, Alexander W. and Weber, Bruce A. (2006). Assessing community capacity in rural America: Some lessons from two rural observatories. *Working Paper Series: RPRC Working Paper No. 06-08*. Columbia, Missouri: Rural Poverty Research Center.
- Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth Edition. (1993).
- Nadler, Gerald (1981). *The planning and design approach*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Nadler, Gerald and Chandon, William J. (2004) *Smart questions: Learn to ask the right questions for powerful results*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Imprint, John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- Nadler, Gerald and Hibino, Shozo (1994). *Breakthrough thinking: The seven principles of creative problem solving*. Rocklin, California: Prima Publishing.
- Nadler, Gerald and Hibino, Shozo, with Farrell, John (1995). *Creative solution finding: The triumph of full-spectrum creativity over conventional thinking*. Rocklin, California: Prima Publishing.
- Putnam, R.D. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy* 6, 65-78.
- Putnam, R.D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Rockefeller Institute of Government, The Nelson A. (December 1997) *Research statement: A study of urban neighborhoods and community capacity building*. State University of New York. Online February 2007 at www.rockinst.org/publications/urban_studies/uns_research_statement.pdf.
- Sampson, R.J., Morenoff, J.D., and Gannon-Rowley, T. (2002). Assessing neighborhood effects: Social processes and new directions in research. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28, 443-478.
- Small, S. A. and Supple, A. (2001). Communities as systems: Is a community more than the sum of its parts? In A. Booth and A.C. Crouter (Eds.), *Does it take a village: Community effects on children, adolescents and families*, 161-174. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Summers, G. (1986) Rural community development. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 12, 341-371.
- Tague, Nancy R. (2005). *The Quality Toolbox, Second Edition*, Milwaukee, Wisconsin: ASQ Quality Press.
- Wilkinson, K. (1991). *The community in rural America*. New York, New York: Greenwood Press.
- Ziembroski, Jessica; Fluharty, Chuck; Mueller, Keith; Weber, Bruce; Dabson, Brian; and Shambaugh-Miller, Michael (August 2005). *What is a healthy rural community?: Understanding community capacity*. Unpublished working paper. Columbia, Missouri: Rural Policy Research Institute.



Appendix

Building Community Capacity: Environment, Structure, and Action to Achieve Community Purposes

Primary and supporting roles

A role is a collection of appropriate, connected behaviors aimed at performing a given set of functions. A role differs from status in that status is the position a person occupies, while role is a set of expected behaviors attached to that position. Thus, for example, a person may enjoy the status of being an Extension professional, but may necessarily play a variety of different roles in the course of his or her work.

Extension professionals play multiple roles in the course of their work with communities in carrying out Extension’s mission. The amount of time an Extension professional spends playing any one role will vary with the individual’s position description, competencies and proficiencies, program area performance expectations, and with the situational needs of various communities and types of clientele.

Over the course of one’s career, the breadth and depth of one’s role performance abilities can reasonably be expected to expand and develop, as an individual gains experience and grows professionally. For this reason, and the fact that organizational mission and individual job and job requirements change over time, role expectations and subsequent performance are constantly evolving and changing.

The roles addressed in this paper apply broadly across Extension work, but are here specifically presented in terms of supporting efforts aimed at building community capacity and achieving community transformation. **Primary roles** are organized, below, into the three elements of a community capacity model proposed by Hinds (2008): Community Environment, Community Structures, and Purpose-Based Action. Some of the roles are listed in more than one of the elements, as is appropriate. Many of the roles listed under the Purpose-Based Action element can also be thought of as being used by community structures

as they take action to achieve purposes. Important supporting roles that may be played, as appropriate, in support of multiple community capacity elements, as well as multiple purposeful approaches in the Purpose-Based Action element are also identified.

The roles presented below are described in terms of individuals’ behaviors. In the context of transforming communities and building community capacity, however, roles should also be thought of as being played in a group setting, with participation, interaction, and empowerment in mind. In many cases, roles can be thought of as being played by a group or with co-actors, as may be appropriate. As a part of their work in the “development of community” professionals should include helping community individuals and groups become proficient in the roles they need to play to carry out their purposes.

Primary Roles

Primary Roles—Community Environment

1. The capacity and ability to define a community, describe and understand its unique environment, and take responsibility for community issues and common purposes.

