



# Identifying Resource Concerns

Step 1

USDA • Natural Resources Conservation Service • July 1999

## What is it?

The resource concerns identified by the Planning Committee will guide the entire planning process. The inventory work of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) will focus on these resource concerns. The TAC will identify potential management strategies for the concerns, and those strategies which the Planning Committee endorses will be promoted in the final management plan.

## When do we do it?

After a committee of representative stakeholders has been formed, the committee has discussed the procedural issues that will guide the planning process, and they've defined the planning area, then it is time to identify the resource concerns. Identifying resource concerns is the first step in the Nine-Step, Three-Phase Planning Process.

## How do we do it?

Use a facilitator to help the Planning Committee prepare a list of the resource concerns in the planning area. As always, the facilitator should be viewed by the Planning Committee as a neutral party. For this reason, a Planning Committee member should never facilitate the discussion about resource concerns, and sometimes local field staff should refrain from facilitating. Instead, try using a trained facilitator from outside the planning area. During the discussion of resource concerns, it is usually adequate to have the discussion facilitator also record all the ideas, though a separate recorder can be used.

Here is the process for the facilitator to use with the Planning Committee:

1.) Begin by explaining to the Planning Committee why they are identifying their concerns for the planning area, and how these concerns will guide the work of the Technical Advisory Committee and the entire planning process.

2.) Next, explain they will use a technique called "brainstorming" to prepare a list of resource concerns. Give an overview of the brainstorming process:

### Brainstorming...

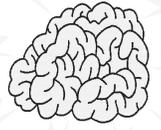
- Effectively gets people "out of the box," and allows them to think more creatively
- Energizes the group
- Generates many good ideas

“ Each member takes turns identifying a concern in the planning area, until there are no new concerns. The Planning Committee avoids lengthy discussion about the merits of each person's concerns. Instead, everyone identifies all their concerns no matter how trivial or controversial. Then, they rank the entire list so those concerns that are most important to most members of the group will be addressed in the planning process. Also, at this time the Planning Committee should avoid discussing ways to solve the problems identified by the group. The primary role of the TAC is to identify potential solutions to the concerns for the Planning Committee's consideration, so lengthy discussions about how to solve the problems will occur later in the planning process. ”

3.) Review some basic groundrules with the Planning Committee before the brainstorming begins. The committee should add any additional groundrules they think are important. If the Planning Committee veers off track during the discussion (for example, if they begin to debate someone's ideas), the facilitator intervenes and reminds the group of the groundrules. Here's a list of commonly used groundrules:

#### Brainstorming Ground Rules...

- Leave rank and status at the door
- No criticism or evaluation
- Quantity and exaggeration is welcome
- Record all ideas
- Everyone participates
- There are no wrong ideas
- Build on the ideas of others



4.) After the brainstorming process and the groundrules are explained, the facilitator asks each person to silently write down all their concerns for the planning area. The facilitator asks "What are your concerns in this area?" After people stop writing, go around the room and ask each person to share their ideas. Record each idea on a flip chart in the front of the room. Here are some tips for effective recording of ideas:

- Always record ideas in the participant's words only. The facilitator/recorder should never paraphrase. Instead, ask participants to paraphrase their own ideas so the recorder can write it succinctly.
- Leave plenty of space on each page so that similar ideas can be written together.
- Set up several flip charts so the recorder can write on multiple sheets of paper with less page turning.
- As ideas are recorded on the flip chart pages, have someone besides the facilitator (e.g., field staff) post pages on the walls where the Planning Committee can see them.

5.) After there are no new ideas, the entire list of ideas is reviewed and similar ideas grouped together. Always ask the person who offered an idea whether it fits with another idea before merging them. Work with the Planning Committee to ensure the final list has discrete ideas which do not overlap with any other ideas. Also make sure everyone understands the meaning of each idea. Put letters beginning A, B, C, etc. next to each idea or cluster of merged ideas so it's clear to everyone which ideas comprise the list of concerns. Avoid using numbers. Then, review the list to see how many concerns were identified. At their discretion, the Planning Committee may wish to narrow down and prioritize their list. As a general rule, about ten or fewer concerns is usually manageable.

6.) To reduce the list of concerns, each person identifies their top concerns and a tally is made of the top scoring ideas for the entire committee. This is called the "Nominal Group Process" and it helps the Planning Committee quickly reach consensus on their top concerns. If the committee wants a list of the five most important concerns, each person will identify their top five concerns. If they want ten concerns, each person identifies their top ten concerns. The Nominal Group Process is an effective way of eliminating less critical concerns while avoiding contentious discussion.

To use the Nominal Group Process, give each person the appropriate number of sticky dots (i.e., five or ten dots, depending on the size of the desired final list of concerns). Give the group five or ten minutes to privately write down the letters of the concerns that are most important to them. When everyone is finished, have them place their sticky dots next to those concerns on the posted flip charts. Add up the number of "votes" each idea received. Eliminate low scoring ideas. Review the final list with the Planning Committee, and review how the list will be used.

## The Next Step

After the resource concerns are identified, the Planning Committee will indicate their objectives or "Desired Future Conditions" for each concern. The Planning Committee and the field staff will also identify technical experts who can address their concerns as part of a Technical Advisory Committee. During this period, the Planning Committee may also want to conduct a tour of the watershed or planning area, if they haven't already done so. Refer to the fact sheet about "Conducting Rapid Resource Appraisal Tours" for ideas.