

TO DO CHECKLIST from RiverzEdge Arts Project

Engaging Youth in Community Planning and Design: Indigenous Voices Make a Difference!

What does it take to create and keep open a role for youth at the charrette table, conference or meeting and why would you want them there? Find out what happens when the authentic voices of disenfranchised youth are brought into public planning and discourse and what it really takes to get authentic voices to the table. RiverzEdge Arts Project combines real world training in art and design with education and employment intervention through workforce development and arts & business programs for teens.

The information in this workshop related to program development in planning, design and public art is replicable in other areas of community building and improvement. Please do not hesitate to contact bekah@riverzedgearts.org for feedback on your specialized programs.

This To Do List presumes that you already have an excellent idea. As we all know, ideas are easy to come by, producing results is the endgame. Strategic development will ensure you are well prepared for the endgame when it comes.

- 1) Identify and reach out to existing and new partners. BE OPPORTUNISTIC. Where are you already involved? What growth opportunities support your mission or are passion driven from within your service population? With whom are you strategically aligning to support your on going participation? Your goal in is open and ample opportunities for future projects.
- 2) Design your program to align with your partner's goals and to take advantage of low hanging opportunities for implementation. Figure out the who, what, when, why and how and curriculum development will follow.
- 3) Gather your resources. How will you fund this program and supply the output? Who will contribute resources to the projects you are implementing and fund and manage the project through time? Remember that community improvement projects are 80% management and 20% design!
- 4) Recruit and train your participants and partners. Are the partners you are working with prepared to engage with your service population? Is your service population coming in ready to learn? Work? Contribute? How will you empower the voices of the voiceless? What kind of learning environment will you need to accomplish your training goals? What is the medium of collaboration and how will you level the playing field within it? Training your participants is on going, but you may have limited opportunities to prepare your partners. Distill your messages for maximum impact.
- 5) Implement your program with your eye constantly on the prize. Curriculum, skills building, assessment, outcomes and outputs all have their own processes and metabolisms, but they occur in service to your larger vision and specific goals.

The more clearly you can identify the endgame, the easier it will be to stay on track through the distractions and obstacles inevitable in the life of a program or project.

- 6) Identify and publicize successes along the way. Hopefully, both the process and products embedded within your idea will give you ample opportunity to reach out to the media, legislators, partner communities and leaders within the field. This is all too often an ingredient left off the recipe and small and great acts of brilliance and accomplishment go unnoticed. Most likely, your service population as well as your program goals will benefit from the attention. FAME AND GLORY is a great motivator for volunteerism as well. You are always preparing for the next time.
- 7) Be tenacious, persevere and never give up on your goals and output. At all costs, do not modify your expectations, but change the timeline if you absolutely have to. Here, the chess metaphor is really apropos. You might be a piece down with little time left on the clock, so you have to play fast and hard for the win. Your service population likely needs to experience a miracle or two in order not to foreclose on the future and so do you!
- 8) Finally, have a really big party or a really moving one. When all is said and done, no matter what your project or program, what problems you overcame along the way, or whether the output met your definition of success (or dare I say perfection?), the juice is in the experience and it's all about the people. You may not have solved homelessness, but maybe the homeless people you are working with feel a new pride in their temporary place and have a new conception of future possibilities. Even that is worth celebrating and everyone likes a celebration. Give certificates, awards and presents and remember to acknowledge your partners and volunteers alongside your participants before you acknowledge yourselves and your organization. Actions speak louder than words anyway.

A few hints: Read this list before you write your grant and try, if you can, to include funding for all the afterthoughts as well as the thoughts. Be bold and fear not, most of the time most people rise to the occasion. Lastly, the devil does live in the details but that is a dialectic: Don't let the details bog you down in moving forward, but attention to the details is going to ensure your success. Which details are important is for you to decide. I will not budge on the details supporting the prominence of youth voices in process and output, but if the messaging in the output is muddied by those voices, so be it. You can and will succeed if you stay positive and powerful. Your project and people are undoubtedly worth it. Thanks for reading this far and good luck with your project, Bekah Greenwald Speck, Executive Director, RiverzEdge Arts Project in Woonsocket, RI, www.riverzedgearts.org.