

OL 241 Assignment Two Special Discussion on Problem Definition

Online Learning: OL 241 Writing Your Climate Action Plan: <https://csd-i.org/climate-change/climate-change-action-plan-241/>

Center for Sustainable Development: <https://csd-i.org/>

Special Discussion on Problem Definition

The first three weeks give you time to digest a lot of new concepts. Here are some of them:

Important Overview of problems, underlying causes and negative impacts.

In this course you are going to jump right into a series of brand-new concepts. This course is about developing sustainable, fundable, impact-oriented projects – and you start right away in Assignment One. Here are some background ideas.

When you meet with your community to do the Ten-Seed needs assessment, they will present you with a mixture of needs, problems, underlying causes, grievances and negative impacts. Your job as a facilitator is to encourage them to say everything that is on their mind. Their Ten-Seed vote will prioritize the two or three things that are the most important to them – so this will simplify your job.

Your job is to be an interpreter. You will need to sort their array of challenges into three things:

1. Two or three (three maximum) important problems (that they prioritized)
2. The underlying causes of those problems
3. The long-term negative impacts that the problems cause

Problems for the purposes of this course are the visible and compelling elements of the needs assessment. These are the things that human beings can relate to. For example, crops dying in the field or fields damaged by floodwaters are visible, compelling problems. You can see these, you can feel the pain and the farmers' suffering. You can relate to them. But if the community lists (for example) climate change induced drought – realize that this is not a problem – it is a cause of a problem. Look for the visible, compelling problem that droughts cause.

Underlying causes in this course are the components that are the causes of the ultimate problems that your community identified. Droughts (in our example) and a lack of knowledge of potential solutions are good examples of the underlying causes that lead to crops dying in the field. Underlying causes tend to be related to events (drought) or knowledge (lack of knowledge of solutions to climate challenges).

Negative Impacts are the long-term negative outcomes of the problem. Flood damaged fields can reduce a farmers income and take years to heal reducing a farmers ability to lead the prosperous, meaningful, productive lives. Negative impacts are long-term outcomes – 3 to 5 years away. They are the ultimate reason why we are interested in working in climate action plans. It is terrible to see damaged fields – and you want to fix them right away – but the ultimate goal is to develop prosperous, well-educated community members that can work together to contribute to their families and communities. So your project is going to address the immediate problem (damaged fields) with the long-term goal of: (positive impact) healthy, productive, well-educated community members.

Therefore, your job in evaluating the Ten-Seed assessment has two main components:

1. Problem/cause/negative impact
 - a. Figure out what the visible, compelling problem is (if all that the community comes up with are causes, ask them about what the ultimate problem is or use your observational skills)
 - b. Figure out what the underlying cause is for that problem
 - c. Figure out what the long-term impacts are
 - d. Fit them into an outline exactly like the one in Magee Project Example Assignment 1.
2. Keep your problem/cause/impact outline short (two or three things maximum) and incredibly simple. The goal of the course is to learn how to develop projects – and you need start off with a simple project to learn the steps. If your community raises several challenges to be addressed – you can return and develop action plans for those challenges also—but after you have learned how to do it in this course. If you are going to benefit from this course, you need a very, very simple project.

Very, Very, Important:

We are going to be presenting to you new, cutting-edge ideas in community-centered, sustainable, impact-oriented project design. At the end of the 12 assignment (241 & 242), step-by-step process you will have a brand-new perspective on this process that you don't have today – in this first week. You will need to trust our guidance in the early stages.

You may struggle with two challenges in the first two assignments.

The first challenge is that some initial projects are too complex. Projects that are too complex are difficult to get funded, difficult to manage successfully, and from the learning experience of this course, their complexity will overshadow your learning experience.

The second challenge is project drift; you have a great idea for your project in the first assignment, which changes a little in the second assignment as you creatively think about solutions, and it changes a little bit in the third assignment – and so on – until pretty soon you have a project that is a different project from Assignment One.

You will need to lock in on the project developed in weeks one and two as the project that will be used for the entire 12 assignments. Each week, I need to go back and refer to your first and second week assignments throughout the rest of the 12 assignments. If you have changed the project, I lose the ability to keep track of the project's direction and I will return it to be fixed.

The advantage of staying with your original project is three-fold:

One, you will learn the system of refining one single project covered over 12 weekly steps.

Two, the assignments build on each other from one week to the next – so you will be able to refer back to your early assignments to make sure that everything is included in the process. For example, Assignment 6 is an expansion of Assignment 2. Assignment 7 is an expansion of Assignment 6. Assignments 11 and 12 are compilations of the previous 10 assignments.

At the end of the 12 weeks, you will have both a well-designed project class documents that you will need for an initial donor presentation.