VISION TO ACTION

Take Charge Too

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Overview

The Context

In 1990, the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development published *Take Charge: Economic Development in Small Communities* to empower rural communities. Based on the harsh realities of the 1980s farm crisis and the felt need for alternative economic opportunities for farmers and others in rural areas, this publication was widely adopted and very successful in helping communities identify and implement economic opportunities.

But dramatic changes have taken place in communities since the publication of *Take Charge*. Although economic development continues to be a major issue for many communities, other issues are also surfacing in rural areas (e.g., housing, land use and environmental conflicts). New approaches and processes are needed to help communities address these issues in the future.

Important changes have taken place in the field of community development over the past decade as well. Most notably, because of the changing relationship between federal, state and local governments as a result of devolution, local governments and their residents are being called upon to design and implement various programs and policies (e.g., welfare reform, workforce investment and health care). This change requires an active engagement of local residents, organizations and businesses.

New approaches to community development also suggest that communities should begin the planning process by focusing on assets rather than needs. Focusing on strengths rather than problems may make it easier to mobilize the community to take action. Most practitioners continue to assess the needs of their community, but do so in the context of the skills, talents and capabilities of local people.

Finally, a growing number of communities and organizations have been engaged in a process to develop an overall vision of what they want to be in the future. The purpose of the community vision is to identify the common ground that will provide the basis for community action.

Program Overview

In light of the changes noted above in communities and in the field of community development, a team of Extension faculty and staff in the North Central region has revised the *Take Charge: Economic Development in Small Communities* workbook. *Vision to Action: Take Charge Too* is the result, and provides practitioners with a basic guideline for helping communities and organizations develop a vision, and an action plan for accomplishing that vision.

Vision to Action: Take Charge Too is designed to take practitioners through the community action process—from getting started to holding a community workshop to implementing an action plan to maintaining momentum. Some basic material is also provided on how to conduct a community assessment and strategies for monitoring and evaluating the process.

Please note that *Vision to Action* is completely different than the original *Take Charge* workbook, which focused entirely on economic development. This material will help communities address a broader range of concerns, and reflects some of the "best practices" of action planning among practitioners in the North Central region. Additional materials are also being developed to supplement this workbook, and will focus on specific substantive issues that may be facing communities, such as land use, workforce development or housing.

Audience

Vision to Action is written for practitioners and educators working directly with communities or organizations. The material will be useful to both experienced and less experienced practitioners. Most of the exercises are designed for communities interested in developing an action plan for the future. Practitioners may need to adapt the material to identify the needs and assets of an organization.

Program Objectives

Vision to Action: Take Charge Too focuses on three major objectives:

- Applying a **participatory process** engaging the entire community or organization rather than just leaders.
- Developing a **community action plan** identifying what will be done, who will do it, and when it will be accomplished.

- Using a **future orientation** emphasizing what the community or organization wishes to preserve, change or create.

Program Content

The action planning process is driven by three basic questions related to the community or organization:

- What do we want to preserve?
- What do we want to change?
- What do we want to create?

Vision to Action: Take Charge Too is organized around the action planning process. A chapter titled "Getting Started" provides a guideline for organizing the process and preparing for the workshop. A chapter titled "Purpose, Values, Vision, Action" focuses on a community workshop that is held to develop vision statements. A chapter titled "Project Planning and Implementation" outlines the basic steps communities take to develop an action plan for accomplishing the vision, and then to implement the plan. A chapter titled "Maintaining Momentum" provides guidelines for how to keep the process going.

Additional information that may be useful at various stages of the visioning process is also provided. A chapter titled "Community Assessment" discusses various methods for examining community trends. Some communities may decide to conduct such an assessment at the outset of the process, others may wait until they have begun to develop an action plan, while still others may not conduct an assessment at all. A chapter titled "Monitoring and Evaluation" provides a rationale for monitoring and evaluating the visioning process, and offers strategies and examples as well.

The following figure provides a brief overview of the expected outcomes at each stage of the process.

Vision to Action: Overview of Expected Outcomes

Getting Started	1-6 months	**Outcomes:** • Formation of steering committee. • Design for community workshop and local process to create the action plan. • Marketing strategy to get people involved in logistics to conduct community workshop. • Resources available to conduct community workshop.
Purpose, Values, Vision, Action	1-3 months	**Outcomes:** • Purpose, values and vision statements for the community. • Preliminary action plan for the community. • Energized, committed residents ready to work on projects. • Increased capacity to plan.
Project Planning and Implementation	6-12 months	**Outcomes:** • Recruitment and engagement of additional volunteers. • Completed projects or completion of start-up phase. • Increased community capacity. • Media recognition of successes.
Maintaining Momentum		**Outcomes:** • Communication about the process and progress. • Celebration of successes and acknowledgement of contributors. • Revisit and renewal of purpose, values, vision and project generation. • Continuous action planning. • Generation of new projects that are relevant to the vision.

Getting Started

Vision to Action: Take Charge Too is initiated in a community by a steering committee. This committee is often an existing group that is willing to take responsibility for initiating the effort and providing leadership to the process. It is helpful to have a community development practitioner or educator involved with the steering committee as well, to serve as a resource in moving the action planning process forward. This resource person or facilitator can provide a linkage to the university, the state and other sources of assistance as needed, and provide back-up support to local leaders and committee and project team members throughout the *Vision to Action* process.

Composition of the Steering Committee

The first task of the steering committee is to review its composition and ensure that a broad cross-section of the community is represented. This is important regardless of whether the process is being applied to a community of place or a community of interest.

For example, in a community that has an issue with youth loitering on the streets of its downtown, the *Vision to Action* process may be initiated by the youth activities community. However, representatives from the following sectors should be considered as valuable members of the steering committee as well: parents, schools, youth groups, youth agencies, law enforcement, and downtown businesses.

Consider the following sectors within a community when reviewing the composition of the steering committee:

Agriculture
Banks
Chambers of Commerce/Commercial Clubs
Churches
Civic Organizations
Community Improvement/Betterment Groups

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Elderly
Health Care
Industry
Libraries
Local Development Organizations
Local Government
Real Estate
Retail Businesses
Schools
Utilities
Youth

Within the steering committee, tasks should be divided among all members. Responsibilities of the steering committee include:

- Define community boundaries.
- Determine expected outcomes.
- Determine community readiness.
- Identify community participants.
- Determine role of the media.
- Prepare for workshop.

Define Community Boundaries

A broad definition of community is used in *Vision to Action*. Community may be a group of people who live in the same area, or who share an interest or concern that brings them together. Organizations can be called communities as well. As the steering committee initiates the *Vision to Action* process, it may need to discuss some of the following questions around defining the boundaries of the community.

A **community of place** has an identifiable boundary. Where are the spatial boundaries of the community? Are they legally representative of an entity—for example a ward, an incorporated village, a city, a county, a parish, a reservation, a federal jurisdiction as in a military base, a National Park or National Forest area like a service district? How many square miles of land are in the targeted community?

Also identify the clients, recipients or stakeholders in the community of place, and do a head count using the most recent census. Have an Extension educator or local planner provide recent community population counts and an age/sex pyramid for the designated community. Consider what proportion of each segment is included in the community of place. What are the ratios? Are groups missing? Who exactly calls this community of place home?

