What is PATH Strategic Planning?

"PATH" is an acronym for "Planning Alternative Tomorrows With Hope"

PATH was developed by Jack Pearpoint, John O'Brien and Marsha Forest in 1994 as a planning and problem solving strategy for individuals and schools, and the process lends itself well to any group wanting to develop a collaborative and innovative strategic plan. The PATH process encourages participants to visualize a future based on shared values and beliefs. It includes the identification of specific timeframes and accomplishments as well as a description of current and potential resources.

PATH is a creative process for strategic planning. Using graphic facilitation, the PATH process helps individuals and organizations identify their vision of the "ideal future", and develop a plan for achieving it. The process emphasizes creativity and "dreaming big." It is energetic and interactive, involves all the key stakeholders, and challenges us to leave our assumptions about what is possible or impossible aside. Ideally, groups will allocate two to four hours to a PATH process.

A PATH Plan has 8 sections:

1. **The Dream.** This represents the "north star" or long-term goal, and provides direction to the plan. It is high level, and includes your ideals and values.

2. **The Goal.** This examines the dream, and builds a vision of what the dream would look like once manifested. We know that the more tangible a goal is, the more likely you are to achieve it. This is a creative process that encourages participants to imagine themselves in the future.

3. **The Present.** We create an honest description of the current situation. The outcome of this step is to identify the gap between the current situation and the goal; if there isn't enough of a stretch, we revisit the goal.
4. **The People.** This step identifies whom we need to include in the plan; who will support it and help us achieve success? Identify what their contribution can/will be. (As a follow up step, the individuals listed in this section must be approached for their support, and a plan around who will do that is developed.)

5. **Building Strength.** This step identifies what skills, knowledge and competencies will you need in order to achieve the work ahead?

6. **Next Steps.** We identify what needs to occur within the next 1-3 months to move us closer to our goal.

7. **Immediate Steps.** A specific plan identifying what will be done and by whom within the next month. This step identifies responsibilities and timelines.

8. **Commitment.** Individual identified in the last step explore what is needed for them to complete their task(s). This includes a discussion about potential barriers, supports, and blocks. This step is critical to ensure the work does not stall, and the group experiences success over the coming month.

The P.A.T.H. strategic planning process requires two to four hours of time and a safe, quiet, and comfortable space. It is vital that the time be free of distractions. Anyone who owns a beeper or cell phone must leave it behind and everyone must be beyond reach by the office!

- The space must have comfortable seating with refreshments freely available.
- Fifteen – twenty people is an optimal group size, but the process can work with fewer people, as well. With more than twenty, it is challenging to engage all the participants.