# Facilitator's Guide

## CONTEXT

APWA established the Center for Sustainability to create capacity for essential research, innovation and technology transfer for leading economically sound, socially desirable and environmentally healthy projects, programs and services.

To help take this broad mission to the actionable level, the Center developed the Framework for Sustainable Communities. This one-page tool guides the development of sustainable decisions. It describes five generic principles that function as distinct system boundaries for sustainable outcomes.

They are general enough to apply to any aspect of public works, and concrete enough to guide tangible outcomes. The five categories describe sustainable community needs for:

- Ecological integrity
- Economic security
- Empowerment and responsibility
- Efficient services and infrastructure
- Health and well-being

If public works projects and services could deliver on these five sustainable community needs, then we would foster healthy communities.

APWA's Framework for Sustainable Communities is a simple yet powerful, one-page decision tool that will guide the development of sustainable decisions.

## USES

There are many potential uses for this framework.
The three below are most common:

1. **To optimize not compromise**. Asking the five questions will help an individual or group think through an issue and formulate an outcome that is even more sustainable. And when outcomes are sustainable, they contribute to the health of our communities.

2. **To select the most sustainable option**. While considering a variety of alternatives or pathways, the framework will help weigh the pros and cons and guide the most sustainable decision.

3. **To identify key issues**. Identify issues that are potential hurdles or enhancements as well as areas that could hinder or foster project success.

Our world is complex and the choices we make always have tradeoffs and opportunities. The power of APWA's framework is that it does not just give one right answer. It helps make any decision more balanced. Use of the framework establishes a platform that encourages dialog leading to trusting relationships and commitments to decisions.

The power of this tool is that it is scalable. You can use it at your desk or with a group. You can use the framework to:

- **Find Balanced Solutions**. You can open up conversations around how to meet all sustainable community needs when developing a policy, project or action. When you meet all needs, you minimize conflict.

- **Tell a Story**. You can frame how to communicate the information, ensuring users understand the relationship between seemingly unrelated things. By highlighting the causes and effects, citizens and non-public works people gain a better understanding of the project, moving the discussion away from a single issue.

- **Create Openness**. You will give credibility to all points of view. It makes it safe to bring up all issues. Once on the table, you can discuss the issues constructively.

- **Create Focus**. You can boil issues down to key areas that need leadership attention to move from the current state to a future condition. This is what makes innovation happen.

- **Get things unstuck**. You can rely on the experience and judgment of the people in the room to address all needs and get things unstuck without analysis paralysis.

## WHAT IS IT?

The Framework has three dimensions:

- **Five Needs**: Satisfy five distinct sustainable community needs to assure a balanced/sustainable outcome: Ecology, Economy, Empowerment, Efficiency and Health.

- **S.W.O.T.:** For any given action considered, there are Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

- **The Traffic Signal - Red, Yellow, Green:** This dimension provides an indicator for how well a particular action satisfies a sustainable community need. If it is green, the action provides value, or contributes in a positive way toward that need. If it is yellow, there are manageable risks. If it is red, there may be some fatal flaws that need attention.

## STEPS FOR USING IT

### Step 1:  Identifying
*The goal of this step is to clearly identify the topic*

Identify a clear topic, policy, or issue that you would like to evaluate. Write the action on the top of the form as a statement such as, "Building a three-lane roadway cross-section on Main Street," or "removing glass from the recycling stream." The more specific you can be, the better, because this will help focus your discussion on the action that is most important to you.

### Step 2: Brainstorming
*The goal of this step is to fill out the framework, getting as many ideas as possible*

Brainstorm strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in each of the five needs categories. Start by asking the question…"So how does what we are proposing influence the economy?" Remember, influence can be good or bad. Appendix A will offer other questions to get the discussion going.

Strengths and weaknesses are things internal to your organization and have direct control over.

Opportunities and threats are things outside your control, and you must respond to proactively.