When defining the boundaries of a **community of interest,** both geographical and social factors are considered. There can be a significant overlap between a community of place and a community of

interest. For example, if land use issues are at stake, then the community of interest may include certain landowners and the place will be where their land is located.

Other communities of interest spread farther across both geographical and social boundaries. For example, if a community of interest decided to address teen drinking through the *Vision to Action* process, it is important to recognize that this issue spreads across geographical boundaries from town to county to state—right up to national and international levels. Many social boundaries are also crossed by this community of interest, including young and old, rich and poor, rural and urban. A steering committee organizing the *Vision to Action* process around teen drinking would need to consciously decide on the scope of the community of interest.

Determine Expected Outcomes

The steering committee and others involved in the *Vision to Action* process will have a better understanding of where the process is going if expected outcomes are determined at the outset. The following questions can help determine expected outcomes:

- What are our concerns as a steering committee in this community? Why did we pick this community?
- Do we plan to create new committees out of this process?
- Do we pass the information generated through the *Vision to Action* process on to other groups in the community, such as the Chamber of Commerce, Planning Board, or some other group?
- What method will be used to evaluate the outcome?

Communities are constantly in a state of change. To reach a community's desired future it is important that leaders have some way to assess and monitor the change that is occurring. Information on conducting a community assessment and monitoring and evaluation is available in the *Vision to Action* workbook (see pages 57 and 79 respectively) and may prove useful as a baseline against which to measure change.

If yearly objectives or projects are established, these become measures of progress. At the end of each year, the steering committee can evaluate how well the objectives have been met, modify current objectives and set new ones. What successes were there? What could be done differently next time? Who helped make things happen? What resources were used and who provided them? An evaluation guide that may assist in this process can be found in Appendix A (see page 89). These accomplishments provide a means to recognize volunteers for their time and efforts, and to challenge the community to meet new and continuing objectives in the year ahead.

Determine Community Readiness

Before initiating a *Vision to Action* workshop, the steering committee should determine the readiness of their community for the process. Consider the history of community action and volunteerism.

Assessing a community's strengths and weaknesses in relation to the following characteristics will be useful in determining community readiness. A checklist with these terms is provided in Appendix B (see page 91), along with instructions on assessing a community's score.

Leadership Capacity: Are leaders willing to act? Complete a realistic assessment of the leadership required and the leadership ability of the community. Also evaluate the time that may be required for volunteers or paid staff to carry out projects selected in the *Vision to Action* process.

Attitudes toward Community Development: Assess the attitudes of the community towards community development. A survey could help in this process, but community leaders are usually able to assess the general attitude of their constituency and the support and motivation for community development. Do residents exhibit loyalty, pride and commitment to their community? Is the community prepared for the change that may result from this process?

Political Clout: Assess the political clout of the community by determining the leadership's ability to influence local political decision makers, as well as the resident's ability to influence non-local decision makers as needed.

Cooperating with Neighboring Communities: Is cooperation with neighboring communities possible (where appropriate for a given project)? Is the community willing to pool resources and talents with other communities to achieve common goals? Is there a sense of trust and willingness to share power with neighboring communities? Is there a history of old disputes that may prevent cooperation? (Sometimes the *Vision to Action: Take Charge Too* process can bridge old disputes and bring about new energy for cooperation. Note that this characteristic applies more to community of place than to community of interest.)

Organizational Structure: Does the community have, or can they obtain, the necessary organizational structure to engage in the *Vision to Action* process and accomplish project planning and implementation?

Diverse Participation: Can the community engage broad citizen participation in the process, representing the diverse people of the community? What level of controversy exists in the community and can the process involve and balance someone controversial? Who are the people

who get things done and who have the time to participate and carry through selected projects?

Civic Involvement: Does the community value participation and meaningful engagement of its citizens in community issues?

Media Involvement: Will the local media support the *Vision to Action* process and provide coverage of the community workshop and selected projects in order to inform the greater community?

Financial Capacity: Are there members of the community with grant-writing experience? Can the community organize its own fund-raising events?

Private Sector Involvement: Will the private sector support the *Vision to Action* process, both financially and otherwise? Will employers and employees from local businesses be involved?

Identify Community Participants

The steering committee is also responsible for identifying community participants to be involved in the workshop. Consider involving participants representing:

- Major agencies and organizations in the community from which resources can be derived.
- Decision makers in the community who have the authority to allocate resources.
- General citizenry who can provide community support and new leadership.

Begin by listing significant segments of the community (suggestions are provided in Appendix C, page 93). Next, identify the key individuals who make the decisions within that segment. These individuals are important because they occupy a position that gives them the authority to allocate resources (e.g., people, money, knowledge).

The steering committee also needs to identify key individuals who may not occupy positions of authority, yet influence the community. These individuals can be identified by asking people in the community who they believe wields this influence (e.g., extension board, Chamber of Commerce board, bank board). Names of such influentials will be mentioned several times.

Once a list of potential community participants has been compiled, the steering committee will need to review the list to see if a broad cross-section of the community is represented. The National Civic League Stakeholder Model in Appendix D (see page 95) can help.

The number of participants will vary depending on the needs of the community. In some cases, the steering committee may feel that an existing economic development organization or selected community leaders would benefit from this program and the number of participants may be small, perhaps around 20 individuals. In other cases, when engagement of the total community is desired, the number of participants may be quite large. Determining the focus of the program and who the participants will be is a decision to be made by the steering committee.

The success of the program depends on participants being committed to the full *Vision to Action* process. After potential participants are identified, the steering committee may want to divide up the names and personally contact the individuals. The purpose of *Vision to Action* and the date of the community workshop should be conveyed. Having a registration form and charging a small fee to cover the costs of the materials and refreshments is one way to gain commitment.

The success of the program also depends on broad citizen participation in and support of community development efforts. It is important to involve the full community. Citizens that are not participating in the effort at this time should still be kept informed (e.g., through local organizations and through the media).

Determine Role of the Media

Publicity and promotion of the *Vision to Action* process will be more effective if the role of the media is determined at the outset. The level of media support and involvement was addressed in the section on determining community readiness (see page 9). The steering committee also needs to decide if the media will be asked to inform the full community by reporting on the *Vision to Action* process, or invited to actually participate in the *Vision to Action* process. Appendix E provides guidelines for getting a positive response from the media (see page 101).

Prepare for the Workshop*

As the steering committee prepares for the community workshop, separate subcommittees may be created with at least one member of the

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* This section is adapted from *Community Futures, the Action Planning Process as a Means of Developing a Community Plan of Work* (which is adapted from *Building Communities from the Grassroots—Community Development Academy, The Community Action Planning Process);* and *Preparing Your Community: A Guide to Community Action Planning in Oregon,* 1990, Kathe Schaaf and Teresa Hogue, Positive Youth of Oregon, 530 Center St. N.E., Suite 300, Salem, OR 97310.

steering committee on each subcommittee. The subcommittees are responsible for carrying out the tasks assigned to them, while the representative from the steering committee is responsible for keeping the steering committee informed of progress and decisions. This will facilitate coordination between subcommittees as together they plan the *Vision to Action* community workshop.