■ **Researcher: Seeks to search for causes, make generalizations, and disprove hypotheses.**

Conducts research to add to the general knowledge base about communities. Uses an active, diligent, and systematic process of inquiry aimed at discovering, interpreting, and revising facts. This intellectual investigation produces and adds to the knowledge base a greater knowledge and understanding of events, behaviors, theories, and laws, and makes practical applications possible. This role includes several sub-roles:

— **Community Based Researcher: Seeks to study local conditions to build local knowledge and to inform community change strategies.**

Conducts community-based applied research with community groups to enable understanding of the community environment and directly inform local initiatives.

Uses an active, diligent, and systematic process of inquiry aimed at discovering, interpreting, and revising facts. May engage other community members in research design, implementation, interpretation, communication, and/or application.

— **Data Collector/Provider: Acquires and shares data and information to meet identified needs.**

Obtains data and facts about existing conditions and to define and describe the community environment. Employs many types of measurements (from subjective and easy to apply indices to sophisticated statistical and technical measurements). Limits data collection to what has been identified as needed in pursuing a particular purposeful approach.

■ **Diagnostician: Analyzes the cause or nature of a problem or concern using criteria to reach a conclusion.**

Also enables communities to comprehend and understand the community environment, properly frame situations and issues, and conduct a self-diagnosis. May also help a community prescribe effective courses of action and identify which purposeful approach or approaches should be pursued to implement actions.

■ **Educator: Shares information and identifies content information needs.**

Understands learners and their needs; examines and organizes content; selects and organizes content; selects appropriate learning tools and methods; ensures effective physical learning environments; reflects and respects cultural diversity in program content and delivery; arranges for expert help or acquisition and distribution of appropriate educational materials. The term “educator” implies development of the mind and abilities, as well as instruction in content. In Extension work, this role is further specialized as **Adult Educator**. (For a description of educator sub-roles see Educator in Primary Roles—Purpose-Based Action, below.)

Primary Roles—Community Structures

2. The capacity and ability to create, manage, and maintain appropriate community structures that address community issues and achieve community purposes.

■ **Leadership Developer: Fosters Independence**

Assists groups to identify and empower their leaders. Provides individual guidance and coaching to develop leadership in depth. Provides opportunities for leadership development, including personal growth, organizational development, motivational skills, providing the means and supportive environment for change to occur, and pursuing effective leadership of strategies. This role is also appropriate in a learning approach.

■ **Organizational Developer: Helps local leaders create and develop organizations and other community structures.**

Understands organizational behavior and the principles of organization design and development. Shares organization development knowledge and skills with local leaders. Provides information on structure alternatives. Assists communities in their efforts to create and maintain networks of individuals and organizations. This role is also appropriate in a learning approach.

■ **Social/Network Organizer: Helps local stakeholders diagnose social context and create networks that enable development of a sense of shared responsibility and collective competence to address community concerns and achieve community aspirations and purposes.**

Understands and can apply stakeholder analysis. Understands community social organization and principles of network formation, development, renewal and transition/dissolution. Provides information on network alternatives, with the principle of form/structure following function in mind.

- **Educator: Shares information and identifies content information needs.**

Understands learners and their needs; examines and organizes content; selects and organizes content; selects appropriate learning tools and methods; ensures effective physical learning environments; reflects and respects cultural diversity in program content and delivery; arranges for expert help or acquisition and distribution of appropriate educational materials. The term “educator” implies development of the mind and abilities, as well as instruction in content. In Extension work, this role is further specialized as **Adult Educator**. (For a description of educator sub-roles see Educator in Primary Roles—Purpose-Based Action, below.)

Primary Roles—Purpose-Based Action

3. The capacity and ability to take appropriate actions to address community issues and achieve community purposes.

The roles listed in this section are the primary roles played in pursuing the five purposeful approaches that comprise Purpose-Based Action. Since communities take action through their structures: individuals, organizations, and networks, these roles are closely associated with community structure. Community structures, for example, need to be able to learn, plan and design, conduct some forms of research, evaluate their performance and effectiveness, and lead and manage themselves.

Learning

- **Learner: Gains skills or acquires knowledge about existing information.**

Acquires the knowledge of or skill in by study, instruction or experience.

Any person who is in a learning process, whether it is formal education or informal learning.

- **Educator: Shares information and identifies content information needs.**

Understands learners and their needs; examines and organizes content; selects and organizes content; selects appropriate learning tools and methods; ensures effective physical

learning environments; reflects and respects cultural diversity in program content and delivery; arranges for expert help or acquisition and distribution of appropriate educational materials. The term “educator” implies development of the mind and abilities, as well as instruction in content. In Extension work, this role is further specialized as Adult Educator. The educator role includes several sub-roles:

- **Teacher: Creates opportunities for others to know something or to know how to do something.**

Provides instruction, guides studies.

