

# THE FOUR STAGES OF CIVIC CONDITION

## *How to Transform your Community from Apathy to Alliance*

### *Specific Steps to Transform Your Community*

Stuck in **Apathy**?

At war in **Argumentative**?

Wanting to remain in **Action**?

Aspiring for **Alliance**?

#### **How to Transform**

In order to positively transform communities, people must come together. They have to understand that being a part of something bigger than them is worthwhile. That *something* is "community."

But just bringing people together for the sake of being together only produces short term benefit. In order to sustain progress, people must plan and implement together.

This transformation is best done through a very comprehensive, objective, expeditious and action-oriented strategic planning process that enables communities to : 1) establish the capacity to implement their priorities, 2) select strategies and initiatives that have the highest likelihood of success and then 3) self-define a series of action steps designed to initiate implementation activity.

Reactions to "Coming Together"		
Civic Condition	Planning Phase	Implementation Phase
Apathy	Enjoyable, Positive	Disengaged, Disinterested
Argumentative	Regimented, Controlled	Selective, Forced
Action	Engaging, Productive	Collaborative, Effective
Alliance	Studious, Complete	Deliberate, Purposeful

In effect, mobilizing the community through implementing a well-crafted, community-supported community and economic development strategic plan is the best way to elevate civic condition from Apathy and Argumentative behavior. Such activity reinforces the achievement motivation (Action Stage), while giving purpose to the association motivation (Apathy Stage) and working to overcome the authority motivation (Argumentative Stage).

**Isolation is a friend to communities in the Apathy and Argumentative Stages.** Without bringing the community together to collectively envision and enact its future, the very simple association motivation, as well as the corrosive authority motivation persist—and the people who have most at stake in the future of their communities are rendered ineffective.

Sometimes the movies capture it best. Here is a quote from President Shepherd, portrayed by Michael Douglas in The American President: "America isn't easy. America is advanced citizenship. You gotta want it bad, 'cause it's gonna put up a fight."

# THE FOUR STAGES OF CIVIC CONDITION



ACC = Alliance Community Commitment | CO = Community Organizer Assessment | KSF = Key Success Factor Analysis

## The Four Stages of Civic Condition: COMMITTING TO PROGRESS

Stage	Specific Steps
<b>Apathy Stage</b>	
<p>Communities at the Apathy Stage are characterized by having little, if any, drive amongst their civic leaders (elected and non-elected). Perhaps the simplest test is: “How many people wake up on Saturday morning thinking about civic projects that are being advanced by the community?” While many communities have paid staff charged with advancing community development projects, are there individuals who are self-motivated to advance the project beyond any professional requirements?</p> <p>Apathy Stage communities are also characterized by a lack of vision and drive for community achievements. The community may be largely comprised of impressive individuals with other worthy values related to family and their religion but not those with a civic focus. These communities typically assume or decide that they cannot control their destiny, that state and federal government serves only as a regulator rather than a partner and that any attempts to change that philosophy will be doomed to failure.</p>	<p>The primary motivation for Apathy Stage leaders and volunteers is association. That is, such community members simply want to affiliate with one another in a social context.</p> <p>The challenge for achievement-oriented professionals and volunteers is to gain serious commitment from the community to advance local priorities. While people may show up to the planning process, especially if there is a good opportunity to socialize (and eat!), the key is to get people to dedicate themselves for the long-term.</p> <p><b>Recommended actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Select a small number of strategies and initiatives to include in the plan</b></li> <li>• <b>Carefully select dates and times that Steering Committee members find most convenient for meetings</b></li> <li>• <b>Provide snacks or rewards at the meetings</b></li> <li>• <b>Celebrate small victories as the plan is being implemented</b></li> <li>• <b>Be on the lookout for and reinforce new members who might want to make targeted commitments (specific projects or initiatives)</b></li> </ul>
<b>Argumentative Stage</b>	
<p>Argumentative Stage communities move significantly forward on the <i>willingness continuum</i> but generally have not advanced on the <i>ability continuum</i>.</p> <p>Argumentative Stage communities are characterized by a group of civic leaders who do have goals and dreams for their community. These communities, however, generally lack both the <i>professional capability</i> and the <i>unity</i> to carry these dreams forward.</p> <p><i>Professional capability</i> refers to a community’s investment in an individual and/or organization that serves as an advocate. Although the individual need not be a paid professional, communities generally find this necessary in order create the stability needed for long-term advocacy.</p> <p><i>Unity</i> refers to the community’s acceptance of the individual development projects being advanced. A lack of unity creates a dynamic in which the greatest obstacles to project advancement are created within the community itself.</p> <p>Argumentative Stage communities frequently create a “lose-lose” dynamic.</p>	<p>Argumentative Stage community leaders are typified by their behind-the-scenes power plays designed to carry out their personal agendas.</p> <p>The Argumentative Stage presents the greatest challenge to professionals and volunteers simply looking to improve their community. It is sometimes difficult for such altruistic volunteers to understand the gamesmanship that such power-grabbing people have, as it is so different from their own.</p> <p><b>Recommended actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Co-opt one or more of the good ol' boys into the process by offering them power on one or more of the plan's priorities</b></li> <li>• <b>Withhold publicity on key projects or initiatives until such efforts are beyond being vulnerable to attack or subversion</b></li> <li>• <b>Invite power players to ceremonies and ribbon-cuttings; share the credit (even if undeserved)</b></li> <li>• <b>If possible, facilitate the desires of authority-seekers to serve on out-of-town boards and commissions</b></li> </ul>

