

Overview of Participatory Strategic Planning using the ToP® (Technology of Participation) Methods

"How can our group come to a common vision for our future? How can we make our vision happen by creatively addressing the root causes of the challenges that are blocking us, rather than focus simply on fire-fighting and problem-solving? How can we ensure a real sense of ownership, so that for once our plan actually happens?"

ToP® is:

- A structured approach that sparks individual creativity and recognizes and honors all contributions
- A way for teams to deal with large amounts of data in a short period of time
- A methodology that pools participant's contributions into larger and information rich patterns, tools and processes that enable teams to foster an emphasis on common ground and to deal effectively with diversity and avoid conflict and polarization
- A process that builds commitment by assuring effective action
- A world renowned approach that enables strong participation in large as well as small groups

Participatory Strategic Planning is a 4-stage process, each stage involving a specially tailored **Consensus Workshop** process. The four stages are:

- **Practical Vision** - what the group would like to see in place in 3-5 years' time, often preceded by a visualization exercise.
- **Underlying Contradictions** - the obstacles or issues that are preventing that vision from happening, and which must be dealt with in order to move forward
- **Strategic Directions** - innovative courses of action that the group can take to deal with the underlying contradictions and move it toward realizing its vision.
- **Implementation Plan** - a set of practical actions that will start the group's journey from where it is to where it wants to be. A clear outline of what is to be done, why, how, when and by whom.

Advantages of Participatory Strategic Planning

- Outcome focused
- Clear and simple
- Consistent and flexible
- Quick inclusive input
- Identifies common purpose
- Utilizes the energy of the issues so they become doors to the future
- Naming underlying contradictions and causes
- All data faithfully held in charts and summaries
- Creates new common understandings
- Group interprets and holds data through titles and overviews
- Taps into and expands people's natural abilities
- Ready recognition of what is possible and necessary enables cooperation
- Easily adapted to various cultural contexts
- Motivating coherent framework
- People who are implementing the plan do the planning, no buy-in effort needed
- Gives you a way to create your own map and compass to guide you through unfamiliar territory
- Connects and extends participants' experience, concerns and insights

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