Encourage the flow of ideas. Recognize that sometimes there will be lots of overlap. You may start in one category; this may lead to factors in other categories. Discuss those factors together and put on the map at the same time so the team can begin to see the relationships and competing factors.

### Step 3: Distilling
*The goal of this step is to refine your brainstorming list to the key issues*

After you have brainstormed all the ideas, begin selecting what you believe to be the most important strengths and opportunities and the most concerning weaknesses and

threats. For any issue, there really should not be more than a few for each of the needs category.

### Step 4: Evaluating
*The goal of this step is to determine how balanced your solution is*

Looking at your prioritized list, step back and look it over. What is it telling you overall? If a need category has many strengths and opportunities, it is likely a **green** light. If it has some strengths, but also has some weaknesses and threats that you feel you can overcome, it is likely a **yellow** light. If there are some significant weaknesses or threats that you have not figured out a way to overcome yet, it is likely a **red** light. Also, one significant weakness by itself may warrant a red light.

### Step 5: Problem Solving
*The goal of this step is to find a balanced solution. This means all need categories have a green or yellow rating*

Focus the group's attention on the key issues that create red lights. Ask the question, "What can we do differently to turn this red light into a yellow or green light?" Some of those answers may take time to formulate. Make assignments for more research and agree to get back together to discuss the new ways.

### Step 6: Move Forward
*The goal of this step is to assign accountability for action that moves the topic forward*

Once all your research is completed and you have a balanced solution, get commitments (Who? Must do what? By when?) to move the item forward. Pay attention to the specific actions necessary to overcome risks in the yellow lights and innovative actions that turns red lights into yellow/greens.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# APPENDIX A

Below is a sampling of the possible questions one could ask while filling out the need categories. Not all questions apply to every topic.

## 1. Ecology
*How does it influence the natural environment?*

For example, how does it influence…

- the quality of surface and groundwater
- habitat, plants and animals?
- emissions that pollute our air and degrade our atmosphere?
- forests, fertile farmland and soil?

## 2. Economy
*How does it influence the local economy and at what short- and long-term costs?*

For example, how does it influence…

- a stable and efficient economic base?
- revenues and expenses?
- whole cost accounting?
- cash flow in the short term?
- income, jobs and meaningful work?
- a return on investment?

## 3. Empowerment
*How does it influence effective government, social equality and community relationships?*

For example, how does it influence…

- citizen's ability to influence things that affect their lives?
- citizen's ability to self-determine their own future?
- equal access by all?
- sustainable structured ways to resolve conflict?
- transparency in our government?

## 4. Efficiency
*How does it influence the delivery of services and the infrastructure?*

For example, how does it influence…

- professionally sound infrastructure?
- the efficient delivery of services?
- sound asset management principles?

## 5. Health
*How does it influence the well-being of people?*

For example, how does it influence…

- the exposure to harmful chemicals produced by society?
- citizen's sense of well-being?
- trusting long-term relationships?
- safety and security?
- meaning, purpose and connectedness?
- aesthetic enjoyment and beauty?

# APPENDIX B
## FACILITATION TIPS

- Using a white board is a great way to identify issues in groups. Place all five need categories on the board and ask participants to offer ideas as you fill it in together.

- Make sure you have the right people in the room who can contribute expertise to the brainstorming in all five categories.

- Diversity of perspectives always enhances the quality of the brainstorming and problem solving.

- It is not so important to worry about where to place an issue. What is most important is that the issue gets on the board.

- As you use the model more, you will find new ways to use the tool. For example, you can run the framework for each alternative you are considering. You can use it to discuss a difficult issue with a community group, or run different scenarios such as whether to close a road or not for construction.

- If you have a large group, break them up into five sub groups, each dealing with one of the legs. Then bring the groups together and compare notes.

It deserves mentioning that just because the framework is a qualitative tool, does not mean that no analysis has or will be done. Usually, the detail calculations and analysis occur before or after you have a discussion using the framework.

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