- **Trainer: Stresses instruction and drill with a particular end in view.**

Trains people to acquire specific skills or to perform specific tasks.

- **Coach: Tutors; instructs, trains, or guides individuals or teams as they perform.**

Also, directs the strategy of a team as it performs.

- **Learning Facilitator: Leads or guides learning activities.**

Creates a comfortable learning environment and adjusts style to accommodate the needs of the learners. Respects and validates the diversity of life experiences represented by the learners. Shares the teaching role with the learners. Learning may concern subject-related matter, structure-related matter (such as organizational learning), or process/strategy-related learning.

- **Instructional Technologist: Uses computers, the Internet, video and audio recording, CD/DVD recording, audio and compressed video networking, television and radio broadcasting, satellite television, and other technologies and means to provide effective and cost-efficient delivery of educational programming.**

- **Expert:** Provides high level of knowledge, experience, etc. on subject content and strategies, skills, and tools in a content area or discipline.

Reliable source of knowledge and information about subject matter, research methods, costs, exemplary practices, and people. Locates, interprets and applies existing relevant research. Capable of accessing, evaluating, and organizing information and data, structuring decision models, estimating time/costs for data collection/research, and presenting information and knowledge to others.

Planning and design

- **Planner/Designer: Provides assistance to specific people and organizations who seek to create or modify a situation-specific solution, structure, or system.**

Designs and implements a planning and design approach with individuals or groups to maximize the effectiveness of a recommended solution, maximize the likelihood of its implementation, and maximize the effectiveness of resources used in the planning effort. Is able to employ a planning and design approach to help design other purposeful approach-related systems, such as learning systems, research systems, evaluation systems, and management systems, as well.

- **Planning and Design Facilitator: Guides and enables the pursuit of a planning and design approach.**

Employs group process skills and tools, and other methods as appropriate, to pursue a planning and design approach. Monitors quality of group work and provides feedback and coaching to foster development of a “facilitative group” over time. Involves and works with a variety of stakeholders over the course of a planning effort.

Operating and supervising

- **Leader:** Performs functions that help a group see the bigger picture and larger reasons, purposes, objectives, and goals for an initiative, encourages and empowers group members, and models inclusive and ethical behavior.

- **Leadership Developer: Fosters Independence**

Assists groups to identify and empower their leaders. Provides individual guidance and coaching to develop leadership in depth. Provides opportunities for leadership development, including personal growth, organizational development, motivational skills, providing the means and supportive environment for change to occur, and pursuing effective leadership of strategies. This role is also appropriate in a learning approach.

- **Organizational Developer:** Helps local leaders create and develop organizations and other community structures.

Understands organizational behavior and the principles of organization design and development. Shares organization development knowledge and skills with local leaders. Provides information on structure alternatives. Assists communities in their efforts to create and maintain networks of individuals and organizations. This role is also appropriate in a learning approach.

- **Program Manager:** Manages program and project functions and structures; oversees and coordinates activities of a program’s various projects.

Employed in larger initiatives. Provides for and oversees a developmental process that addresses: (1) problem exploration, (2) knowledge exploration, (3) resource development, (4) project administration, and (5) project spin-off. A program will include one or more projects. A program manager is usually accountable to an overall program leader or department head.

- **Project Manager:** Oversees a project and provides logistical support.

Employed in a smaller initiative, or in a component of a larger initiative. Assumes overall responsibility for the successful planning and execution of a project. Works with group leaders to make use of strategies, timelines, schedules, agendas, budgets, and other tools for effective management of a project. Amends these management tools as necessary to reflect new group decisions regarding the



project strategy. A project manager coordinates activities with, and is accountable to, a program manager.

Research

- **Researcher: Seeks to search for causes, make generalizations, and disprove hypotheses.**

Uses an active, diligent, and systematic process of inquiry aimed at discovering, interpreting, and revising facts. This intellectual investigation produces and adds to the knowledge base a greater knowledge and understanding of events, behaviors, theories, and laws, and makes practical applications possible.

- **Community-Based Researcher: Seeks to study local conditions to build local knowledge and to inform community change and development strategies.**

Conducts community-based applied research with community groups to enable understanding of the community environment and directly inform local initiatives. Uses an active, diligent, and systematic process of inquiry aimed at discovering, interpreting, and revising facts. May engage other community members in research design, implementation, interpretation, communication, and/or application.

