

# The Brownfields Town Meeting Role-Play

### INTRODUCTION TO THE ROLE-PLAY\*

This activity presents a **town meeting**, with students acting out the roles of **stakeholders**. A brownfield site in the town of “Anyplace, USA” is used for the environmental decisionmaking scenario, but any environmental issue affecting any town could be adapted for discussion.



The activity generates discussion and planning for redevelopment of a brownfield site and gives the student an insight into participatory environmental decisionmaking. (It can be modified slightly to generate discussion for any type of strategic planning.) This method has been used effectively in real-world brownfields workshops. “Strategies for Job Development and Training in Brownfields Communities.”\*\*

### SUGGESTED INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURE

Students review the “Anyplace, USA” brownfields [scenario](#) and [overview](#) information located in the [Handouts](#) section. (If you have a local brownfields site, you may want to customize the scenario to take advantage of that location.) The students then **assume the role** of a particular stakeholder. You may have them choose the role themselves, or assign them a particular part from the choices in the scenario section. Certainly, you don’t want all the students to be residents or all of them to be business owners. You want the students to represent a variety of people in the town of Anyplace.

The stakeholder choices vary widely in complexity. The decision of which roles to use in the town meeting role-play depends on the experience of the learner participating in the activity. For instance, high school students may not be familiar with some of the corporate stakeholder roles, corporate trainees may not be familiar with the government official stakeholder roles, and so on. For the instructor’s reference, the stakeholder roles are provided in the order of simple to more complex. (In other words, Stakeholder #1 is a role with which the majority

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\* This activity has been adapted from a workshop originally prepared for the NIEHS Trainer’s Exchange by Laborers-AGC Education and Training Fund.

\*\* “Strategies for Job Development and Training in Brownfields Communities” Workshops conducted by Hazardous Materials Training and Research Institute (HMTRI), sponsored by EPA.

## Brownfields in a box

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of participants would be familiar, while Stakeholder #20 would require a more experienced participant or some career research).

In this activity, you can choose from (but are not limited to) a variety of stakeholder roles, such as:

- High school student
- Apartment building tenant
- Citizen
- Homeowner
- Fisherman
- Farmer
- Realtor
- Environmentalist
- Business owner
- Banker
- Coordinator of community-based programs
- Career counselor
- Insurance representative
- Local government official
- Owner-operator of small environmental remediation company
- Local college representative
- State official of the Department of the Environment
- Labor union training supervisor
- Land development assessor
- Bankruptcy court officer
- Environmental scientist

Impress upon the students that this is a role-play activity. They should try to see the scenario from the **point of view** of their assigned stakeholder, rather than from their own real-life outlook or opinion.

After the stakeholders are determined, divide students into teams by forming **coalitions** and grouping similar people together (business persons, scientific community, residents, etc.). These teams will:

- Choose a recorder to write down the coalition's consensus proposal (on the Recorder Sheet).
- Research brownfields topics from their team's perspective.
- Discuss and develop a proposal for the given Brownfield scenario.
- Discuss a strategy for presenting the proposal to the town as a whole.
- Choose a spokesperson to present during the report-back session with the town.

## Brownfields in a box

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During this small group discussion, the instructor should walk from group to group to assess the progress and ensure that participants are on track. The instructor answers any questions and makes suggestions.

Finally, the coalitions come together for a simulated **town meeting**. Each team makes its presentation (the report-back session) on its vision for the brownfield site. It is not likely that all teams will reach the same conclusions. After the presentations, discuss the various proposals and reach consensus on the redevelopment initiative for the Anyplace brownfield site.

To facilitate the discussion and keep the meeting on track, the instructor conducts the meeting as Anyplace's impartial mayor, **Mayor Perkins**. Use the blank stakeholder form and fill in information about yourself in the role of Mayor Perkins. Use your real-world background to fill in the information. Use this information to introduce yourself to the students/stakeholders at the beginning of the town meeting.

