Building the Connectivity Planning Team

Description

The connectivity planning team is the core group of people responsible for assessing community assets, needs, priorities and potential, and develop an action-oriented connectivity plan with strong links to community development.

Ideally, the connectivity planning team includes one project lead who plans and directs the connectivity planning process, and then a few community champions who understand the community needs and goals.

Rationale

- Allows for proactive planning, establishing priorities and coordinating efforts
- Unites all relevant local actors on a common mission
- Creates accountability from the beginning
- Generates buy-in from community members and key partners

Outcome

Establishment of the connectivity planning team, with roles and responsibilities clearly outlined in a simple Terms of Reference.

Governance Models

Governance can bring focus, continuity, and sustainability to the connectivity planning process, which may cover one project or many. It also helps to promote effective decision making. To this end, there are two common approaches to governance structures:

1. **Advisory committee**: one time, ad-hoc committee consisting of senior staff. Its purpose is generally to oversee technical assessments and present reports to council or board.
2. **Steering committee**: meets at regular intervals to ensure ongoing planning efforts, and is made up of elected officials, senior staff, and key stakeholders that provide guidance, direction, and oversight of progress of one or more projects.

Key Considerations

1. The composition of the team will differ depending upon the approach that makes sense for your community. Each team needs to include individuals with experience in areas relevant to your community needs and goals. For example, if the goal is to integrate connectivity more widely into local or regional economic development initiatives, the connectivity planning team could include economic development organizations and chamber of commerce representatives.
2. Establish governance early in the process. This is important as many communities begin with an advisory committee to help staff guide initial research and analysis, and then later create a steering committee to oversee implementation.

Terms of Reference – Overview of Sections

A Terms of Reference document can be very helpful when establishing either an advisory committee or a steering committee. It defines the purpose, scope and authority of the committee. Having a Terms of Reference for your committee ensures that all members are aware of their role, what will be required from them, and how the group will operate. The following list provides an overview of suggested sections for the Terms of Reference.

Background

What is the broad purpose of the committee? Who was it established by and why? What are the overall goals of the committee?

Responsibilities

What is the role of the committee? It can be helpful to describe the function the committee will serve, including the actions and deliverables that are expected.

Membership

List the members of the committee and document the overall terms of membership, recruitment process, and when the work of the committee will be completed.

Governance

Describe who will oversee and chair the committee, and how decisions will be made (e.g., majority vote, chair's authority, council/board approval). Include any other relevant details about overseeing the group's activities or how the internal structure will operate.

Meetings

Describe the frequency of the meetings, duration, and format. Also indicate who will organize, chair, and set the agenda for the meetings, and whether minutes will be kept and made public.

Resources

Describe the resources or support that the group will be provided to complete its work. If applicable, establish who will be responsible for overseeing the funds and resources of the group, and what their role is.

Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality

If necessary, address how conflicts of interest will be managed, and confidential information dealt with.