Budget Subcommittee

The budget subcommittee is responsible for developing a budget and raising the funds necessary to support the *Vision to Action* process, which includes preparing for the workshop, the workshop itself, and follow-up to the workshop. The amount of time and supplies volunteered will impact the amount of funds needed for the process. Large amounts of funds may not be necessary if volunteerism is high.

Plan for the following costs:

- Staff time.
- Computer time.
- Phone service.
- Printing to market, report, and keep people informed.
- Postage.
- Extra office supplies.
- Facilities for workshop and any subsequent meetings.
- Workshop materials (flip charts, markers, tape).
- Refreshments at the workshop.
- Meals at the workshop.
- Photographs.
- Preparation of reports.

The budget subcommittee should keep track of everything, including in-kind contributions and time. Coordinating with other subcommittees will be necessary to keep track of what others are doing and spending.

Logistics Subcommittee

The logistics subcommittee will be responsible for arranging the following:

- Date and time for workshop and follow-up meetings.
- Facilities.
- Room set-up.
- Equipment and supplies.
- Childcare during workshop if provided.
- Meal arrangements during workshop if provided.
- Refreshments during workshop and follow-up meetings.

When selecting the workshop facility, the logistics subcommittee should consider the following:

- Convenient location.
- Accessible to those with special needs.
- Adequate free parking.
- Non-threatening to potential participants.
- One room large enough to fit all participants.
- Additional rooms for break-out sessions if necessary.
- Adequate ventilation with access to heat and air conditioning controls.
- Adequate lighting with access to controls.
- Comfortable chairs.
- Registration table near entrance to meeting room.
- Separate room for child care (if provided).
- Kitchen to store and prepare refreshments.
- Refreshments near or in meeting room.
- Access to adequate number of tables, chairs and restrooms.
- Signs directing people to facility.
- Good acoustics, even if a microphone is used.

Equipment

- Flip chart paper and easels (at least two, but more for large groups).
- Microphone with enough cord (or cordless) to reach back of room.
- Overhead projector and screen or wall to project onto.

Supplies

- Sign-in sheet for registration table.
- Name tags (prepare ahead of time if possible).
- Colored markers.
- Masking tape (several rolls).
- Refreshments and supplies (napkins, cups, etc.).
- Pencil or pens and paper for participants.

<u>Marketing and Public Relations Subcommittee</u>

Marketing means selling the community on the worth of the *Vision to Action* process. Tell the community about the steering committee and the positive changes they hope to bring about through this process. Inform people about:

- Upcoming workshops and trainings.
- How community members can become involved.
- Benefits of the *Vision to Action* process.
- Results of facilitating this process in the community.

The marketing subcommittee may consider creating a fact sheet or brochure about the *Vision to Action* process including information on

who the steering committee members are and why they are facilitating *Vision to Action* in this community. Coordinating with other subcommittees can facilitate spreading the word to a wider audience more efficiently. The overall steering committee and the invitations subcommittee should be kept informed of the marketing strategies. If appropriate, news releases and radio announcements should be developed. (Appendix E provides guidelines for getting a positive response from the media and promoting your project, page 101.)

Invitations Subcommittee

This committee is responsible for mailing invitations to key individuals in the community identified by the steering committee. Mail invitations to prospective participants at least four weeks before the *Vision to Action* workshop to allow people enough time to plan to attend. Letters should be personalized to each recipient; no form letters. Personalized letters let individuals know their attendance and participation in the process is valued and important.

Invitation letters should contain specifics on what will be required of participants: time commitment and what may be required beyond the initial meetings. If, for example, during the workshop committees will be formed which will continue to work on issues identified, this should be explained in the invitation.

Each invitation should be followed up with a phone call or similar personal contact. Be ready to answer questions about the purpose and time commitment required for the *Vision to Action* process as well as questions about why community member participation is important to the future of the community.

The invitations subcommittee may also take on the responsibility of writing thank you letters to invited members and others who attended the workshop. Prompt and consistent thank yous and recognition for every special contributor, financial and nonfinancial, are appropriate.

Recording the Event Subcommittee

The *Vision to Action* process should be recorded (either by notes or audio/videotape). That record should be written up and distributed to all present at the workshop. Participants will generate a number of ideas during the workshop, and the steering committee as well as participants will want to have a written record of what issues were discussed, the vision and purpose that was developed, and the action steps that were identified. The written record is also a useful tool in promoting future workshops or action steps and in keeping the greater community informed about the *Vision to Action* process.

The written record should look professional. Use a word processor and proofread carefully before distributing. Send a copy of the written report to all participants at the *Vision to Action* workshop, news media, town officials, and other interested parties in the community.

Purpose, Values, Vision, Action

Many well-organized and well-intended organizational or community efforts—whether simple or complex—have fumbled and faltered. Often this occurs because the group never really took the time to make sure that they had a shared understanding of purpose and/or a shared understanding of the desired outcome.

The analogy of the orchestra is a good one. To perform a piece of music together as an orchestra, all of the musicians and the conductor have to be on the same page. To perform well, they even have to develop a common interpretation of what experience and feelings they want to create for the audience. And they better know why they are performing together.

What does the development of shared purpose, values and vision accomplish for a community or organization?

- Shared purpose, values and vision provide the critical guidelines for weighing options and opportunities.
- They provide the foundation for evaluating if community efforts are making a difference. Evaluation includes looking at the community's overall progress towards achieving its vision and determining how well the community is meeting its purpose.
- The very process of creating shared purpose, values and vision develops ownership, commitment and involvement by participants. The same will happen with the community at large if:
  - The workshop participants reflect a good representation of the entire community.
  - The purpose, values and vision are communicated well.
  - People are given ways to continue their participation or to become a part of the process.

Good planning starts with a clear and shared sense of purpose, values and vision

Purpose defines why we as a community or organization exist and are engaging in creating our future.

Values are the beliefs and principles that we hold in common as a community or as members of an organization.

Vision tells us where we are going; it is our overall sense of direction, the desired destination.

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To facilitate development of purpose, values and vision for the future, the *Vision to Action: Take Charge Too* process includes holding a community workshop. This will produce a shared purpose statement, vision statements, and categories or themes into which the vision statements have been organized. This section of the workbook provides successful methods for conducting a community workshop, and will show participants how to put purpose, values and vision to work in their community.

The Devil is in the Details

There are many details involved in organizing an effective community workshop. Here are some helpful tips that have proven to be of value.

- The meeting room needs to be set up for people to participate easily in both small group and large group discussion.

- The best small group discussions occur in groups of three to five, absolute maximum of six per table. Ideally people should sit at round tables, the small ones that typically seat five or six people. Rarely are such tables available. The next best options are the larger round tables or square tables. If six- or eight-foot rectangular tables are used, seat people on opposite sides of the table so they form a small group.

- Set up tables with room to roam between and with room around the edges of the room where sheets will be hung on the wall. Also make sure people will be able to move chairs to see the facilitators and flip charts in the front.

- Make sure there is room to hang paper on the wall and set up several easels. People have to be able to see their work as well as hear each other. It is tempting to use the computer projection unit to record group work. The serious drawback is that people cannot continue to see what was on the screens preceding the current projection. Recording the work on the computer is important for dissemination. However, this can be done separately at the workshop or later from the sheets generated.