### **ALTERNATIVE SUGGESTIONS**

The Town Meeting Role-Play activity can be used effectively for a variety of groups, including:

- High school students
- Corporate employees
- Government employees
- Teachers
- Trainers
- Citizens, residents, community members

Keep in mind that the town meeting role-play is designed to function as a cross-disciplinary tool. Many different departments can join in this activity, or make use of it on their own, including:

- Biology
- Botany
- Business
- Chemistry
- Civics
- Communications
- Economics
- English
- Environment
- Environmental Justice
- Finance
- Law
- Mathematics
- Speech
- Statistics
- Toxicology
- Zoology

Use the role-play as a creative distance learning activity. You might team with one or more other schools, with each school serving as a different coalition. Make your presentations through whatever communications medium is available to you, such as videotape or e-mail attachments. Remember that discussion and consensus may take longer when communicating at a distance.

Invite another instructor, industry contact, coworker, or student to be the Anyplace mayor and conduct the town meeting.

Depending on the size of the group to whom you are presenting the activity, you may need to customize the scenario and stakeholder roles. For a small group, the members could meet as a committee representing different interests, rather than a town as a whole; or participants can play dual stakeholder roles.

Instead of using Anyplace, USA as a scenario, customize the activity to fit the specifics of your actual town or region. Use existing sites, the names of real businesses and elected government officials, etc.

If you have an actual brownfield site in your area to study, have the students role-play and present their findings and conclusions to actual members of the community (parents, educators, peers, local politicians, etc.). It's possible that the students' ideas for the necessary outcome could be implemented; for example, turning an abandoned lot into a playground.

Students can be involved in the actual community effort to bring the project to completion. They can:

- Poll the community for input.
- Research other brownfields programs to compare problems, issues, and solutions.
- Perform fundraising.
- Assist in acquiring information for permits.
- Help with the cleanup of noncontaminated sites.

## **SUGGESTED SYLLABUS**

### **Objectives**

After completion of this activity, participants will be able to:

- Determine who stakeholders are and how brownfields redevelopment will benefit each within a given scenario.
- Recognize that elements of disparity may arise from the different stakeholder points of view.
- Recognize the necessity of team effort and consensus for successful brownfields redevelopment.
- Research, generate, and present an informal (oral or written) persuasive proposal.
- Identify challenges for brownfields redevelopment.
- List some necessary resources in terms of time, energy, dollars, and commitment.

