Timeline

3 hours

Maximum
of 15 people

Low

RESOURCES REQUIRED

MATERIALS:
- Room;
- Pencils;
- Tape;
- Chairs;
- Paper;
- "Post-it" notes; and
- Tables.

HUMAN RESOURCES:
- A facilitator.

SUMMARY

The timeline is a simple tool for participatory planning of actions to deal with a problem. This method makes it possible to unite members of a community to create a timeline that begins on the first day of the activity and spans several years, while achieving a shared vision.

Strengths ⬆

- Simple;
- Provides a "big picture" (actions, objectives, etc.);
- Allows the participants to project into the future;
- Makes it possible to prioritize the actions to be taken and to delegate them;
- The method is visual, dynamic, and extremely productive in terms of generating ideas;
- Makes it possible the confirm the reasonableness of certain suggestions; and
- Promotes dialogue.

Weaknesses ⬇

- Some "timeless" elements are more difficult than others to place on a timeline;
- The mental exercise of projecting into the distant future may be difficult for some participants; and
- Transcribing the information obtained can be laborious.

Information
Consultation
INVOLVEMENT
Collaboration
Empowerment

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this tool is to identify, through dialogue, the main steps to be taken to address the challenges facing the community. The timeline also makes the participants aware of the importance of taking action from Day 1, rather than postponing action.

WHEN TO USE

This method can be used by a citizens' group, community organization or municipality concerned about an issue. The timeline is particularly useful when carried out with people who have the power to make decisions or take action.

When used in combination with Open Space, the timeline method can achieve interesting results. It can also be used as an initial step toward other participatory tools.

The timeline is especially useful in dealing with change (climate or other) because it can project and describe the desired end goal. The principle is based on the getting the participants to ask themselves what must be done to achieve an objective within a specific time frame. The basic idea is to visualize a goal and then to back-track to identify what must be done from Day 1 to achieve that goal.

BEFORE THE ACTIVITY

Estimated preparation time: 5 hours

1- Choosing and issue and logistics
The organizers must identify the issue that will be the focus of this exercise. They must also reserve a room that is large enough to accommodate the participants, with sufficient wall space to put up the timeline.

2- Recruiting participants
The organizers must then recruit participants that have a stake in this exercise. The exercise must be carried out with participants who are aware of the issues surrounding the chosen topic, that is, participants that are already concerned about the problem.

3- Preparing the visualization exercise
The facilitator must write a short text to guide the participants through the initial visualization exercise. The following sample text can be adapted.

"I invite you to close your eyes and imagine yourself walking in the streets of [municipality x]. The year is 2030 and [municipality x] has successfully managed the transition to a resilient future on all levels. How do you feel? What do the buildings around you look like? Are things different? Are you alone? Are there children around you? What are you eating? What kind of job do you have in this future world? You meet an older person who has lived through this transition. Speak to him; listen to him share his personal experience. I now invite you to go back to your initial point of view. Continue observing this familiar yet new environment. Take a deep breath. When you feel ready, open your eyes and come back into the present."

This excerpt is adapted from a presentation by Starhawk in the book Transition Timeline: For a Local, Resilient Future, page 104.

4- Timeline
The day of the event, the organizers will draw a line on a board or a large sheet of paper, indicating "start" (current date) at one end and "end" (at least 20 to 30 years into the future) at the other, to delineate the period in question. The organizers may also divide the timeline into 5- or 10-year segments, etc. They will arrange the chairs in a way that allows all participants to see the timeline.

ACTIVITY

1. Explanation
The facilitator will explain how the method works and the issue that will be the focus of the activity, so that the participants clearly understand the goal of the activity. (10 minutes)

2. Visualization exercise
The facilitator will read the previously written text (above) to guide the participants through the visualization process. The participants will be asked to imagine a time in the future when the issue in question has been resolved. (15 minutes)

3. Discussion
The facilitator will allow some time for the participants who wish to do so to share their vision. During this phase, a person may be asked to note any points arising from the discussions that could be included as action items on the timeline. (25 minutes)

4. Identifying the objectives
During this phase, the participants will write the action items that arose from the discussions on pieces of paper or "post-it" notes. These will then be placed in the appropriate spot on the timeline. At that point, the facilitator can invite the participants to write down any other action items deemed relevant to achieving the ultimate objective (the vision). It is suggested that the participants work backwards, that is, that they start at the end goal to be achieved over the period of time (e.g., 20 years) and reflect on the actions that will have to be completed by the 15-, 10- and 5-year marks, for example. (25 minutes)

5. Creating the timeline
The facilitator invites the group to "play" with the ideas (pieces of paper), to move them around on the timeline, and to discuss the position of the items on the timeline with other group members. (60 minutes)

6. Sharing
By the end of the process, the participants should be able to reach a consensus on the timeline. The facilitator may propose that the stakeholders present identify commitments and expectations (which could be the starting point for a SENAT exercise. (20 minutes)

AFTER THE ACTIVITY

Depending on the initial objectives, the resulting timeline could be saved and updated over the years to develop an action plan. This step may require several meetings to allow for further reflection.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

