

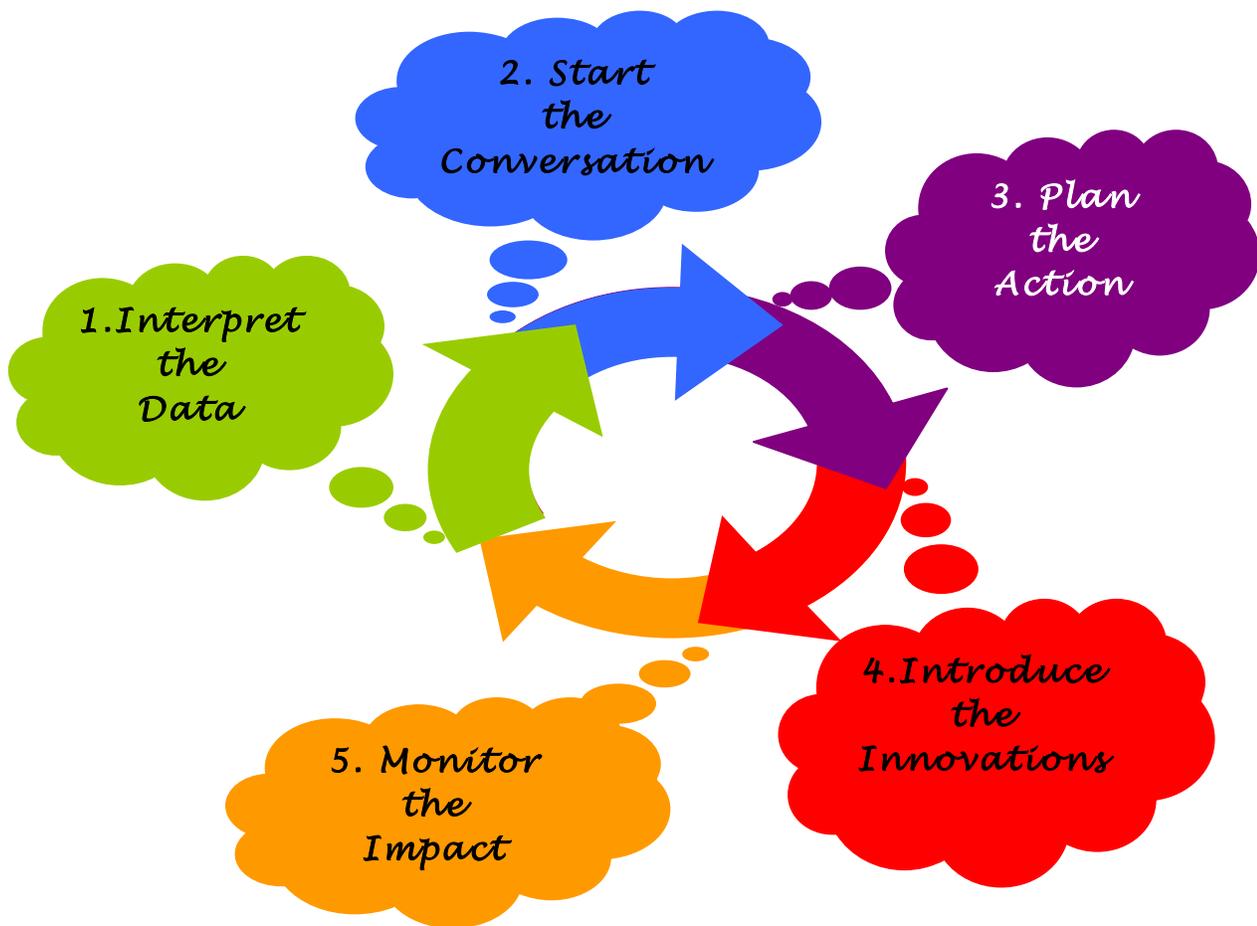
# Moving

from

toward

# Assessment Transformation

The ultimate purpose of this assessment is to provide an information base for moving toward a shared vision of how the congregation can become an asset-rich faith nurturing community for children, youth and families. There are five basic steps in the transformation process:



Our intent in this section is only to give a brief overview of this process. There are several excellent resources that will help you navigate this process and we have listed some of these at the end of this manual. Our task here is to explain the purpose of each step briefly and give some suggestions for how each step might look in your congregation. First, however, there are a few basic principles of the process, which are important at every step.

## Principles of the Process

**Engage Youth as Active Partners.** Engaging youth as partners boosts authenticity and energy. Inviting children and youth to play a role in the process sends an important message to young people and the whole congregation that their contributions matter. Moreover children and youth can provide a unique and vital perspective as you move from assessment to transformation.