- **Data Collector/Provider:** Acquires and shares data and information to meet identified needs.

Obtains data and facts about existing conditions and to define and describe the community environment. Employs many types of measurements (from subjective and easy to apply indices to sophisticated statistical and technical measurements). Limits data collection to what is needed in pursuing a specific purposeful approach.

Evaluation

- **Reviewer/Evaluator: Reviews or evaluates process and outcomes of previous and ongoing solutions or other purposeful activities.**

Conducts evaluations for the primary purposes of bettering programs, projects, products, personnel, organizations, governments, consumers, and the public interest; contributes to informed decision making and more enlightened change; precipitates needed change; empowers all stakeholders by collecting data from them and engaging them in the evaluation process, and experiences and shares the excitement of new insights. Evaluators aspire to construct and provide the best possible information that might bear on the value of whatever is being evaluated.

- **Evaluation Facilitator:** Enables the active participation of subjects, citizens, etc. in an evaluation activity.

Uses facilitation skills and participation tools to involve people in the evaluation of an existing system, approach, or experience.

Important supporting roles

The following roles are frequently needed, and are often essential, in successful community development. They are more or less universal, and may be applied in one or more of the three community capacity elements and in the five purposeful approaches included in the Purpose-Based Action element. Extension professionals are not expected to play, nor should they play, many of these roles. In their positions as community development professionals, program or project managers or advisors, though, they should know when the need for one or more of these roles is present, and assist communities in finding and engaging appropriate persons from within or beyond the community who are capable of playing these roles.

Decisions regarding which roles are played, how they are played, and which skills and tools are chosen to support roles will depend on the community environment, issues, community structure considerations, and specific purposeful activities being pursued.

- **Activist: Vigorously pursues a particular doctrine, belief, or practice, especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue.**
- **Advocate: Defends or maintains a view, principle, etc.; pleads the case of others.**
Supports a cause publicly, through speaking or writing.
- **Boundary Spanner: Serves as an integrator or link to explain sets of ideas.**
Bridges the information/style/interest gaps between users, clients and adopters. Boundaries may be geographic, ethnic, cultural, class, generational, information/discipline, etc. Assists others to cross boundaries with minimum difficulties.
- **Chairperson: Presides over group or organization meetings.**
Calls for discussion and action on an agenda, keeps order, and determines who speaks. In formal situations. Follows Robert's Rules of Order and/or the organization's meeting rules.
- **Conflict Resolver: Helps a group identify the type of conflict it is experiencing and works with the group to manage the conflict through to resolution.**
Conflict is a state of opposition, disagreement or incompatibility between two or more people or groups of people. Often a group finds itself in conflict over facts, purposes, objectives, goals, methods or values. The conflict resolver role includes several sub-roles:
 - **Mediator: Employs a mediation process, a form of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) that brings together conflicting parties to promote reconciliation, settlement, or compromise.**
Advises on the conflict resolution process. Uses appropriate skills and tools to open or improve dialog between parties in a conflict. Mediators must be perceived as impartial on the issues and the parties by all sides. They also often play an active role by intervening, interposing, and reconciling differences, seeking to achieve consensus and settlement. Through the use of discus-

sion, conference, compromise, and other techniques, helps parties to open or improve dialog, resolve disputes, agree upon courses of action, bargain for individual or collective advantage and/or attempt to craft outcomes which serve their mutual interests.

- **Conflict Resolution Facilitator:** Assist individuals and groups with divergent views in reaching consensus on a goal or in solving a conflict problem. The facilitator is concerned primarily with the process and helps parties to design and follow an agenda and to communicate and problem solve effectively. The facilitator does not take responsibility for assuring that parties reach a settlement.
- **Negotiator: Enables the exchange of information through communications where parties in a conflict seek to have their needs met.** Persons may act as negotiators on their own behalf or may enlist another to negotiate on their behalf. Negotiators are not neutral parties. In an advocate approach negotiators negotiate on behalf of one side of a dispute. In a win-win approach negotiators seek to satisfy the needs of all parties involved.
- **Consultant/Advisor: Provides professional or expert advice, guidance, and services.**
Deals primarily with providing help with process, but may also incorporate the role of content expert as well.
- **Convener: Assembles individuals together as a meeting, group, organization, committee, or other deliberative body to fulfill a specific purpose or purposes.**
- **Information Resource Provider: Locates, retrieves, and shares a very broad range of data, information, and references and sources.**

This role includes several sub-roles:

- **Resource Broker: Has extensive knowledge in specific fields or topics of where information may be found and of who possesses the information and knowledge.**
- **Librarian: Oversees the acquisition, cataloging, and management of a collection of publications, media, etc.**

Assists individuals in accessing a library's publications and information. May provide specific information on request.