- Set up the refreshment table in the room if possible so people stay engaged when they go get a cup of coffee, etc.

- If there are 30 or more participants use a microphone. The ideal is to have a portable (lavaliere or handheld) microphone for the facilitator. If a microphone is being used for participants, it is best to have a second facilitator control this microphone. If a microphone is not used for participants, it will be important to repeat what gets said so everyone hears.

- Start by seating three or four people to a table as this allows for filling in with participants that arrive late. The group can update the newcomers as they join a table.

- Plan on two facilitators who can work together. Paying attention to what the group is saying verbally and nonverbally is almost always done more effectively with two people. Of course, the larger the group, the more critical this becomes. As the size and complexity of the group grows past 50 or 60 persons, add more facilitators. Remember that this takes more planning for details, logistics and coordination among facilitators. Regardless of the number of participants, additional persons (such as members of the steering committee or its subcommittees) should deal with the details of registration, refreshments and meals, etc.

Additional suggestions for the workshop facilitator can be found in Appendix F (see page 105).

Community Workshop Sample Agenda

Below is a sample workshop agenda that combines the development of purpose, values and vision with the development of a preliminary action plan. Note that the overall size of the group will affect how much time is needed for the various agenda items. Working with a community versus working with an organization will also affect how much time is needed.

9:30 a.m.	Registration
10 a.m.	Welcome and Introductions
10:10 a.m.	Developing Purpose and Values
11 a.m.	Developing Vision (items 1, 2, 3 and 4 under session content)
12 p.m.	Lunch
1 p.m.	Developing Vision (items 5, 6 and 7 under session content)
1:30 p.m.	Developing Preliminary Action Plan (items 1, 2, 3 and 4 under session content)
3 p.m.	Developing Preliminary Action Plan (items 5 and 6 under session content)
3:30 p.m.	Adjourn

Registration

Context: Welcome participants and provide them with nametags, agenda or other materials, and answer any questions about seating, meals, restrooms, etc.

Time: 30 minutes prior to start of workshop. (Staff the registration table for a short while after the workshop starts as well, for those who may arrive late.)

Preparation:
- ❑ Signs welcoming participants and directing them to the registration table and the meeting room.
- ❑ Signs for restrooms.
- ❑ Table to use for registration.
- ❑ Several people to staff registration table.
- ❑ Sign-in sheet with name, address, phone, e-mail, etc.
- ❑ Name tags.
- ❑ Agendas to hand out or a large agenda posted on the wall.
- ❑ Masking or drafting tape.
- ❑ Markers.

Welcome and Introductions

Context: Begin the community workshop by welcoming participants, offering some introductions, and explaining why the workshop has been put together. Be upbeat.

Time: 10 minutes

Preparation:
- ❑ Post operating guidelines or ground rules in large print on the wall.
- ❑ Post agenda on the wall or on a flip chart if one has not been handed out.
- ❑ Set up a microphone system if you will be using one.

Agenda:
- ❑ Welcome participants.
- ❑ Introduce facilitators.
- ❑ Briefly acknowledge the steering committee and workshop sponsors.
- ❑ Review the agenda.
- ❑ Explain the anticipated outcomes of the workshop—the immediate end product will be purpose, values and vision, and the ultimate product will be the action of the community.
- ❑ Review the operating guidelines or ground rules (see a sample in Appendix G, page 107).

- ❏ Make any necessary announcements concerning the facilities, etc.
- ❏ Put participants into working groups.

Session Content: Put participants into working groups before developing purpose and values. People generally sit with others that they know and feel comfortable around, which usually means they already think a lot alike. When developing purpose, values and vision though, encourage people to think differently and create new options. Below are several suggestions for mixing people. Consider what is likely to work with the group, how many people there are, and the time it will take.

- Ask people to move and sit with people they don't usually associate with, and especially ask spouses to split up "so their good ideas can be spread farther."
- Pre-assign people if it is known who is coming. Be flexible as many people's plans change; some arrive without being on the list and some don't show up.
- Count off. If 40 people are present and four people to a group is desired, count from one to 10.
- Have people quickly line up by order of their birthday in the calendar, and then split them into groups.

Developing Purpose and Values

Context: Dealing with purpose and values first accomplishes several important things:

- It is a safe place to begin, yet important.
- It helps participants start thinking about the community. They also start talking and listening to each other.
- Developing purpose together starts building a common ground of understanding and a realization that "we are all in this together."

Purpose gives meaning to existence. It answers the question: why do we exist?

Values are the principles and guiding factors that undergird people's decisions and actions.

Time: Allow 30 to 60 minutes for developing purpose and values, although 90 minutes would be ideal. Experience indicates that another 30 to 60 minutes is often needed for these tasks when dealing with identification of common values. This is especially important when working with organizations and communities of interest. The notes below indicate the differences in conducting this activity with communities versus organizations.

Preparation:

- ❏ Two easels with flip charts and markers.
- ❏ Two half sheets of flip chart paper per table.
- ❏ At least one marker per table.
- ❏ Masking or drafting tape.

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Don't expect people to agree on all of the values expressed in a community. Exploring and determining the essential values held in common to a community or organization is a powerful building block for group ownership, motivation and action.

Agenda:

- ❏ Develop purpose and values statements in small groups.
- ❏ Discuss purpose and values statements in large group.
- ❏ Redraft purpose and values statements in small groups.
- ❏ Bring closure.
- ❏ Notes for community.

Session Content:

1. Develop purpose and values statements in small groups.

Ask each small group to develop a purpose and values statement answering the critical purpose and values questions below. Instruct each group to develop and write these with a magic marker on a large piece of paper (a half sheet of flip chart paper works well).

The Critical Purpose Question:
What is the purpose of <community name or organization>?
Why do we exist (not why we were created)?

The Critical Values Question (for communities):
What are the values that underlie our purpose as a community?

The Critical Values Question (for organizations or communities of interest):
What are the critical values that our members share in common? Or
What are the values that a person affiliated with this organization is expected to accept?

Give people 10 to 15 minutes to accomplish this task. Developing purpose and values statements are a difficult task and people will struggle a little bit. That's okay. Help a group that's stuck by asking why someone from the outside should care about the community? Also try to help people get at the core purpose by asking "why?" until they get to a deeper sense of why.

Have each group hang its statement on the wall for all to see.

2. Discuss purpose and values statements in large group.

Allow the entire group to review the purpose and values statements hanging around the room. Discuss similarities and raise the question of the underlying *why* if the statements are mostly focused on *what we are or do* versus the *why*.

This will take 10 to 15 minutes.

3. Redraft purpose and values statements in small groups.

It is usually beneficial to give each group an opportunity to rewrite the purpose and values statement. Once again hang the results. Note the improvement in statements as to the *why*.

This will take another 10 minutes.

4. Bring closure.

Additional time may be needed to discuss values held in common or expected to be held in common. It is important for the large group to come to some consensus about basic tenets of purpose and basic values. To do this, have one or two flip charts on easels at the front of the room. Have the critical questions penned on one. Have the other flip chart available to write comments about development and growth, to note points of agreement, or to work toward more complete consensus of wording. At this point there usually is a fair amount of consensus in general meaning, but not necessarily in specific words. Most groups require the work of a subgroup to craft the specific wording.

