

How Empowered is your community?

A simple self-exam to check your progress

Why Measure Empowerment?

Community empowerment is much more than the jobs you create, the facilities you build, the loans funds you bankroll, the services you improve. It is about achieving self-sufficiency and independence.

Being empowered means having the capacity to keep your progress going, knowing your community need never again drop into the despair of overwhelming poverty, standing at the top of the “empowerment staircase,” and being ready to graduate from the Community Empowerment Program when your designation ends. This checklist can help you measure your community’s progress toward “empowerment.”



The clock on EZ/EC support is running. Will you be ready at graduation time?

Where Should You Be Now?

This checklist shows indicators of progress for the ten steps of the “empowerment staircase.” Communities in the first three years of implementing their plans will probably be focusing much of their effort on **startup activities**, steps 1-4. From years 4 to 6, the focus will mainly be on **working the community’s strategic plan**; for these communities, the principal challenges fall into steps 5-7. By the time a community reaches year 7, however, it is time to look forward to graduating from the Community Empowerment Program at the ten-year point. To assure continued success beyond graduation, these communities will want to devote increasing attention to **building sustainability**, steps 8-10.

How to Use This List

Take an honest, objective look at your community and its processes. Is it really where you want it to be? Will it be ready for graduation when the time comes? What can you do now to make empowerment a lasting reality.

The Empowerment Checklist

1. Building a Strong Foundation

Give your community points if these statements are true:

- Hope is evident on the faces of citizens
- Talk is about opportunities, rather than problems
- Citizens are talking about “vision”
- Enthusiasm is widespread within the community

Subtract points if these statements are true:

- Blaming and finger-pointing are common
- A climate of hopelessness exists
- The main focus of discussion is on problems
- The main obstacle is seen as “not enough money”
- Someone “in charge” tells the community its vision

2. Building Community-wide Participation

Give your community points if these statements are true:

- There is no single leader
- There is discomfort because unfamiliar people are involved
- New, uncomfortable views are being expressed
- Disagreements are seen as healthy and are welcomed
- There is no such thing as “outsiders”
- Everybody feels they can speak and contribute

Subtract points if these statements are true:

- The “right” people are running the show
- The “person in charge” runs the agenda and makes decisions
- There is little disagreement over goals

3. Finding Partners

Give your community points if these statements are true:

- Hope is evident on the faces of citizens
- Groups come forward to offer resources
- Cooperation is more prevalent than competition
- Credit is shared freely among groups

Subtract points if these statements are true:

- ❑ One organization does all the work
- ❑ Other organizations join, but on “our” terms
- ❑ Lead organization wants to show others “how it’s done”

4. Creating Sound Strategies

Give your community points if these statements are true:

- ❑ Citizens are talking about strategies as much as projects
- ❑ Projects are part of larger strategies for improvement
- ❑ The community has turned down at least some offered funding because it did not fit the plan
- ❑ Projects link with one another to achieve larger goals

Subtract points if these statements are true:

- ❑ The community will accept any good project
- ❑ The community will take on any project that is funded
- ❑ The community keeps its plan on the shelf

5. Turning Your Vision Into a Workplan

Give your community points if these statements are true:

- ❑ The strategic plan is specific and clear
- ❑ Each goal has several benchmarks
- ❑ Projects have been changed after targets were not met
- ❑ Citizens know the benchmarks and monitor progress
- ❑ Leaders are held accountable for missing targets

Subtract points if these statements are true:

- ❑ Benchmarks are treated as bothersome requirements
- ❑ Slack performance is tolerated
- ❑ Benchmark measures are loose there’s no way to miss
- ❑ Goals are so general that nearly any project is accepted

6. Finding the Right Resources

Give your community points if these statements are true:

- ❑ Most projects use multiple funding sources
- ❑ EZ/EC dollars are mainly used for seed money
- ❑ Leveraging ratio is more than 10:1
- ❑ Non-dollar resources are counted
- ❑ At least one novel method to tap local resources is used

Subtract points if these statements are true:

- ❑ Projects are mainly funded from EZ/EC funds
- ❑ Only dollars are counted; other resources are seen as “fluff”

7. Creating Successes

Give your community points if these statements are true:

- ❑ The community often celebrates successes publicly
- ❑ Something positive is reported every month

- ❑ Average citizens can name at least one success
- ❑ The community has inspiring “stories” to tell about its work
- ❑ The community has new heroes and champions

Subtract points if these statements are true:

- ❑ Citizens cannot name benchmarks or successes
- ❑ Nothing ever seems good enough to report
- ❑ Nobody is telling stories about the good things happening

8. Building Community Capacity

Give your community points if these statements are true:

- ❑ The community continuously seeks new leaders
- ❑ Regular training is provided for leaders and workers
- ❑ Senior leaders mentor junior leaders for larger jobs
- ❑ Multiple organizations share the community’s work
- ❑ Lessons from failures are talked about and used in training

Subtract points if these statements are true:

- ❑ Current leaders resist sharing power with others
- ❑ Little or no training is available
- ❑ Little time is spent discussing management issues

9. Adapting Strategic Plans

Give your community points if these statements are true:

- ❑ Two or more meetings are held each year to review successes and modify plans
- ❑ At least one good idea was borrowed from outside the community
- ❑ At least one major strategy has been changed because it proved to be not good enough

Subtract points if these statements are true:

- ❑ The community has ineffective “sacred cows” it isn’t willing to kill
- ❑ The community has never changed its strategies

10. Building Toward Sustainability

Give your community points if these statements are true:

- ❑ Services are self-financing or need no more investment
- ❑ Strategies are consistent with the community’s vision
- ❑ The natural environment is seen as an asset, not something to ignore or use up
- ❑ Leadership transitions are smooth
- ❑ New participants come into the process regularly

Subtract points if these statements are true:

- ❑ Leadership transitions are tightly controlled
- ❑ Partner organizations are suspicious and hold back
- ❑ Services need ongoing subsidies to survive