Stage	Specific Steps
<b>Action Stage</b>	
<p>Action Stage communities are characterized by a track record of consistently identifying and advancing development projects. These communities have a high level of willingness and a high level of ability. They typically have a sense of overall direction whereby they can immediately identify whether or not proposed projects are consistent with that direction. Projects that are inconsistent are typically discarded. The rest are usually embraced and advanced.</p> <p>Like Argumentative Stage communities, however, Action Stage communities are still faced with limited resources. While there are, at times, opportunities for collaboration among projects in Action Stage communities, typically the agenda becomes so large that competition for available technical and financial resources becomes a limiting factor. As such, Action Stage communities sometimes face a “win-lose” situation.</p>	<p>Action Stage communities generally have an army of professionals and (especially) volunteers dedicated to achieving all that is possible for their community.</p> <p>The Action Stage setting is perfect for both planning and implementing the desired future of the community. People serving on Steering Committees will be right at home in their achievement-seeking environment.</p> <p>Recommended actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite a broad array of interests to the planning process</li> <li>• Acknowledge and include existing projects and initiatives when developing the strategic plan</li> <li>• Proactively promote the planning and implementation process to the community</li> <li>• Ensure that implementation steps are broadly assigned in order to capture full implementation potential</li> </ul> <p>Use the planning process to broaden public awareness of the many strategies, initiatives and projects of the community</p>
<b>Alliance Stage</b>	
<p>Alliance Stage communities take the ultimate step on the ability continuum. These communities are not only willing, but are also completely able to advance their development agenda. Like Action Stage communities, Alliance communities are skilled at envisioning, defining and advancing development projects. They have a record of success which reinforces a “we will succeed at this—it is only a matter of time” approach.</p> <p>Alliance Stage communities make a paradigm shift from project orientation to community orientation. That is, it is simply not enough to succeed with advancing community development projects—it is necessary to examine how each of these projects serves larger community goals. Such communities strive for “win-win” solutions.</p>	<p>Alliance Stage communities are very rare. They have leaders who work to successfully elevate their Action Stage capabilities to actualize and sustain long-term progress.</p> <p>While this stage should be the "ultimate level" of civic condition, there are some unique challenges to planning and implementation; as such communities can at times become preoccupied with process over results.</p> <p>Recommended actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ensure that strategies and initiatives include action steps and assigned implementers</b></li> <li>• <b>Be wary of “analysis paralysis” (studying ideas to death)</b></li> <li>• <b>If certain strategies and initiatives seem to be falling victim to debate and study, consider advancing doable elements of such efforts</b></li> </ul>