EXCEL EXperience in Community Enterprise and Leadership

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EXCEL
(EXperience in Community Enterprise and Leadership) Template

Kickoff Event and Graduation
Two events are important to a program: a kickoff event and a graduation. These serve several purposes: saying thank you to the sponsors; bringing the total group of stakeholders together (sponsors, employees, spouses, steering committee, facilitators and participants); and demonstrating the community investment in leadership development. Guest speakers are sometimes invited to help set the tone of the program. These events may also increase community awareness and create additional networking opportunities. A graduation ceremony recognizes and celebrates the participants’ efforts.

Kinds of Activities:
Sit-Down Dinner
Bar-B-Que

Designed to:
1. Introduce participants and recognizes and celebrates participants' efforts.
2. Brings together total group of stakeholders (sponsors, employees, steering committee, facilitators, and participants).
3. Lay out “Road Map” of the EXCEL program; relate purpose and importance to community.
4. Give participants an idea about one another through Participant Directory (bios).
5. Let employers and spouses understand how much time the participant must commit.
6. Speech on civic involvement/EXCEL experiences by past participants or invited VIP.
7. Extend appreciation to all supporters.
8. Opportunity to inform community about EXCEL program.
9. Formal class picture is taken by newspaper.

What happens in learning?
The Kickoff event is designed to dispel anxiety and answer questions participants might have about the program. Participants learn of the community’s investment in leadership development.
Participants plan the graduation event and get opportunity to celebrate their success and share with stakeholder what they gained from the program.
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Introduction to Community/County History/Getting to Know One Another:

Soon after the opening event, many groups conduct an all-day workshop that has two purposes: 1) in-depth introductions so people start getting comfortable with each other; and 2) a study of community history and culture with emphasis on how the community's past influences the present. These two activities help create a "sense of belonging" and enhance community identity and pride within the group. A shared understanding of local heritage also helps in analyzing current issues.

**Kinds of Activities:**
1. County Historical Society Hosts Session at Historical Society Museum
2. Held on Saturday
3. Local Historian speaks
4. Home grown business with long history speaks
5. Tour museum
6. Life Map – Each participant draws a picture on poster board that represents their life. Pictures, no words. Each person presents life map to group.

**Designed to:**
1. Learn about history of community/county, its heritage and culture.
2. Learn about major events/people that make the community/county what it is today.
3. Learn about each other through life map. “Where I come from, what has impacted my life.”

What happens in learning?

Participants learn about one another on a much deeper level. They learn about themselves through the thought process necessary to draw map/picture of their life. They become more at ease with one another by presenting to the larger group. Helps dispels fears about public speaking. A shared understanding of local heritage also helps in analyzing current issues.
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EXCEL Retreat:
Evaluations of EXCEL programs have clearly shown that a high quality, out-of-town retreat is the single most important event in successful programs. Held early in the program, a two or three-day retreat fosters an open climate for learning and sets the tone for the rest of the sessions. One group observed that after two days in retreat, they were able to constructively discuss sensitive and controversial community issues that they had been reluctant even to mention to each other prior to the retreat.

A retreat also develops group trust. Through the retreat, participants break down barriers to communication and develop closer relationships, which not only improve group interaction during the course of the program, but also increase the likelihood of sustained community activity later. Additionally, retreats give people time to work in depth on concepts and methods of leadership and how to apply them, and to work on group problem solving in a variety of settings.

Kinds of Activities:
Challenge Courses (low and high ropes)
Team Building and Problem Solving Exercises
Demographics of County Presentation
Mind Mapping Process to Identify Issues in County
Visioning Process
Basics of Leadership
Discovering the future through changing paradigms.

Designed to:
1. Bring about self awareness of participants by providing them with knowledge and tools to value and use differences among people to affect change on key issues affecting their community/county and world.
2. Provide the above in an environment in which the group can begin to build a team or network of leaders.
3. Provide participants with skills for effective leadership (situational), an introduction to group skills, problem-solving techniques, community analysis/action planning skills and dealing with paradigm shifts and conflict.
4. Provide participants with information on how to utilize resources.
5. Provide participants with demographic and socio-economic information on their county. This gives them a picture of their county as it relates to state and nation.
6. Provide participants with knowledge to organize for change.