Conclude this session with sincere but positive feedback about their work. Indicate the importance of purpose and values in giving meaning to life and work as a community. Point out the value of purpose as a collective group.

This will take at least 10 minutes as people may have comments. An additional 15 to 30 minutes will be needed if the group decides to work on consensus and wording for the purpose statement. Actual examples of purpose and values statements can be found in Appendix H (see page 109). However, do not share these examples with the participants themselves as each group needs to develop its own statement that fits the community.

5. Notes for community.

Communities carry out functions that the individual family, business or organization cannot accomplish alone. Communities frequently have similar purpose statements. That's okay. What makes a difference is how well a community fulfills its purpose.

The role of development is to achieve this community purpose with quality. Development has often been mistakenly assumed to equal growth and expansion. Development's role is to accomplish the community's purpose with quality and balance. It is well to ask whose responsibility it is then to engage in development (and expect people to note that it's everyone's).

Consensus, as used here, means that people can live with the decision. It does not necessarily mean everyone totally agrees.

If a contentious, big issue emerges that can't be easily resolved, there are no magic solutions. Totally ignoring the issue often thwarts the whole process at hand. Depending on the situation, the issue, and the facilitator's comfort level, it is best to acknowledge some issues can't be resolved and move on, or step back and indicate that it is a critical issue and that the process will deal with it.

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Developing Vision

Context: Vision will tell people where they are going; it is the overall sense of direction, the desired destination. The end product of this activity is a series of vision statements organized by themes that naturally emerge. Vision is fruitful when it leads to development of specific actions.

This process, therefore, does not strive purposefully for a neat, clean, concise single statement, but rather for direction with multiple aspects.

Creating a vision together is powerful.

- People develop a sense of the possible and begin to believe they can achieve their dream for the community.
- Participants learn what they have in common—even when they disagree about some things. This *common ground* forms the basis from which people can work together.
- Collective and individual ownership and commitment are developed.
- Vision and action plans create a new kind of citizen-based community power to bring about change.

As part of the action planning process that occurs after the vision, the development of a concise and clean statement is often desirable for promotion and visibility. This task is usually delegated to a working subgroup that crafts and refines the purpose and values statements. Certainly the vision statements developed in the following process will form the meat from which to develop such statements.

"Without a vision, the people will perish."

Proverbs 29:18

"Vision without action is daydreaming. Action without vision is merely passing time. Vision with action can change the world."

Blackhawk

Time: Allow at least 60 minutes.

Preparation:

- ❑ 2 to 3 easels with flip charts
- ❑ set of 2 different-colored markers for each easel (blue, black, brown, green and purple are the most easily read colors)
- ❑ 4 to 5 half sheets of flip chart paper per table
- ❑ at least one marker per table
- ❑ piece of paper and pencil or pen for each participant
- ❑ masking or drafting tape
- ❑ directions for recorders of vision

Agenda:

- ❑ Develop individual vision statements.
- ❑ Compile list of vision statements in small groups.
- ❑ Compile list of vision statements in large group.
- ❑ Develop vision themes.
- ❑ Choose vision themes.
- ❑ Appropriate vision statements to themes.
- ❑ Determine how to refine purpose, values and vision statements.

Session Content:

1. Develop individual vision statements.

Ask each person to write down on a piece of paper his or her own response to the critical vision question below. This is to be an individual activity.

The Critical Vision Question

> It is the year _____ <*year 20 to 25 years into the future*>. You as a group of community citizens <*or appropriate phrasing for organization*>, have successfully created the ideal and desired _____ <*name of community or organization*>. Describe what the community is like. This is not a description of the strategies used to get where we are in _____, but a description of what we have become.

Remember that visioning is not to define what people can perceive as possible. It is to leap past the present to identify dreams. Asking participants to consider only five to 10 years often results in not being able to let go of the present and dream a different future. While participants rarely project 20 to 25 years ahead, doing so will allow them to break out of the present to truly think about the future.

Allow approximately five minutes—watch until most of the people have put down their pens or lifted their heads up from the paper.

2. Compile list of vision statements in small groups.

Watch for statements that say something is *better* or *higher*. Ask for specific descriptors because better can mean 1 percent better or 200 percent better.

Instruct each group to compile a list of the individual vision statements. Use a magic marker and a half sheet of flip chart paper. The group list should include everything from the individual sheets of paper. Suggest that ideas be shared in a round robin fashion (around the table).

Indicate that participants are not to judge or criticize the other vision statements, and that it is okay to have differing views if they do not have a way to agree on the common element. The intent is not to combine, but to capture the essence of everyone's ideas. It is also acceptable for the group to add things as they work.

Allow 15 to 20 minutes to accomplish this task.

3. Compile list of vision statements in large group.

Ask a reporter from each table to share an item on their list until every table's list is exhausted. It is the responsibility of the tables to determine

when another group has reported one of their items. Suggest that someone at each table scratch through the items so they will know when their list of vision elements is exhausted.

The role of the facilitator(s) is to lead the process smoothly, make sure everyone is heard, ask for clarification, and coordinate with recorders.

Conclude by hanging a blank sheet and telling people it's still possible to add to the list.

Allow 10 to 25 minutes for this task depending on the size of the group.

4. Develop vision themes.

Looking at the list of vision statements, ask the large group what logical themes emerge as topics around which to organize planning. Allow the vision themes to emerge from the group. If the facilitator suggests themes such as housing, education, recreation or local government, participants may feel the topics have been forced or that the facilitator has a preconceived notion about the outcome. Participants will find more ownership in being part of the process if they define the themes. (See Appendix J for an alternative visioning exercise, page 121.)

Develop a list on the flip charts. The number of viable themes will depend on the number of people engaged in development of the action plans. A rule of thumb is approximately one theme per five to six people. If there are more, work with the group on combining several themes.

Allow approximately 10 minutes for this task.

5. Choose vision themes.

Assign each theme to a different table or work area where people can stand around a flip chart. Have a co-facilitator or members of the steering committee write down the themes on the tables or flip charts as they are assigned. Ask participants to stand and then choose the vision theme they wish to continue to develop. Ask them to reorganize themselves by theme (to vote with their feet).

PROCESS TIP

Select several recorders ahead of time who are comfortable writing in front of a large group and who have legible writing. Instruct the recorders before you instruct the large group on what is next. Also select one or two people to hang up the sheets of flip chart paper.

Unless it is a very small group of approximately 10 people or there are several facilitators, you will need others to serve as recorders and hangers. Great process and programs have gone awry because the facilitator tried to do it all alone and missed important information generated by the group.

See Appendix I for directions to provide to the recorders (page 119).

Sometimes a particular theme will not attract anyone. That usually means it is not a topic of as much pressing need, or sometimes people are not comfortable knowing how to deal with it at present. Either way these themes can be picked up later.

Allow approximately five minutes for this task.

6. Appropriate vision statements to themes.

Ask each theme group to identify and list the vision statements that pertain to their theme. Don't worry about some overlap, although no group should claim all statements as their realm. For example, a vision statement such as "strong diverse retail business sector" would be identified and written down by those working on a "thriving economy" theme.

