

NRCS ILLINOIS

Resource
Planning
Guidebook

Factsheets

USDA NRCS
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Building Local Ownership of Resource Plans

USDA • Natural Resources Conservation Service • July 1999

What is it?

A resource plan has local ownership when stakeholders in the planning area believe the plan reflects their interests, concerns and objectives. It's when local people feel the plan is "theirs" because they want it, they develop it, and they promote it throughout the planning area. Local ownership means stakeholders support and are involved in implementation of the plan. Local ownership also means the resource plan is a viable document that people look to for ways to manage their resources for a long time to come.

Why is it important?

Local ownership is essential for successful resource planning. Without local ownership, resource plans risk never being finished, shelved and forgotten, or opposed by community members.

When do we do it?

Local ownership begins during "pre-planning" and continues to develop throughout planning and implementation.

How do we do it?

The entire planning process is intended to foster the involvement, commitment and independent initiative of local stakeholders. The single most important way to develop local ownership is to maintain the integrity of the planning process. The ultimate goal of the NRCS resource planning process is to enable local people to manage their resources in ways that are consistent with their ecological, economic and social interests. Ideally, Planning Committees go on to become on-going coalition groups that provide continual leadership for natural resource issues.

Local ownership begins with the formation of a citizen-based Planning Committee. The Planning Committee leads the planning project. Technical experts provide information, advice and process facilitation to help the Planning Committee achieve their goal of developing and implementing a resource management plan. Local ownership continues to develop with regular public input, Planning Committee participation in resource inventorying and evaluation, and stakeholder selection of preferred management strategies. Implementation strategies that actively involve stakeholders--volunteer activities, educational campaigns, grant-writing committees and more--keeps the plan in the purview of the local people.



Here are some tips for building local ownership.

Cultivate trusting relationships with communities before helping them identifying specific problems or needs. Get to know people and their communities. This familiarization enhances staff understanding of the resource issues in their language, not yours, and helps convey the benefits of natural resource management from their perspective.

Once the Planning Committee is formed, interests may ebb and flow. To ensure the process stays on course, help the committee maintain their focus, commitment and interest with the following:

- **Hold dynamic meetings (start and end on time, have a good agenda, keep it moving, get things done).**
- **Take action. Identify easy projects that are likely to succeed to do throughout the planning.**
- **Value participants' input.**
- **Find out participant's interests and involve them accordingly.**
- **Place participants on committees and empower them to execute their responsibilities.**
- **Make assignments and hold people accountable.**
- **Provide leadership opportunities.**
- **Engage a trained facilitator.**
- **Give feedback by documenting and sharing progress.**
- **Encourage participants to present and report at meetings.**
- **Encourage individual thinking and contribution.**
- **Make sure all members support decisions.**
- **Ensure the next step. Conclude all meetings and activities with a clear plan for what will happen next.**
- **Acknowledge good work.**

Everyone involved in the planning project is responsible for building local ownership. Each member of the Planning Committee has a responsibility to stay interested and engaged in the project, and to suggest changes when something is not working.

The Planning Committee leadership (for example, the Chairman, Vice-Chairman) helps foster local ownership by staying informed and involved in the process, and by ensuring work is completed and decisions executed.

NRCS/SWCD staff and technical experts also create local ownership. They maintain a commitment to the project and care about the group's progress. They monitor social and political factors that may affect the project's outcome, use good communication skills, are respectful of members, able to share responsibility and credit, and are patient, creative, and flexible!

**WARNING SIGNS!
LACK OF LOCAL OWNERSHIP**



- **Group does not set meeting dates.**
- **Group does not select a Chairperson.**
- **Group does not develop meeting agendas.**
- **Members are reluctant to take on duties.**
- **Members are reluctant to come to meetings.**
- **Some members are involved only so that "nothing happens."**