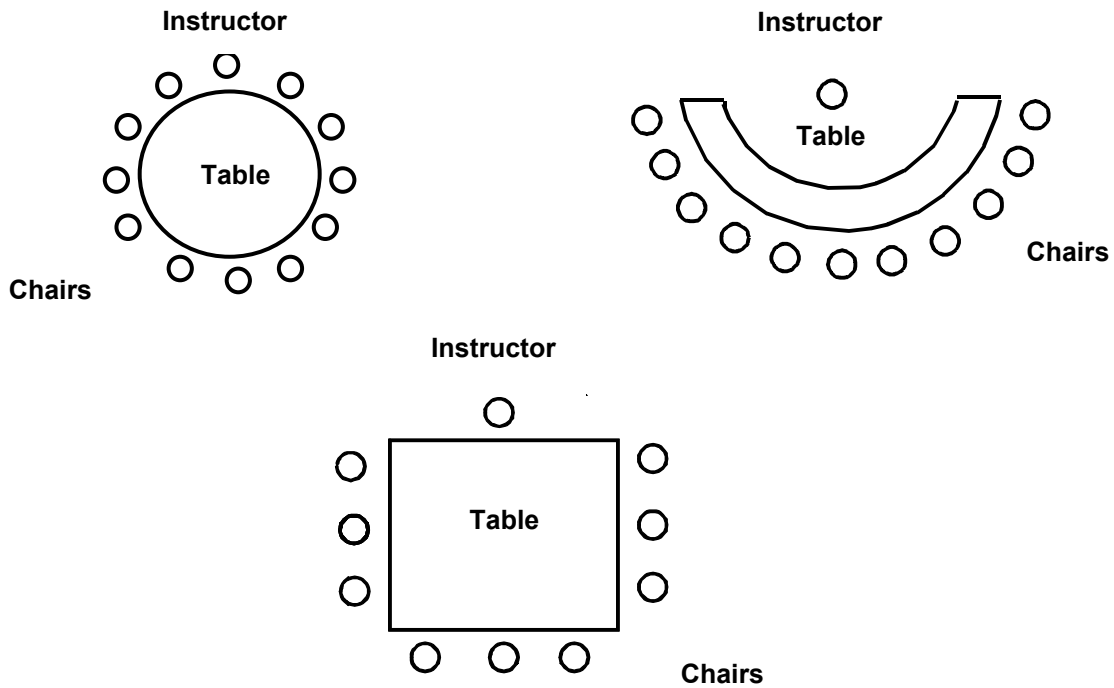
### **Classroom setup**

The room used for this role-play activity should be set up so that all participants can easily view one another when speaking, and can separate easily into small groups. The specific setup will depend on class size and facility/equipment availability. (See below for ideal setups.)

Necessary equipment/material includes:

- Stakeholder role handouts from this manual
- Recorder handout from this manual
- Flipchart, bulletin board, or writable overhead transparency (something that everyone can view, to write out coalition instructions and to record the town meeting consensus)

## Classroom setup (continued)



### **Minimum time requirement**

Divide the activity into the following segments:

• Description of town meeting role-play	5 min
• Overview of activity objectives	5 min
• Participant review of stakeholder role/scenario handout	10 min
• Small group discussion	
o Election of group leader and recorder	5 min
o Coalition group discussion	15 min
• Full group discussion	
o Stakeholder introductions	10 min
o Coalition presentations (report-back session)	20 min
o Town meeting discussion	45 min
• Summary	5 min
Total	2 hours

NOTE: If additional time is available, allocate as much as possible to the town meeting discussion.

### **Summary**

The instructor should use the last five minutes to summarize the work of the group. Stress that brownfields redevelopment is a complex process and needs involvement and communication from all stakeholders.

# **HANDOUTS**

## **SUPPLEMENTAL BROWNFIELDS INFORMATION**



## OVERVIEW OF BROWNFIELDS REDEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

**Brief review.** Brownfields are “abandoned, idled , or under-used industrial and commercial facilities where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination.” These sites do not qualify as toxic waste National Priority List sites under the Superfund legislation, because they do not pose a serious public health risk to the community.

Yet the stigma of contamination and legal barriers to redevelopment cause the community’s perception that these properties are undesirable. Businesses do not buy the land and sites remain roped off, unproductive, and vacant. Developers build in “green” areas outside the city, while the urban centers continue to deteriorate. Beginning in November 1993, the federal government has taken a series of actions to encourage communities to clean up and redevelop brownfields to return them to productive use in these communities.

**Creating a national model.** In November 1993, the President’s Brownfields Economic Redevelopment Initiative was announced. As of mid-1998, the federal government had awarded over \$42 million to states, cities, towns, counties, and tribes to help communities clean up and redevelop brownfields sites—abandoned, contaminated properties, often found in distressed areas—and return them to thriving centers of prosperity. Each Brownfield Pilot Project is intended to be a model for revitalizing urban contaminated properties.

**Providing startup (seed) money.** The Brownfields grants are intended to be used as seed money to help:

- Assess contamination at abandoned inner-city sites
- Involve community residents in all aspects of assessment, cleanup, and redevelopment (including review of how the land will be used in the future)
- Leverage other public and private funds to attract economic activity
- Resolve liability concerns
- Serve as models for other communities seeking effective redevelopment approaches

**Removing the barriers to development.** In January 1995, the federal government also removed some of the legal obstacles to development of brownfield sites by taking 27,000 sites off the Superfund inventory. The Superfund inventory, or the National Priorities List (NPL), is a list of sites that are contaminated with toxic waste and are public health risks. By taking the low priority sites off the list, the federal government has relieved potential developers of unnecessary red tape, has removed the stigma of contamination, and has set the sites on track for redevelopment.

**Tax incentives.** Shortly after the State of the Union speech in 1995, the President expanded the Brownfields program to provide targeted tax incentives to businesses that purchase and clean up these sites. The tax incentive broadens the effort, accelerates cleanup, and provides the financial means so that businesses will be able to expense the cleanup cost over a shorter period of time. This provides a significant financial incentive to restore these areas, so that they can again produce jobs and increase the tax base in communities across the country. Cities and states across the country have also enacted legislation to spur redevelopment of brownfields areas.