**Focus on Building Strengths, Not Just Solving Problems.** What are the sources of strength for young people in your congregations? How can those strengths be celebrated and enhanced? Focusing on strengths doesn't eliminate the need to address problems, but it does provide a new perspective and new tools to face problems.

**Free People to Participate.** People are much more likely to be involved in planning and change if they feel comfortable, valued, and inspired. They must be assured--and see evidence--that what they say and do will be respected and considered worthwhile. Participants should feel free to voice ideas in opposition to something already spoken. All opinions, ideas, and thoughts need to be respected. Participation needs to be a positive, energizing experience.

**Rally Broad Support.** Ownership by people involved in change is crucial to its adoption. Although involving many people in creating an inspiring vision is difficult, it's also an enormously valuable and powerful experience. It's especially important to involve people who have a stake in the change or will be asked to implement it. This includes adults who are not parents as well as those who are.

**Recognize Both Formal and Informal Means of Change.** Some transformations can be structured formal decisions. One example of a formal decision might be a congregation's governing board deciding to change the worship times to accommodate the needs of children. But not all of the important changes can be made through formal channels. Whether or not adults make an effort to learn young people's names and talk to them is something that requires a personal attitude changes not just a decision by congregational leaders. Take advantage of the process to work for both types of transformation.

**Link the Process to Your Congregation's Style and Traditions.** This is a generic process. Infuse it with the rituals and traditions of your faith. Use approaches that have been shown to work in your own setting.

**Find the Balance between Deliberation and Action.** It is important to take time to listen and learn as a group, to come to a shared vision and create a plan. It is also important to take action. It may be helpful to think of planning as your right foot and action as your left. The best way to move forward is - right-left-right-left. You'll quickly become tired if you just hop on your right foot.

**Aim for Transformation.** The goal of this survey process is transformation of the congregation toward the shared vision based on what your congregation learned from the survey data. It is important to distinguish between transformation and implementation. Implementation is the process of carrying through with the plan. Implementation will be an important part of transforming your congregation, but there is more to transformation. Transformation is less about getting individual tasks done than it is about getting toward the vision. Transformation is a gradual process. It will not be finished when your plan is implemented, and you will need to make new plans to keep going.

\*These Principles are partially based on *Your Congregation's FUTURE: A Faith-Centered Planning process--A Guide for Congregational Leaders* (Search Institute 1996), Gene Roehlkepartain, *An Asset Approach to Positive Community* (Search Institute, 2001), and Merton P. Strommen, *The Innovative Church* (Augsburg Books, 1997).

## Step 1: Interpret the Data

The survey does not tell you what to do. It only tells you what people said. The congregation needs to interpret the data to decide what it means and what is most significant before taking action. Among other things, you will need to decide what information is important and what is less important and why. A few tips to help you as you interpret the data:

- **Involve multiple stakeholders.** Make sure everyone is given an opportunity to help in the interpretive process.
- **Don't hide the data.** Hiding some or all of the data, will likely fuel distrust and suspicion. It could jeopardize the process and harm the congregation. If there are difficult or controversial findings, find ways to deal with them thoughtfully sensitively and honestly.
- **Focus on strengths as well as weaknesses.** It is easy to see challenges where the desired future seems far from current perceptions. However, make sure that you celebrate the strengths of the congregation that were uncovered in the assessment and look for ways to build on them.
- **Ask questions.** What confirms what you know? What surprises you? What does not make much sense? Are different people seeing different things in the congregation? What do the data mean?
- **Work in small groups.** Small groups ensure that one person's voice will not steer the congregation's conversation in one direction.
- **Look for themes.** Significant patterns in the data over several items may call for more attention than one item by itself. Let small groups work together to identify themes that emerge.
- **Avoid using data to point fingers.** Emphasize that everyone--not just leaders or youth or parents or any other group--has responsibility for the culture and climate of the congregation.

## Step 2: Start the Conversation

After a wide range of people have given their input and a shared interpretation of the data begins to emerge, it is important to communicate the major themes more broadly. Getting people talking about the findings will help build interest, confirm hunches, raise any additional questions that were missed, and build consensus around the interpretation. Starting a conversation about the emerging interpretation also gives the congregations some time and energy to think about the shape of the future. This can be an important time to incubate informal change processes. Here are some suggestions for starting the conversation:

- **Use means of communication appropriate for your congregation.** The more ways you get the word out the better. Try newsletters, announcements in worship, committees, and presentations by young people and adults to different groups in the congregation.
- **Remember and remind others that this is just the beginning of the conversation.** There is room for input and discussion about what the results of the survey mean, though you are moving toward a shared understanding.
- **Invite articulate and committed youth, parents and other adults to share the findings.** Their voices and perspectives will be respected. Also encourage influential leaders (formal and informal) to share the findings and their importance to the future of your congregation.