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What happens in learning? (See above description under EXCEL Retreat heading)
Participants learn about their personalities and obtain a deeper understanding of self and how they interact with those personalities different than their own. They learn how to work with and problem solve in small groups made up of different personality types. They are challenged physically both as individuals and within groups through participation in challenge course. They explore issues they are passionate about in a safe environment and begin to explore ways to make a difference in their community/county. They learn that it is ok to disagree with one another and still work together. As a result of the retreat they become a cohesive group/team that feels empowered to positively impact their community.

Vision and Action Planning
This session can be a continuation of the visioning process conducted at the retreat that focuses on the action planning part of the process or a session that begins with the visioning process and ends with the action planning process. It can also build on the mind mapping process done during the retreat.

RRD 182 Vision to Action: Take Charge Too: This publication provides practitioners with a basic guideline for helping communities and organizations develop a vision, and an action plan for accomplishing that vision.
http://www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/pubs/contents/182.htm

Kinds of Activities:
Develop Purpose and Values
Develop Vision
Develop Action Plan

Designed to:
1. Apply a participatory process engaging the entire community or organization rather than just leaders.
2. Develop a community action plan identifying what will be done, who will do it, and when it will be accomplished.
3. Use a future orientation emphasizing what the community or organization wishes to preserve, change or create.

What happens in learning?
Participants experience and understand the process of developing a community vision and action plan that guide community action and policy making (in conjunction with purpose).

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EXCEL Topical Sessions
No single "best" course of learning activities and topics exists; each community has its own priorities. The most successful programs are carefully individualized to fit the community. The general goals and purpose of the program should determine what is covered.

One program cannot address all the concerns or issues that the community might have. The focus should be on developing a broad understanding of the community and its various aspects, how they work, what issues surround them, and in what ways they can be influenced. Emphasis should be on knowledge and skills for actively developing the community. These skills can be applied to a variety of issues.

Most communities stress civic education with topics related to:

- local and state government and service systems
- economic development
- the environment and infrastructures
- cultural heritage and demographic trends
- communication, planning, and processes such as working with groups and dealing with differences.
- education
- human services, arts and leisure (quality-of-life issues)

The goals of the course activities are to offer learning opportunities and to build a cohesive working group. Therefore, a combination of topical workshops and other participatory activities are desirable. Content, sequence and methodology are all important. Opportunities are built in for people to get to know each other and start working together.

Topical workshops are the heart of the learning experience. They are highly interactive and related to how the subject impacts the community over time. Workshops range from two or three hours to more than eight hours and should present a balance between understanding the status quo and considering options for the future. For this reason, it is often helpful to combine outside and local presenters to offer both generic and community-specific perspectives.

The facilitator or committee members discuss with each presenter the group's expectation that they should teach in an interactive, applied manner. The emphasis should be on a thorough consideration and analysis of the issue rather than a simple transfer of information. Plenty of time is allowed for discussion and includes the diverse perspectives and experiences of the participants as part of the learning experience.

The facilitator is the thread that links program sessions and provides continuity. By attending each session, he or she can observe, facilitate, brief presenters, or offer group exercises that can set the tone for the session and tie in previous learning.

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Education:

Kinds of Activities:
Representatives of various educational institutions speak/interact with the participants through tours, panel discussion and/or presentations. A representative from the State Department of Education is utilized to speak about financing, budgets, etc., and how it relates to programming. (A general overview). Local representatives of school districts are invited to speak about the local situation.

Issues a panel can discuss and think about:
• How do we maintain and/or improve quality in a time of economic decline?
• How do we meet comparable pay/benefit standards and maintain staff morale?
• How do we pass a levy to maintain our current spending?
• What do we cut to reduce spending if levy doesn’t pass?
• Given the current economic climate, how do we shape the future of our schools?

Designed to:
1. Identify community institutions that educate: public/private schools and colleges, University of Missouri Extension service, libraries, etc.
2. Analyze learning/education environment in the area. Does it limit or stimulate community development?
3. Hear from a panel of representatives of various public/private institutions to address current issues. (include students in discussion groups)
4. Look at how education is financed – specifically, how well is it financed?