**Current activities.** Instructor should discuss any recent and/or pending developments in brownfields areas. The EPA's Brownfields Website provides current information (<http://www.epa.gov/swerosps/bf/>).

**HANDOUTS**

**SCENARIO AND  
STAKEHOLDER ROLES**

## **ANYPLACE, USA—SCENARIO**

### **The Town**

Anyplace, USA, a fictional community, is situated on the banks of the Snake River, which feeds into Rustic Lake. Anyplace started out as a coal-mining and agricultural community. After the coal mines played out, the community still thrived with the local industries (plating works, farm implement manufacturer, textile manufacturing, etc.). When the interstate highway was built 10 miles north of town, the downtown area started dying out. In the 1980s, the industries started downsizing, and in some cases went completely out of business. Much of the property near the river is on the tax delinquency rolls. The city or county now owns an area with a cemetery, an abandoned factory, several vacant lots, two old gas stations (now out of business), and a few condemned residences. In addition, there are a few privately-owned businesses either out-of-business or under-utilized. This area is a “brownfields” site, the future of which the community needs to address.

### **Brownfields**

Brownfields are “abandoned, idled, or under-used industrial and commercial facilities where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination.” These sites do not qualify as toxic waste sites under the Superfund legislation, because they do not pose a serious public health risk to the community.

Yet the stigma of contamination and legal barriers to redevelopment cause the community’s perception that these properties are undesirable. Businesses do not buy the land and sites remain roped off, unproductive, and vacant. Developers build in “green” areas outside the city, while the urban centers continue to deteriorate. The federal government has a program called the Brownfields Economic Redevelopment Initiative that provides education and assistance (including startup funding) to communities to clean up and redevelop brownfields, in order to return them to productive use in these communities. The town of Anyplace is in the process of applying for one of these grants, but must first decide what use to make of the brownfield properties.

### **Potential Brownfields Concerns**

Below are various points which are often concerns with brownfields areas. You may want to consider these when playing your stakeholder role.

- Environmental contamination
- Unused valuable land
- Environmental justice

- High unemployment
- Higher incidence of crime compared to other parts of the town
- Inability to attract new business due to real or perceived problems of the area (e.g., high costs to tear down and rebuild, liability for environmental contamination, problems borrowing money on property)
- Possibility of higher incidence of illness to residents because of environmental contamination or increased chance of disease from pests (rats, etc.) or garbage.
- Funding for remediation
- City beautification or civic pride

## **The Meeting**

The mayor of Anyplace has called a town meeting to discuss what should be done with the town's brownfields area. The mayor has directed that the first brownfield action will be directed towards the site of an abandoned manufacturing plant, which sits on a 200-acre tract of land adjoining Anyplace. The attendees of the next town meeting will represent a variety of stakeholders (persons who will be impacted by what is done with the property) in the brownfields project. As one of those stakeholders, you need to meet with other members of the community and begin planning for the redevelopment of the manufacturing site.

This property is now the responsibility of the town, due to nonpayment of property taxes. The land contains the factory (currently not in use) and borders a family-owned farm. The Snake River runs through this 200-acre parcel. The Snake is a medium-sized river that could provide public recreation and use. The land is currently zoned for light industry.

Prior to the town meeting for the Anyplace Brownfields Project, the mayor's office has provided the following questions to be used in the planning process. You should come to the meeting prepared to discuss the questions from your own point of view, and to reach a consensus on the questions with other stakeholders. **The objective of the town meeting is to make a recommendation for use of the property.** The recommendation will be presented to the citizens of Anyplace as a referendum in the next city election.

## **Planning Questions**

Each stakeholder (or stakeholder group) should discuss and record these questions prior to the start of the town meeting.

1. Who are the stakeholders for this project?
2. What does consensus mean to you?
3. What process can you use to come to consensus?
4. How would the redevelopment benefit each of the stakeholders?
5. What two elements of redevelopment do you believe are most important and should be built into this project?
6. What is the ideal outcome, as stakeholders go through the process of arriving at a consensus?
7. What steps or activities must the stakeholders take to reach the ideal outcome?
8. What current activities can be built on?
9. What forces or factors in the community might work against redeveloping the property?
10. What resources inside and outside our system (e.g., time, energy, dollars, commitment) could be used to move toward the goal of redevelopment of the property?

