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Understanding the PCI process

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Conservation should be viewed on a variable scale of:

- Personal satisfaction
- Economic viability
- Ecological and social sustainability

Value in conservation practice ultimately grows from the human relationships that are built, rather than from the quantitative or technical product of the work being done. Effective goal-oriented action plans can only be created after people define their particular problems, needs and issues. These can best be assessed with a diversity of willing participants who see personal opportunity in their involvement. All participants must be free to choose their level of participation within the process. Success should be measured in terms of personal and professional satisfaction rather than in dollars spent or acres impacted. Project success – however it is specifically defined in each situation by the participants (e.g., in terms of social, scientific or scale related objectives) is an outcome of the process of relationship building, leadership development, and practical implementation of work plans.

The following seven steps were codified by Bill Whitney and John Heaston – a result of dissecting the process by which several successful working groups have been formed under the banner of the Platte Corridor Initiative. It is not complicated, and if one looks at successful projects of any type the same elements will be apparent. Two critical points need to be understood. Strategies and action plans don't begin to take shape until step five (avoid “jumping to solution” until the group defines the issue or problem. Steps 1-4 are essential prerequisites.

This process is about mobilizing social capital and encouraging buy-in at all levels. The potential tangible benefit is leverage and alignment of labor and funds. The outcomes include quality projects and new social networks, which become conduits for new ideas and actions.

The following examples are in the spirit of the Platte Corridor Initiative and help illustrate what we mean by mobilizing social capital: PPRI and TNC worked with members of a local landowner corporation which owns Bush Island, a large island in the Platte River west of Marquette. A series of facilitations following the basic seven-step process outlined below (with cookouts or pot lucks!) led to the formulation of a management plan for their land – the stated need of the Bush Island Corporation. It helped a diverse group of members understand each

other as well as the NGO representatives; many members learned more about their island resources and the potential benefits of a management plan, the members were able to define and buy into group goals. This is the end of the Bush Island facilitation, but not the end of the story. Tim Tunnel was able to provide financial support for the corporation through the Platte Habitat Partnership contract. Other relationships resulted from these meetings, including PPRI and TNC working with the Hamilton County Assessor and County Surveyor on accretion surveys and GIS (a hugely important meeting according to Duane Katt in retrospect). Three members of the Bush Island Corporation have helped PPRI with cedar removal on the Griffith Prairie just across the river. The people we worked with are not strangers on the street; they are peers, friends and helpers. It is simply a matter of communication, problem definition, acquiring good information and aligning the funds and resources to the task.

Another example (no planning process was followed then) is PPRI's SOAR program, which is now in its 13th year at Aurora. The beginning goal was to start a summer enrichment program for elementary youth in Hamilton County. Through a year-long process of frequent meetings and exhaustive issue definition (step 3 on page 3) the SOAR staff of four teachers and one PPRI naturalist established a program structure still in place today. It maintains creative focus, maintains amongst staff unity in all aspects of decision making, places focus on the developmental needs of the participants, develops young leaders and future PPRI/TNC interns, and much more. The content is in the curriculum, the process is all about mobilization of social capital – an investment in people.

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Seven Steps

Step 1: Declaration of Need or Statement of an Idea.

Step 2: Creation of a forum for further discussion and to widen the audience and/or the level of participation.

Step 3: Facilitated issue identification process where the following are given preliminary definition. This needs to be an exhaustive brainstorming activity.

- ◆ Geographic scope
- ◆ Level of need or interest
- ◆ History of issue
- ◆ Scope of interest
- ◆ Scope of ability
- ◆ Relationship of issue to broader community commonwealth
- ◆ Asset mapping
 - Social
 - Economic
 - Regulatory
 - Environmental
 - Human
 - Natural

Step 4: Identification of local leadership in relation to issue.

Step 5: Begin a locally led iterative process to seek definition and clarification of the following:

- ◆ Problems/opportunities
- ◆ Resources available to complement the issue
- ◆ Stakeholders in process
- ◆ Potential projects

Step 6: Develop a preliminary work plan that encompasses, but is not limited to the following:

- ◆ Potential impediments to projects successful completion
- ◆ Creation of an implementation structure that can adapt to change
- ◆ Statement of purpose and guiding principles
- ◆ Creation of measurable goals

Step 7: Review and adaptive response; go back to step 1; spin-off subgroups start at step 1.