What happens in learning?
Participants learn about what education looks like in their community literally and intellectually. They interact with key players in the educational system and discuss one-on-one the issues critical to education in their community, state and nation. Participants get the opportunity to discuss in a non-threatening environment issues related to education.
Natural Resources

Kinds of activities:
Discussion of various programs concerning natural resources in the community.
Panel discussion with representatives of agencies and organizations that provides support for natural resource programs, laws, etc.

Designed to:
1. Identify natural resources in the county. (Examples: coal, farmland and ponds, recyclable materials, etc.)
2. Analyze how well resources are being utilized; how trends affect this.
3. Discuss limits on the lifespan of individual resources or potential legislation that would affect utilization of resources.
4. Discuss what resources will be most valuable in the future.
5. Long-term outlook of resources, how financed.
6. Utilize maps for participants (Use geographic resource center).
7. Possible entities to find information, speakers, etc.:
   - Civic Recycling, Columbia, MO
   - County Commissioners
   - Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Division of Energy
   - Department of Natural Resources in your region
   - Geographic Resources Center, University of Missouri-Columbia
   - Missouri DNR - Division of Geology and land Survey
   - Missouri Energy Resources
   - Natural Resources Conservation Service - USDA
   - Rural Electric Cooperatives
   - University of Missouri Extension

What happens in learning?
Participants learn about natural resources and how they relate to other aspects of the community like education, government, social services, and health care. They interact with knowledgeable professionals in the natural resources field and discuss one-on-one the issues critical to natural resources in their community and state. Participants get the opportunity to discuss in a non-threatening environment issues related to natural resources.
Local Government Session and Study Tour:

Kinds of activities:
Tour of local city hall, county courthouse and jail.
Formally meet and hear presentations from local officials (i.e. City Manager, Mayor, City Council Members, Circuit Judge, County Commissioners, County Officials, Sherriff, etc.)

Designed to:
1. Analyze local government structures, towns, county, school districts, etc., and how they are elected. Give a general overview, specific to your county.
2. Analyze alternative structures. Look at advantages and disadvantages.
3. Include a financial component:
   a. County government
   b. City government
   c. School districts - K - HE (gov't aspects - not education)
   d. Special purpose districts
   e. Taxing authority
4. Have a panel of local officials. Participants may ask questions.

What happens in learning?
Participants learn about what local government looks like in their community literally and intellectually. They interact with key players in the governmental system and discuss one-on-one the issues critical to local government in their community, county and state. Participants get the opportunity to discuss in a non-threatening environment issues related to local government.
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STATE GOVERNMENT SESSION AND STUDY TOUR

KINDS OF ACTIVITIES:
Invite local state representative and/or senator to speak to the group about what state government looks like (big picture) and how it works. Include how the legislative process works and how citizens can take a proactive role. Include discussion of what lobbying is and how to do it.

DESIGNED TO:
1. Offer an opportunity to learn first-hand about a particular issue or process and to meet and talk with local and state leaders.
2. Most communities take a government study tour to the state capital to observe legislative processes and meet with elected officials and agency personnel who have a significant impact on their community.
3. During the tour, some groups host a reception for elected officials, agency personnel, and others with whom they want to spend time.
4. Preparation for the tour includes analysis of community issues in order to identify appropriate agencies or legislative groups.
5. Local legislators can assist in developing this activity.

WHAT HAPPENS IN LEARNING?
Like the retreat, study tours provide time together to build relationships and rapport.

COMMUNITY STUDY TOUR

KINDS OF ACTIVITIES:
Visiting a similar community.

DESIGNED TO:
1. Learn how they have worked on such issues as economic development, health services or the quality of education.
2. This activity requires careful preparation to insure that there is useful exchange and learning as compared to a "show and tell" of success stories.

WHAT HAPPENS IN LEARNING:
Participants learn about how another community of similar size, etc. addresses issues. They learn firsthand about specific projects and how they might be emulated at home. They make valuable contacts for future community projects and a fresh perspective on how to approach both opportunities and challenges.
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Health Services and Study Tour of Local Healthcare Facilities

Kinds of activities:
Presentations followed by interactive discussions with a representative group of health care providers in the community. What challenges and opportunities do they face? How does health care access here compare to other parts of state and nation?