Have each group identify their sheets with the vision theme and vision elements to facilitate transcription after the workshop.

Allow approximately 10 minutes for this task.

7. Determine how to refine purpose, values and vision statements.

Discuss the process for refining the purpose, values and vision statements and sharing them with the large group. Experience has shown that a voluntary subgroup that meets together (versus working independently and pooling their ideas) works well. Also discuss how people in the community will have the opportunity to react to and comment on the purpose, values and vision.

Allow approximately five to 10 minutes for this task. It often occurs as part of the end work of the workshop.

Developing Preliminary Action Plan

Context: The action planning process can be done at the same workshop (option A), or the group can adjourn and reconvene for a second workshop in order to finish this task (option B). Each option is addressed below.

Time: At least 90 to 120 minutes

Preparation:
- ❑ 2 easels with flip charts
- ❑ markers
- ❑ one 3" x 5" note card and pencil for each participant
- ❑ worksheets to hand out based on the transition activity (see Appendix L and Appendix M, pages 125 and 127)

Carefully challenge statements that say something is *good* or *adequate*. This is the ideal future. People tend to strive for the goals they set; therefore, suggest excellence and best.

Encourage participants to think in terms of what they have versus what they don't have (statements that are worded in the negative, such as lower or no crime or no high school dropouts). Point out the difference between saying "all students are graduating with demonstrated competence" and "we have no dropouts."

Agenda for Option A:

- ❑ Determine actions to achieve vision elements as individuals and in theme groups.
- ❑ Share action items with large group.
- ❑ Develop initial action plans for action items.
- ❑ Report action plans by vision theme.
- ❑ Identify initial members for a project team
- ❑ Bring closure.

Session Content:

1. Determine actions to achieve vision elements as individuals and in theme groups.

Ask each participant to write down on a note card his or her response to the following critical action question.

The Critical Action Question:

What are three things that you think need to be done in order to accomplish some aspects of the vision statements listed in your theme area?

After most of the participants have put down their pens, ask each theme group to develop a composite list of the actions noted by individuals. Have them write it on a piece of flip chart paper with a marker. Make sure the sheets are labeled with the theme name.

Allow 15 to 20 minutes for this task.

People are empowered by actually developing the project plans for the actions about which they care.

2. Share action items with large group.

Have each theme group post its list of vision elements and actions, along with blank sheets for additions. Allow time to walk around and read the other groups' lists, adding any additional suggestions to the list.

Another option is to give each participant three to five colored adhesive dots to place next to the actions they feel are the most important. This is often called multi-voting. The placement of dots provides additional information for each theme group—a straw poll or pulse from those present regarding their sense of urgency. However, do not use this as the sole source of information to determine which action plans ought to be implemented first.

Allow 10 to 20 minutes for this task, depending on the size of the group.

3. Develop initial action plans for action items.

Ask people to reconvene by theme and review their lists with any new additions.

Ask each participant to select a partner in their theme area and together develop a preliminary project plan around one of the action items from the list. Provide each team with an Action Planning Worksheet (see Appendix K, page 123). As the teams work, facilitators will want to roam around the room. Participants will often have questions. Be sure to inquire about purpose, timeline, critical first steps, etc. as necessary.

One suggestion is to print the action planning worksheet on large sheets of paper, at least 30" wide by 24" long. Teams can complete them with markers. This increases the sense of group ownership and makes it easier for the partners to work on the preliminary project planning.

PROCESS TIP

Review the action planning worksheet with participants. Especially note the following:

- Purpose is not the same thing as what the project will do. It tells someone why the project is worth doing, why one should care about supporting or funding the project, and elicits people's passion for getting the action done.
- For project timeline, on-going or infinite is not acceptable. A project takes a specific amount of time to launch to a point of ending or ongoing. It may be one month or it may be 10 years, but a specific amount of time must be indicated.
- Encourage participants to fill in real names for each action.

Avoid a complex process for prioritizing and decision making. Let participants select the actions that they feel strongly about. There is a wonderful quote that says, "Let people do what they want to do and someday they may even do what I think they should be doing."

Allow 30 to 40 minutes for this task and give people plenty of room and freedom to spread out.

4. Report action plans by vision theme.

Bring workshop participants back together to report on the action plans. Identify the vision theme, project, purpose, timeline and 30-day goal. It is best to hang the action planning worksheets as well so people can see the additional details. Expect to be impressed by the amount of practical work that the group has been able to accomplish.

Allow 30 minutes for this task.

5. Identify initial members for a project team.

The steering committee needs to consider options for structuring the project team prior to the community workshop, and come prepared to

Too often the people that come to the community workshop think they have to do all of the work. In fact, none of them may be on the project team of the preliminary action plan that they developed. Remember, doing the planning work is very important, but it is just one type of work. Doing the project work is a different kind of work. Matching the kind of work with what people care about and like to do is an important way of building involvement.

offer suggestions. Options for the make-up of the project team may include representatives from each vision theme group, volunteer representation at large, or inclusion of select or all members of the steering committee. Discuss these options with participants at the community workshop and make a purposeful decision that feels right to the larger group.

Note that teams of more than three rarely function as efficiently as those of two to three people. Encourage the smaller teams as a way to develop a greater range of planning.

When initial members of the project team have been identified, the preliminary action plan is turned over to this team so they can get started. The next chapter presents a more extensive and complete project planning and implementation process that the project team will need to consider.

6. Bring closure.

Recap the marvelous work that was accomplished and thank participants for their continued engagement. Emphasize that the preliminary project development is what has been completed, and that the implementation remains. Although the implementation phase will require a more complete project plan, the project team will have a distinct advantage due to the preliminary planning that took place at the community workshop.

Be sure participants understand what the next stage is, and how they can stay informed and engaged. The next stage involves putting the projects on the street and building the organizational mechanism to continue planning and implementation on a routine basis.

Acknowledge the volunteer work of those involving in planning the workshop as well—the sponsors, food servers, child care workers, etc.

Agenda for Option B:

- ❑ Assign each theme group work to be completed before the next workshop.
- ❑ Inform participants of the next steps.
- ❑ Continue with steps 1 through 6 of option A.

Session Content:

1. Assign each theme group work to be completed before the next workshop.

If a second workshop will be held to develop a preliminary action plan, then participants will need ways to stay engaged in the interim. Use the

time between workshops as an opportunity to gather more information and to engage more people for the task of implementing action.

At this point participants have chosen a vision theme that they would like to develop a preliminary action plan for. Prior to the next workshop, ask each person to:

- Share the workshop summary with five other people.
- Ask each of these five other people for three things they see that need to be preserved, changed or created in the community in order to accomplish the vision.
- Ask these five other people what they would personally like to help do.

Two activity sheets can be found in Appendix L and Appendix M to help record this information (see pages 125 and 127).

Prior to the first community workshop, the facilitator and the steering committee should arrange for the purpose, values and vision statements to be transcribed and distributed to participants. A commitment to do so quickly, usually within one week, is critical to the ongoing successful engagement of the participants.