### Step 3: Plan the Action

This step moves from your understanding of the data to decisions about what your congregation will do more formally and intentionally. Planning together as a congregation is a shared process involving many stakeholders. There will likely be more than one phase in the planning process. Some important pieces include:

- identify a shared vision;
- translate vision into objectives with measurable goals;
- develop strategies to reach your goals; and
- agree on specific steps noting who will do what, when, and how.

It is important to find a planning process that will fit your needs. Some helpful resources are listed at the end of this manual, and here are some of suggestions to help you plan:

- **Agree on a process before you start.** Make sure that everyone involved understands the process and is willing to participate.
- **Avoid jumping to program ideas right away.** It can be tempting to read the data and have all sort of ideas for action. Try to save those ideas until there is agreement on the congregation's shared vision for the future and how to get there. Plans worth the investment of time and energy should be able to move the congregation closer to the vision and efficiently use available resources.
- **Start with pictures of the future.** Vision is sometimes an intimidating word. Start by trying to create pictures of the ideal future. In addition to creating word pictures, you may even want to try drawing exercises or other artistic means to allow people to express their visions for the future.
- **Don't try to do it all at once.** In many cases it makes sense to separate the vision part of the process from the planning stages. This allows you to focus your first discussions on "where are we going?" before deciding "how will we get there?" Spreading the process out over different times gives you a chance to communicate the vision and build excitement. Having more than one meeting may allow more people to be involved as well.
- **Communicate the vision again and again in new ways.** After you have a shared vision established, giving people many chances to hear the same message expressed differently will help the vision to stick. Creative redundancy as you share the vision will also generate excitement, plant seeds of commitment, and inspire movement toward the vision that cannot be accomplished with a formal planning process alone.
- **Consider using existing congregational structures.** You do not necessarily need to create a new group or committee to do the planning, though there are situations in which that would be best. However involving existing councils, boards, committees, or teams may help energize their work. Either way, make sure that you involve multiple stakeholders including young people.
- **Make plans that build on your strengths.** Note the things that you are doing well and imagine how you can expand their impact into areas of weakness.
- **Set yourself up for success by making short-, medium-, and long-term goals.** A few "early wins" will help sustain momentum for achieving your long-range goals.

## Step 4: Introduce the Innovations

An essential ingredient in transformation is actually trying some new things. There is some risk involved. New plans may fail. However, it is also possible that implementing a new idea may be more successful than you ever imagined. Even failure may be more useful than you think if you use what you learn to plan new innovations. The important thing is to try something new and here are a few suggestions as you do:

- **Find the balance between planning and action.** Be careful not to get tied up so much in planning that no actual changes are ever made. Keep planning and acting and planning and acting.
- **Choose a strength-based approach.** Build on your strengths. Make the most of what you are all ready doing. Add your strengths to your plan.
- **Learn as you go.** Use your new knowledge to adapt the plan so that you get where you want to be.
- **Add to your toolbox.** Stay on the lookout for new resources and new opportunities inside and outside of the congregation to help you advance toward your vision.

## Step 5: Monitor the Impact

The key question at this stage is how are we doing? It is a question that you will want to ask yourselves at various points along the way. Take time to celebrate the progress that you have made as well as time to consider or reconsider plans for moving toward the vision. Over time your environment will change, there may be new people in your congregation, new problems to solve, or new resources available to you. Changes in your environment may require some changes in your plans or even changes in your vision. These are some suggestions to help monitor the impact:

- **Plan to evaluate.** When you are in the planning stage, decide when you will evaluate your progress and reconsider the situation. Think about how and how regularly you will check to make sure that you are following through with the agreed upon plan. Schedule a time to evaluate the impact of the plan after two to three years.
- **Evaluate to plan.** Return to the planning stage and think how your plan can be amended in light of changes that have occurred in and around your congregation.
- **Consider assessing the congregation again.** Do you need more than a new plan? Decide whether the vision is still alive for your congregation or whether a new vision is needed. If the vision does not seem to fit with the congregation's needs, consider retaking the assessment survey and gathering new information about the congregation.

We hope that these principles, steps and suggestions will help your congregation use what you learn through the assessment to more effectively build on your strengths to provide young people with the things they need to succeed. As you build your vision and carry out your plans we hope that you will visit the Search Institute web site: [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org) for more ideas and resources to support your efforts.

## SEARCH INSTITUTE RESOURCES FOR CONGREGATIONS

*Search Institute has created some resources that will help you in the transformation process. These and other resources for congregations can be ordered from Search Institute's online catalog <http://www.search-institute.org/catalog/>*

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