



**BOARD OF DIRECTORS
COMMITTEE AND TASK FORCE REPORT**

BOARD MEETING

DATE: April 23, 2006

To: APA Board of Directors

FROM: Mitzi Barker, FAICP Task Force Chair
Social Relevance Task Force

SUBJECT: Social Relevance Status Report

TYPE OF REPORT:

Information

Action

CONSENT AGENDA

Yes

No

ADOPTED POLICY:
Action on this report will not constitute ongoing policy.

FISCAL NOTE: Activities will be funded through existing budget.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN GOAL: Relates to Goals 1 and 2:

Goal 1. Tell the planning story through effective planning advocacy at all levels.

Goal 2. Pursue social, economic and racial equity by advocating those planning activities — social, economic, and physical — at all levels of government that effectively move America's communities toward a more just future.

RECOMMENDATION:

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE BOARD: MOTION: Accept Social Relevance Task Force report as part of the consent agenda. As scheduled in the Task Force's initial charge, the group will be discharged with the submission of this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The charge of the Social Relevance Task Force: Identifying and investigating opportunities to forge strategic partnerships which will result in:

- a. Increased participation in planning policy and local planning processes by underserved populations and persons of color.
- b. The application of sound planning principles and practices in neighborhoods and communities of color along with community-based organizations serving these

communities.

- c. Increased participation by underserved populations and persons of color in planning-related higher education institutions and professional development programs.
- d. Cooperation and assistance from other APA committees as appropriate, including the Diversity Subcommittee of the APA Membership Committee.
- e. Recommendations to be brought forward to the leadership meetings to be held in San Antonio in April, 2006.

The Task Force examined the lessons that may be learned from APA’s “Agenda for America’s Communities” initiative from several years ago. Our discussions have touched on several themes:

- It is imperative to listen well, to determine what “underserved” communities want from APA, rather than focusing on what APA can offer these communities. Shift the position of power to the community.
- In many ways, the profession has veered away from advocacy planning. Barriers exist with respect to the image of planners – planners are often seen as “gatekeepers”, guardians of regulatory processes that may be perceived as thwarting community initiatives, rather than as problem-solvers and facilitators.
- Planning practice in community development has tended to become more focused on identifying and correcting deficiencies than on building on assets. The profession needs to integrate asset-based community development back into its lexicon.
- Planning should be a collaborative effort, planning with people rather than upon them, which requires mutual trust – we need to increase awareness that APA must be invited into the community, as well as cultivate opportunities to garner the trust that may result in such invitations.
- One-time intensive activities such as charrettes and Community Planning Assistance teams are good – but what is needed is a longer-term commitment to work in partnership with a community.

The Task Force has also taken a look at potential collaborators – who can APA work with, locally, nationally, to further the goal of making planning something that serves all publics, not just privileged ones.

- APA is collaborating at a national level, and in some cases at the chapter and division level with a wide range of organizations which advocate for, support, or directly fund initiatives which further social equity and justice.
- APA is not so present at the local level, where much planning work is happening through community-based organizations, including local planning departments, serving “underserved” communities.

The Task Force has considered what kinds of outcomes can be brought about through greater engagement of our members, and by making measurable progress and change.

- APA involvement hinges heavily on the ability of individual members’ ability to volunteer. Members may be interested in participating in a *pro bono* activity, but their ability to do often comes down to a matter of finances and time commitment.
- It is difficult to measure outcomes at a macro scale; but progress and change at a local scale *are* measurable, and can help to galvanize broader enthusiasm among members, and institutional change within the profession.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. APA should develop a simplified community planning process template that incorporates the social orientation of the Asset-Based Community Development movement, and integrates it with the land-use/built environment/infrastructure. The template is a tool to assist a community in distilling and relating its story, and becoming empowered to write the next chapter. It is not a comprehensive plan in the traditional and legal sense of the word. This work should be undertaken in close collaboration with planners, educators, and community developers who reflect the diversity of the populations served, including members of APA's "population" Divisions.
 - a. Distribute this model through organizations and institutions representing and serving underserved communities and persons of color.
 - b. Provide training in implementing the model at conferences and events sponsored by these organizations and institutions, where persons of color and those working in underserved communities will be the principal audience.
2. APA should increase awareness among underserved communities of planning as a means of empowerment, and as a way to make the system work for them. We should work to enhance the image of planners as professionals who facilitate this process, broker partnerships, access resources, and advocate for the communities' needs in city hall, the statehouse, and Congress.
 - a. Bring the planning story to conferences and training events sponsored by groups such as Enterprise, NeighborWorks, CCDA, and others to educate community developers and persons of color about planning, planners, and our professional values and commitment to social equity and responsiveness, as well as how planning can help underserved communities meet their goals.
 - b. Contribute articles to printed and online publications of these organizations, focusing on practical approaches to working with planners, both in the community development and regulatory realms.
3. Find ways to establish relationships with underserved communities, such as a small rural town in the Mississippi Gulf Coast area, to assist in developing and implementing a locally-generated and responsive plan for rebuilding a healthy, equitable, and sustainable community.

IMPLEMENTATION: The Executive Director will ensure implementation of the adopted recommendations from this report.

SOCIAL RELEVANCE TASK FORCE:

- Mitzi C. Barker, FAICP, Chair
- Anthony Drummond
- Michael E. Levine, AICP
- Ramona K. Mullahey
- Lani Ravin
- Hing Wong, AICP