### **STAKEHOLDER #1: High School Student**

#### **Your background:**

You are president of the Student Council at Anyplace High School. Many of your fellow high school students have volunteered to help with cleanup efforts for the Anyplace Brownfields Project. They have asked you to represent them in this effort.

### **STAKEHOLDER #2: Apartment Building Tenant**

#### **Your background:**

You live in the apartment building across from the Anyplace courthouse. You've noticed lately that high school students have been congregating in front of the nearby condemned houses every day after school. You and your neighbors have discussed the nuisance of the litter they sometimes leave behind.

### **STAKEHOLDER #3: Citizen**

#### **Your background:**

You are a citizen of Anyplace and have lived all your life in the area near the 200 acres involved in this project. Your father worked in one of the factories that closed eight years ago. He died at the age of 62 after a short, but devastating battle with cancer. You worked as a machinist at a nearby factory until it closed two years ago. You have been unemployed since then. Two of your children are nearing completion of high school and would like to attend college within the next three years.

### **STAKEHOLDER #4: Homeowner**

#### **Your background:**

As a homeowner with small children living near one of the factories in town, you have often wondered about the healthiness of your neighborhood. Since the factory closed, you worry less, but lately you've seen children playing in the empty parking lots of the factory and it has reawakened your interest in the possible health effects of manufacturing facilities.

### **STAKEHOLDER #5: Fisherman**

#### **Your background:**

The stress from your career as a police officer has always been greater than that in the average person's life. To relax and maintain your perspective, you enjoy fishing every weekend when the weather permits. You have been fishing in the Snake River since you were a young boy. You have noticed that the river doesn't seem as clean as it did when you were small.

### **STAKEHOLDER #6: Farmer**

#### **Your background:**

Your farm has been in your family for three generations and it looks like it will continue to stay in the family—your oldest daughter has always shown an interest in the land. Since she declared Agricultural Technology as her major in college last year, she has been raising questions about land management practices on the farm. She has convinced you to attend the town meeting with her.

### **STAKEHOLDER #7: Realtor**

#### **Your background:**

You have an out-of-town client who wants to purchase a commercial property for speculation and long-term investment. The brownfields sites in Anyplace are reasonably priced, but you aren't sure if contamination is present so you don't want to show them to your client yet. If you can't learn more about the potential liability of the sites, you will start looking in the rural areas for a property suitable for commercial construction.



**STAKEHOLDER #8: Environmentalist**

**Your background:**

As president of the local chapter of the Sierra Club, you have organized and promoted several activities to promote public awareness of the environmental impact of the facilities and property under consideration. The Snake River is part of the migratory flight path of several different species of birds (none on the endangered or threatened lists) and has been documented as a migration stopover area. You have recommended the parcel be returned to the public as a wildlife refuge area. You may be agreeable to using some of the area for public access to water recreation facilities.

**STAKEHOLDER #9: Business Owner**

**Your background:**

You own a small gift shop in the downtown area and are chairperson of the Anyplace Chamber of Commerce. Your fellow business owners are concerned about the number of small businesses that have left the downtown neighborhood in the past decade. And the Anyplace Gazette newspaper ran an article last month about the prospect of construction of a new mall just a mile from the city limits. The Chamber of Commerce members have asked you to present their concerns to the mayor at the upcoming town meeting.

**STAKEHOLDER #10: Banker**

**Your background:**

You are the Vice President of Commercial Lending at the Anyplace Bank and Trust. The bank has foreclosed on one of the brownfield properties. You need a property appraisal and you need an assurance for potential buyers that there is no contamination liability attached to the site.

**STAKEHOLDER #11: Coordinator of Community-Based Programs**

**Your background:**

For the past year, you have been program coordinator for all community-based programs within an EPA region with multiple brownfields pilot sites, including the town of Anyplace. Your duties include development of brownfields environmental justice programs in the region, including interaction/ liaison with the EPA, state, and other government organizations. One of your primary responsibilities is to ensure that the issue of environmental justice is considered fully in conjunction with each brownfield project. Your monetary resources are very limited.

