COMMUNITIES HAVE PROBLEMS, JUST LIKE PEOPLE

Problems are part of life -- they go together with being alive. And every community has problems, too; they go together with being a community. That's just a fact of community life.

Two more basic facts:

- Communities, like people, try to solve their problems.
- And analyzing those problems helps in their solution.

Example, A community problem. The downtown area of a community is declining. Stores are closing, and moving out; no new stores are moving in. We want to revitalize that downtown. How should we do it?

Our thinking here is simple:

- We'd be better off analyzing why that decline is taking place, why the problem is occurring, rather than simply jumping in and trying to fix it.
- A good analysis will lead to better long-run solutions. And therefore:
- A good analysis is worth taking the time to do.

So this section explains what analyzing community problems is about, and why it can be helpful -- and then how to do it.

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY PROBLEM?

This covers a lot of ground. There's a long list of nominees. And you probably know some of the main contenders. Can you name the leading problems in your own community? Chances are you can at least start the list.

Below are examples of community problems:

Example Community Problems: Adolescent pregnancy, access to clean drinking water, child abuse and neglect, crime, domestic violence, drug use, environmental contamination, ethnic conflict, health disparities, HIV/ AIDS, hunger, inadequate emergency services, inequality, jobs, lack of affordable housing, poverty, racism, transportation, violence.

WHAT OTHERS WOULD YOU ADD?

Rather than aim for a complete problem list, here are some criteria you may consider when identifying community problems:

- The problem occurs too frequently **(frequency**)
- The problem has lasted for a while (**duration**)
- The problem affects many people (**scope, or range**)
- The problem is disrupting to personal or community life, and possibly intense (**severity**)
- The problem deprives people of legal or moral rights (**equity**)

- The issue is perceived as a problem (**perception**)

This last criterion -- perception -- is an important one, and can also help indicate readiness for addressing the issue within the community.

Keep in mind that what is seen as a problem can vary from place to place, and from group to group in the same place. Although there's no official definition of a community problem, the above examples and criteria above should help you begin to name and analyze community problems.