- This activity does not work well with a large group.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE ORGANISME DE CONCERTATION POUR L'EAU DES BASSINS VERSANTS DE LA RIVIÈRE DU NICOLET (COPERNIC)
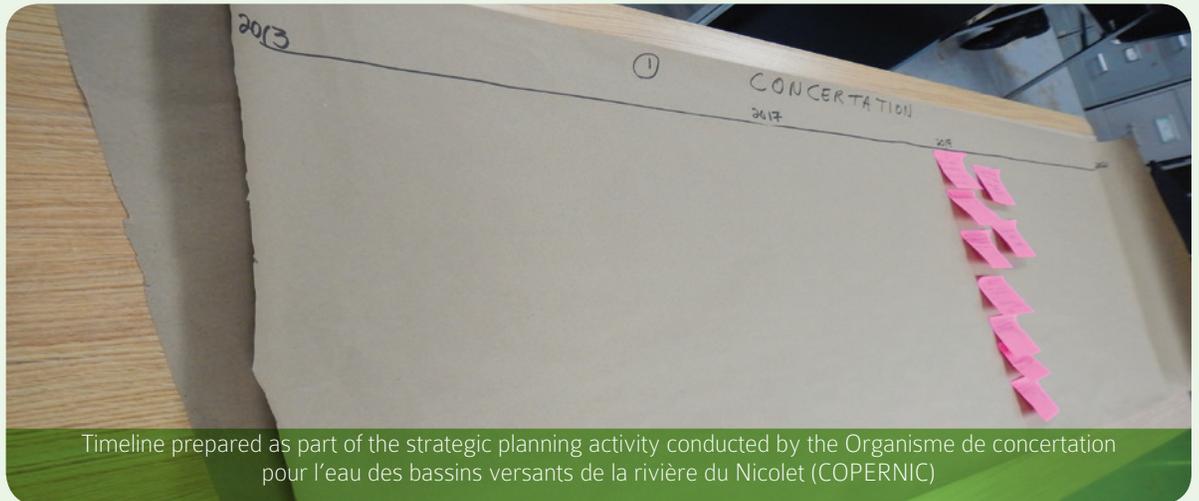
In 2013, the Organisme de concertation pour l'eau des bassins
versants de la rivière Nicolet (COPERNIC) used a timeline to develop different scenarios as part of its strategic planning. The tool was part of a broader approach, given that the organization's mission and vision had already been collectively defined. At the end of that meeting, a best-case scenario was elaborated.

A timeline was created based on this best-case scenario in order to break down the actions to be taken, to prioritize the previously identified issues, and to validate the best case scenario.

This activity was carried out by a dozen or so participants from COPERNIC's board of directors and its core members. These participants came from various sectors (agricultural, forestry, industrial, municipal and community). The activity was initiated by the president of COPERNIC.

Timeline prepared as part of the strategic planning activity conducted by the Organisme de concertation pour l'eau des bassins versants de la rivière du Nicolet (COPERNIC)

In this example, rather than carry out a visualization exercise, the organizers wrote a text describing the best-case scenario in seven years and then improved it with the participants.

Timeline prepared as part of the strategic planning activity conducted by the Organisme de concertation pour l'eau des bassins versants de la rivière du Nicolet (COPERNIC)

A timeline was drawn on a large sheet of paper, with marks at one, three and seven years (photo 1), and the key issues were written on pink "post-it" notes. By consensus of the participants, the issues were placed on the timeline.

This activity, which took three hours to complete, identified several strategic planning scenarios which were very useful for subsequent strategic-planning and group activities.

One of the problems with this activity was trying to take into account all the ideas presented, since numerous issues were identified and many action items were put on the timeline. About a dozen individuals participated in this exercise. The organizers felt this was an adequate number. The more participants there are, the more discussion there is and the more ideas are suggested and developed, thus making it a cumbersome activity.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

CCC-CURA: http://www.defisdescommunautescotieres.org/.

Aubé Séguin, I., 2012. "Développer une vision pour l'avenir, on s'y prend comment. Bulletin d'information no. 3". Available online in French only at http://www.agencesante09.gouv.qc.ca/Document.aspx?id=848&lang=FR.

Bryant, C., Plante, S., Séguin Aubé, I and A. Verville, 2011. "Le carrousel de la mobilisation - La mobilisation des acteurs et des citoyens". Available online in French only at http://www.defisdescommunautescotieres.org/public/documents/bibliotheque/carrousel%20de%20la%20mobilisation.pdf.

ROBVQ, "Boîte à outils sur la participation citoyenne". Available online in French only at: https://www.robvq.qc.ca/guides/consultation_publique.

Starhawk, 2009. Transition Timeline: for a local, resilient future. Shaun Chamberlin. Chelsea Green Publishing.

The Coastal Communities Challenges—Community-University Research Alliance (CCC-CURA) comprises a group of partners and researchers concerned with issues pertaining to resilience and governance for coastal and riverside communities in the context of climate change.

The Regroupement des organismes de bassins versants du Québec (ROBVQ) comprises some 40 watershed organizations operating in Quebec. It is a key partner of the Quebec government in the development of watershed management measures.