**STAKEHOLDER #12: Career Counselor**

**Your background:**

You have been recently employed by a community-based organization that provides assistance to the unemployed and dislocated/displaced workers in Anyplace and the surrounding area. You were unemployed yourself for more than 20 months, after the company you worked for went out of business. You are responsible for providing support services and necessary training for these unemployed workers.

**STAKEHOLDER #13: Insurance Representative**

**Your background:**

You are Vice President for a large insurance company that holds insurance coverage on the Anyplace property under consideration. Your company has some liability, but it is not clear at what level. Your Board of Directors and CEO (Chief Executive Officer) have made it very clear that the company wants to remove this liability from their bottom line. The Board might consider spending as much as \$1 million to do so.

**STAKEHOLDER #14: Local Government Official**

**Your background:**

You are the supervisor for the County Administrator's office. The County Administrator normally attends all the town meetings in the county, but is recuperating from a serious illness. She has asked you to take her place at the upcoming town meeting and to answer questions about community services.

**STAKEHOLDER #15: Owner/Operator of Environmental Remediation Company**

**Your background:**

You own and operate a small minority-owned environmental remediation firm near Anyplace. Your primary work includes lead and asbestos abatement projects. Recently, you have also worked on land restoration projects. You currently have 14 employees, but your work projections indicate that you have only two more months of work for them. Your environmental engineers have estimated that the cleanup and demolition of the site will be between \$2 and \$3 million.

**STAKEHOLDER #16: Local College Representative**

**Your background:**

As Director of Development for Anyplace College, your responsibilities include recruiting students into your college's degree programs and community outreach programs. You have been with the college for less than two years. Anyplace College has seen declining enrollments in each of the last two years.

**STAKEHOLDER #17: State Official from the Department of the Environment**

**Your background:**

You are the Public Information Director for the state's Department of the Environment. As such you coordinate closely with the federal EPA to inform communities across the state on environmental issues. These issues range from wildlife protection to industrial pollution prevention technology. You have preliminary information for the citizens of Anyplace on the state funding process for property cleanup.

**STAKEHOLDER #18: Labor Union Training Supervisor**

**Your background:**

You are the training supervisor for a nonprofit, union-sponsored training trust fund. You are responsible for the development of training and educational programs for union members. You and the Anyplace local union business manager are jointly responsible for recruitment of new members into the apprenticeship program.

**STAKEHOLDER #19: Land Development Assessor**

**Your background:**

You are employed by a large consulting corporation as a land development assessor. You are responsible for providing assistance in the planning, development, and redevelopment of commercial properties in urban and rural communities. Your area of expertise is with brownfields sites. The town of Anyplace has recently hired your firm to assist the mayor's office in coordinating the Anyplace Brownfields Project efforts. You have been sent to Anyplace to consult on this project. You have estimated that the value of the land in question, after cleanup, is \$6 million.

**STAKEHOLDER #20: Bankruptcy Court Officer**

**Your background:**

As an officer of the Bankruptcy Court, you need assessments and valuations of any properties owned by the bankrupt manufacturing company whose property is being converted to the brownfield project. Your office has been contacted by several developers who are interested in environmentally clean properties.

**STAKEHOLDER #21: Scientist**

**Your background:**

You are a geoscientist (i.e., an earth scientist) compiling data for a research project for the “GEO Beyond 2000” planning effort by the National Science Foundation (NSF). The goal of this NSF effort is to develop a vision of the cutting-edge issues for the geosciences during the first decade of the 21st century. Your specific project is aimed at improving training for geoscience careers. Working closely with EPA scientific personnel, you are researching the scientific data collection used as the basis for brownfields projects. You are familiar with the scientific data that is being compiled to qualify the Anyplace sites as brownfields.

**RECORDER SHEET**

(Compile the consensus opinions of the town meeting attendees.)

1. Who are the stakeholders for this project?

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2. How could the development benefit each of the stakeholders?

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3. What two elements of redevelopment do you believe are most important and should be built into this project?

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4. What is the ideal outcome for this redevelopment in terms of process and product?

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5. What steps or activities must be undertaken to reach the ideal outcome?

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6. What current activities can be built on?

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7. What forces or factors will work against this initiative?

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8. What resources inside and outside our system (time, energy, dollars, commitment) could be used to move toward implementation of the initiative?

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