- **Innovator: Seeks to produce new, creative, unique, and advanced solutions and improvements and to advocate their use from inception through implementation.**
- **Materials Specialist: Creates and/or assembles materials that will be used in the course of a learning session, program, or project.**

Examples of materials include written documents or publications, Power Point presentations, video or CD/DVD, and web resources.

- **Organizer/Promoter: Carries out systematic planning, unifies efforts, and provides structure to bring into being an event or organization.**

May include additional functions, such as assuming financial responsibility, generating publicity, contracting, registering participants, and collecting fees, etc.

- **People Involvement Specialist: Employs a variety of methods and techniques to involve people, including the general public, in programs, projects, and decision making.**

Addresses the four dimensions of participation: Who should be involved? What is the purpose of their involvement? When should people be involved? How best can different types of people be involved?

- **Recorder/Record keeper: Sees that records of all activities are made and maintained.**
Insures that ideas and decisions are accurately recorded. Develops a system for organizing and maintaining records and other information for easy access and reference over time.
- **Resource Generator/Coordinator/Developer: Identifies resource needs and draws upon support and aid when needed.**
Seeks opportunities for outside funding, prepares applications for grants.
- **Writer/Editor: Uses language to portray ideas and images in writing, and creates or modifies written work.**

References

- Delbecq, André and Filley, Alan (January 1974). *Program and Project Management in a Matrix Organization: A Case Study*. Madison, Wisconsin: Graduate School of Business, Bureau of Business Research and Service, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Hinds, David G. (2008). *Building Community Capacity: Environment, Structure, and Action to Achieve Community Purposes* (G3840). Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin-Extension, Cooperative Extension publication.
- Nadler, Gerald (1981). *The Planning and Design Approach*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Prepared with the support and participation of the following University of Wisconsin-Extension, Cooperative Extension initiatives.

The ABC Project, Family Living Programs

In 2001, Wisconsin completed a Children, Youth and Families At Risk State Strengthening Project: Community Collaborations for Children: The School Readiness Project.

A new initiative — The ABC Project, Acting to Build our Childrens' Future, was developed based on lessons learned from the 10 pilot community School Readiness sites. The ABC Project is an applied research initiative that fully integrates a child-centered, family-focused, community-based ecological model with a systems planning and design approach, with the purpose of ensuring that all young children have all of the experiences they need to enter school healthy and ready to succeed. This applied research experiment is a work in progress in five Wisconsin pilot communities.

The Strategic Planning Initiative

Since presenting its first program in June 1997, the Strategic Planning Initiative Team has provided inservice instruction and support in Strategic Planning and group facilitation to over 400 Extension colleagues from all program areas. Participants in the programs have since worked with individuals, organizations, and networks around the state to create strategic plans and local capacity to pursue planning.

©2008 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System doing business as the division of Cooperative Extension of the University of Wisconsin-Extension. All rights reserved. Send copyright inquiries to Cooperative Extension Publishing, 432 N. Lake St., Rm. 227, Madison, WI 53706.



Author: David G. Hinds, AICP, is a Professor Emeritus of the University of Wisconsin-Extension. He now serves as a planning and design consultant to several organizations, including UW-Extension, Cooperative Extension.

Special recognition and thanks for inspiration, ideas, and support are given to:

Mary Gruenewald, M.S., Family and Community Development Specialist

UW-Extension Family Living Programs

Gay Eastman, PhD., Child Development and Early Childhood Education Specialist

UW-Extension Family Living Programs/UW-Madison School of Human Ecology

Boyd Rossing, EdD., Community Building Specialist

UW-Extension/UW-Madison School of Human Ecology

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension, work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin-Extension. The University of Wisconsin-Extension, Cooperative Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title IX and Americans with Disabilities (ADA) requirements. If you need this information in an alternative format, contact the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Programs or call Cooperative Extension Publishing at 608-262-2655.

To see more publications or to order copies of this publication, visit our web site at <http://learningstore.uwex.edu> or call toll-free: 1-877-WIS-PUBS (947-7827).

Building Community Capacity: Environment, Structure, and Action to Achieve Community Purposes (G3840)

1/02/2008