2. Inform participants of the next steps.

Ensure participants that within one week they will be receiving a summary of the purpose, values and vision statements developed in the first community workshop. Review the assignment listed above, and provide them with copies of the two activity sheets. Also provide participants with a name and phone number of who they can contact if they have any questions.

Prior to the first community workshop, the facilitator and the steering committee should determine how to compile and share the feedback gathered between workshops so that the action planning process can draw fruitfully upon this work. Share a clear process with participants before they leave.

Communicate when the next workshop will be held and the location.

3. Continue with steps 1 through 6 of option A.

Putting Purpose, Values and Vision to Work in the Community

In addition to identifying opportunities for continued input from the broader community, the steering committee and the project team need to think about how they will put the purpose, values and vision to work in the community. At the very least it is important to record verbatim the purpose, values and vision statements generated in the community

Dynamic purpose, values and vision statements are those that truly capture the perspectives of the spectrum of the people in the community.

Leaders of successful communities and organizations continually use purpose, values and vision as a focusing tool.

The end (product) and the means (process) are both important. You cannot have one without the other.

workshop. Timing is critical. Prior to the first workshop, the facilitator and the steering committee should arrange for the statements to be transcribed and distributed to participants within one week.

When sharing the purpose, values and vision statements with the broader community, consider ways that people receive and respond to information. Think about all segments of the community and think outside the normal boxes. Following are some creative methods that have been used to prominently display purpose, values and vision in a community:

- Print the unabridged work (and later the refined versions) in the newspaper.
- Display the worksheets in local restaurants or other frequented public spaces.
- Tape the session and air on local cable television.
- Print a final report as a brochure or pamphlet.
- Print refined versions on letterhead.
- Print and display banners.
- Print on place mats in local restaurants.
- Hold discussions on radio and local television.
- Meet with service organizations and agencies, local government, schools, development groups and churches.
- Hold contests with kids to design logos and/or pictures of the future and use this in conjunction with other communication methods.
- Create dynamic web pages with opportunities for comment, volunteerism, reporting of action, etc.

Summary

Remember what the steering committee is trying to accomplish. They are building ownership, commitment and involvement as they determine how and with whom to create the purpose, values and vision for the community. Plans that really get used always change. A viable plan is one that people commit to and work to bring to life. The process used to develop the direction can make the difference between a plan that collects dust and one that really guides the community in purposeful development.

Resources

A Guide to Community Visioning: Hands-On Information for Local Communities. 1993. Oregon Visions Project, Oregon Chapter, American Planning Association.

Provides additional insight into processes and variations.

Chattanooga: A Community With a Vision.
A videotape highlighting a highly participatory citizen-based planning process used in Chattanooga. Available from Eleanor McCallie Cooper, 110 Windmere Dr., Chattanooga, TN 37411; (423) 624-1215.

Community Development Academy. University of Missouri.
Building Communities from the Grassroots, Course One is offered two to three times each year by the University of Missouri. The Academy provides an intense week long training that includes use of the action planning process, involving people, assessing the community, evaluating outcomes, etc. *Empowering Communities for the Future, Course Two* deals with participatory action research, community economic development, community policy, telecommunications, and dealing with discrimination. *Creating Capacity for Dynamic Communities, Course Three* deals with large and small group process design and facilitation, conflict resolution, community organizing and other topics. Courses Two and Three are currently offered once per year. For more information about the academy see http://ssu.agri.missouri.edu/CommDev. For registration information contact Sue Brouk, MU Conferences, University of Missouri, 344 Hearnes Hall, Columbia, MO 65211; (573) 882-9552, brouks@missouri.edu, http://muconf.missouri.edu/CommDevelopmentAcademy.

Darling, David L. 1991. *Community Strategic Planning.* Manhattan, KS: Kansas State Research and Extension.
A videotape (SV #76) available from the Department of Communications, Distribution Office, Umberger Hall, KSU, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-5830 for $7.80 plus shipping and sales tax.

Domack, Dennis. 1995. *Creating a Vision for Your Community,* G3617. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Extension.
Looks at the process of creating community vision and offers specific ideas for communication techniques, information gathering approaches, follow-up projects, financial and technical resources. A good overview of community development. Available from Cooperative Extension Publications, Rm. 245, 30 N. Murray St., Madison, WI 53715; (608) 262-3346.

Kaner, Sam et al. 1996. *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making.* Gabriola Island, BC Canada: New Society Publishers.

Kinsley, Michael J. 1997. *Economic Renewal Guide: A Collaborative Process for Sustainable Community Development.* Snowmass, CO: Rocky Mountain Institute.

Focused on sustainability and economic development, contains good process suggestions and ways to evaluate ideas for action. Available from Rocky Mountain Institute, 1739 Snowmass Creek Rd., Snowmass, CO 81654-9199; (970) 927-3851.

Leuci, Mary S. 1996. "Establishing a Direction—Shared Principles, Purpose, Vision," *Missouri Express Guide 5*. Columbia, MO: University Outreach & Extension, University of Missouri System. Available on the web: http://outreach.missouri.edu/moexpress/guides/guide5-full.html.

Leuci, Mary S. 2000. "Large Group Interventions for Whole System Participation, Development and Change," *CD Practice Series.* Milwaukee, WI: Community Development Society.

McNamara, Carter. 1997. *Facilitator's Guide to Nonprofit Strategic Planning,* St. Paul, MN: The Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits.

Owen, Harrison. 1997. *Open Space Technology: A User's Guide, Second Edition.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.

Provides an alternative way of conducting some aspects of the *Vision to Action* process.

Peterson, Mark. 1995. *Harnessing the Power of Vision: Ten Steps to Creating a Strategic Vision and Action Plan for Your Community.* Little Rock, AR: University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.

Scharre, Phillip C., Phillip W. Wyatt and Kim Yates. 1997. *Quality Communities Manual.* Knoxville, TN: Tennessee Valley Authority.

Contains good materials for steering committees, excellent worksheets for meeting management, and several processes for issues exploration. Available for $23.25 with prepayment from Bicentennial Volunteers Inc., Attn: Phyllis A. Giger/TVA-ETPA, 400 W. Summit Hill Dr., Knoxville, TN 37902; (865) 632-8088.

Study Circles Resource Center. Pomfret, CT.

Provides process information for using study circles to develop action plans in neighborhoods and communities. P.O. Box 203, Pomfret, CT 06258.

Weisbord, Marvin and Sandra Janoff. 1995. *Future Search: An Action Guide to Finding Common Ground in Organizations and Communities.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.

Describes a three-day process that includes developing vision as skits, and contains an excellent chapter on facilitation pertinent to the *Vision to Action* process.

Project Planning and Implementation

In the community workshop, participants developed purpose, values and vision, as well as a preliminary action plan. In order to make the vision a reality, however, additional project planning and implementation is necessary.

It is important to have a well thought out written plan in which the work to be accomplished is clearly stated. This chapter will guide the project team through that process. Until there is a written plan, it is difficult to direct efforts effectively. Please note, however, that a plan is also dynamic. It may change as new information is received or new situations occur.

Another important aspect of the project planning process is organizing critical decisions in sequence. For example, it does little good to purchase a tract of land for a senior citizen housing project if the proper zoning cannot be obtained.