Designed to:
1. Allow participants to get a close up view of what health care professionals face as challenges and opportunities in their community.
2. Give participants the opportunity to ask questions about access and quality of local health care.
3. Teach participants about services available in their community/county.
4. Inform participants about how health care is paid for, etc.

What happens in learning?
Participants learn about how another community of similar size, etc. addresses issues. They learn firsthand about specific projects and how they might be emulated at home. They make valuable contacts for future community projects and a fresh perspective on how to approach both opportunities and challenges.
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Community Economic Development and Business & Industry Tours

Community Economic Development

Kinds of activities:
Presentations and interactive discussions with economic development professionals in the community, state and a resource from University of Missouri Extension on what community economic development is and is not; how does money flow in and out of the community; what is the current economic climate for the area; how can citizens be involved in community economic development efforts.

Designed to:
1. Inform participants about what financial systems are.
2. Give participants the opportunity to participate in a discussion about what community economic development is and is not; what do they want it to look like in their community/county.
3. Teach participants about current economic climate and how they can be involved in local community economic development efforts.

What happens in learning:
Participants learn about community economic development and how it relates to other aspects of the community such as education, government, social services, and health care. They interact with knowledgeable professionals in the community economic development field and discuss one-on-one the issues critical to CED in their community and state. Participants get the opportunity to discuss in a non-threatening environment issues related to CED.

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Tours of Local Business and Industry:

Kinds of activities:
Visit a cross section of types of business and industry in the county. For example, manufacturing, services, telecommunications, wholesale, etc.

Designed to:
1. Give participants firsthand look at what is made in their community, what money comes in and what money goes out.
2. Give participants a general idea of types of jobs available and what resources exist in community.
3. Teach participants about the amount of investment it takes to have a business in the community.

What happens in learning?
Same as above.

Social Services

Kinds of activities:
Presentations and interactive discussions with social service professionals in the community and a resource from the state (i.e. University of Missouri Extension). Discussion might include a general overview of social services and how they are funded; challenges facing these entities; success stories and an analysis of the needs. This could include a simulation exercise on public assistance. Bring in clients actually benefiting from programs so participants can learn on a peer basis. Panel representing different aspects of social services - mental health, community health, welfare. Have an instructor/facilitator

Designed to:
1. Give participants a general overview on social services - local, state, national level, and how they are funded.
2. Identify organizations that provide social services in their county.
3. Analyze who is served and the quality of service.
4. Discuss what segments might be poorly served or not served at all.
5. Discuss future social service needs that seem to be on the horizon and possible solutions.

What happens in learning:
Participants learn about social services and how it relates to other aspects of the community like education, government, community economic development, and health care. They interact with knowledgeable professionals in the social services field and discuss one-on-one the issues critical to their community and state. Participants get the opportunity to discuss in a non-threatening environment issues related to social services.

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Community Service/Project Guidelines:

Kinds of Activities:
Members would be required to complete a minimum of X hours of community service or project during the X month period that this program runs or at the conclusion of the program.

Service/project may be any activity that results in benefit to the local community.

Participants are encouraged to reach out to entities that they have not previously been affiliated with to conduct service hours/project. This however is not a requirement, and hours may be completed with organizations that participants are currently affiliated with.

Closure/Evaluation Session

The last session before graduation should include time for reviewing the learning experience, processing what was learned, discussing possible future projects, formal evaluating of the entire program and saying goodbye to one another. This session should be conducted by the main facilitator.

Kinds of activities:
Structured review of sessions, time for reflection by participants of what they learned, how they plan to use this knowledge and discussion of possible community projects. Time for sharing what participants learned from one another should be included.

Designed to:
1. Allow participants to review what they experienced and reflect on it.
2. Allow participants to process what they learned and determine how they will apply knowledge.
3. Provide additional opportunity for group to discuss opportunities for community projects, etc.
4. Provide facilitators and planning team feedback from participants on what was learned, what worked, what didn’t work and how to improve program for the future, etc.

What happens in learning:
Participants get opportunity to reflect on the time and effort given to the EXCEL program. A facilitated discussion is held that gets at what each participant learned, how they will use what they learned in the future and what the experience meant to them and their co-learners. It is a formal process to provide closure to their experience.