There is no sample agenda included for this portion of the *Vision to Action* process. As project teams meet and work through the project planning worksheets detailed below, individual team schedules will develop accordingly. However, many of the logistical details suggested for the community workshop will also be useful as project teams meet during the planning and implementation process.

One specific suggestion is to use flip charts while developing the plan so project team members can visually see the process. This enhances ownership, understanding, and most importantly, the ability to accurately explain the process. It is also useful to bring the plan to each project team meeting. This allows progress to continually be checked with reference to the plan.

VISION TO ACTION
Take Charge Too

Please note as well that project planning and implementation are two different functions. The project team has the responsibility of developing a plan for the project and making sure everything is in place for implementation. Depending on the scope and complexity of the plan, the project team often needs to develop a strategy to involve others in the implementation, perhaps even the total community.

Read through the entire chapter before finalizing the make-up of the project team and proceeding with the development of a project plan. On page 41 is a section titled "Managing the Effort over Time" which includes useful information for a steering committee and a project team as they continue through the *Vision to Action* process.

Developing Project Plans

To begin with, each project team needs to review the action planning worksheet (Appendix K) that was prepared at the community workshop. This will provide a record of the preliminary action planning process. Although the project team will have a distinct advantage due to the preliminary work that has already been done, it is important to remain flexible and adapt to changing conditions.

Eight project planning worksheets are included in the appendix and will be referenced throughout this chapter. While reviewing the action planning worksheet, complete Project Plan Worksheet #1 (see Appendix N, page 129).

Analyze the Impacts on Groups and Individuals

All projects have positive impacts on some people and negative impacts on others. It is important to identify who will potentially benefit from this project and how, and who will potentially be harmed by this project and how.

Complete Project Plan Worksheet #2 (see Appendix O, page 131).

Analyze the Situation

It is important to know how a community will respond to a project. To determine this, the project team can conduct an analysis of the community's attitude toward the project. In order to get a variety of perspectives visit with many different sectors of the community. For example:

- Community Leaders
- Friends and Neighbors
- High School Youth
- Senior Citizens
- Ethnic Groups

Use Project Plan Worksheet #3 (see Appendix P, page 133) as a reference when conducting each interview. It is also useful to record personal information about the people interviewed to ensure that a broad cross section of the community has been surveyed. For example:

- Occupation
- Age Group
- Income Group
- Other information that is relevant and useful.

Please note that a chapter on community assessment has been included in the *Vision to Action* workbook (see page 57). Community assessment can occur at several points in the process, whenever people need information.

After conducting the interviews, project team members need to meet and analyze the results to determine the community's attitude toward the project. Discuss each item listed below, and then compile and summarize the results on another copy of Project Plan Worksheet #3.

1. Current Community Priorities

Where does this project fit into current community priorities?

Complete section 1 of Project Plan Worksheet #3 (see Appendix P, page 133).

2. Current Related Projects

Are there groups in the community currently working on the same project or related projects? Have they been contacted? Is it feasible to join forces with the other group(s) or turn the project over to the other group(s)? If the project team proceeds on its own, will the other group(s) fight or block those efforts?

Complete section 2 of Project Plan Worksheet #3 (see Appendix P, page 133).

3. Past Attempts to Accomplish Similar Projects

Have there been past attempts to accomplish the same project or similar projects? If so, have the people involved been contacted and asked why the effort succeeded or failed? What was their response? Do any of these people want to become involved in the current project? Does the current project team want any of them involved?

Complete section 3 of Project Plan Worksheet #3 (see Appendix P, page 133).

4. Other Communities' Attempts to Accomplish Similar Projects

Have other communities attempted to accomplish the same project or similar projects? If so, have the people involved been contacted and asked about their experiences? What was their response? Why did they succeed or fail? Can insight be gained from visiting with them or by visiting their projects? It might be worthwhile for the project team to organize a tour of other communities where similar projects have been undertaken in order to observe successes and to visit first-hand with those involved.

Complete section 4 of Project Plan Worksheet #3 (see Appendix P, page133).

5. Where will the Decisions be Made

Where will the decisions pertaining to this project be made? In government offices, civic clubs, the local coffee shop or bank board meetings? Access to the decision making process is often critical to the success of the project. Develop a list of where the decisions will be made for each part of the project plan and determine how to access that particular decision making process.

Complete section 5 of Project Plan Worksheet #3 (see Appendix P, page 134).

6. How will the Decisions be Made

How will the decisions pertaining to this project be made? Will a public vote be required? Will a city council or county commission vote be required? Will civic clubs or other groups need to vote to use their resources to support part of the project? There are an increasing number of local, state and federal regulations that can impact a project as well (e.g., childcare and environmental issues). How regulations are enforced is critical to the success of a project. If regulations are an issue, involve people who make decisions on and enforce regulations in every step of the project design and implementation. People tend to support what they have helped develop.

Complete section 6 of Project Plan Worksheet #3 (see Appendix P, page 134).

7. When will the Decisions be Made

When will the decisions pertaining to this project be made? For example, county governments often have deadlines for budget requests for the upcoming year. If a proposal is not submitted on time, it won't

be considered. The same is true for many other agencies—both public and private. Never take timelines for granted. When developing the list of where decisions related to the project will be made, obtain information on timelines and policies as well. Ask for guidelines that explain the procedures.

Complete section 7 of Project Plan Worksheet #3 (see Appendix P, page 134).

8. Helping Forces

In every project planning and implementation situation there are internal forces and external forces that can help move a project forward. Recognizing the helping forces can allow the project team to channel those forces to their advantage in order to move the project forward. What are the helping forces related to this project and how might the project team use them to meet the desired outcome?

Complete section 8 of Project Plan Worksheet #3 (see Appendix P, page 134).

9. Hindering Forces

In every project planning and implementation situation there are also hindering forces that may oppose the project team or have a negative impact on the vision or the project. Identifying the hindering forces may allow the project team to reduce their impact or turn them into helping forces. What are the hindering forces related to this project and what strategies might the project team use to reduce or overcome these forces?

Complete section 9 of Project Plan Worksheet #3 (see Appendix P, page 135).

Seek Ideas and Approval

It is important for people to buy into the project. The best way to do that is to ask for input early on rather than telling people what the project is and how they are to be involved. Ask key decision makers for their input first, then members of various organizations. Share what is trying to be accomplished and then ask for their ideas and approval. Use Project Plan Worksheet #4 to identify key decision makers and potential supporters and opponents (see Appendix Q, page 137, and explanation on next page), and Project Plan Worksheet #5 when interviewing these people (see Appendix R, page 139). Valuable input may be provided that will improve the project, and people may pledge enthusiastic support for the project. At the very least, the team should gain some sense of what support there is in the community for the project.

1. Key Decision Makers

There are key people in every community that, because of their position or past experiences, can make or break a project. These key decision makers need to be personally visited and briefed about the situation, problem or opportunity. Specifically, the project team needs to know how strongly the key decision makers support or oppose the project. Ask them how they would approach the situation? Share the project teams' ideas on how to address the situation, being careful to remain flexible. The project team will want to ask the key decision makers to support the project, and therefore must remain open to their ideas. Transferring ownership of the project and specific ideas from the project team to the key decision makers takes diplomacy, but is very important.

Complete sections 1a and 1b of Project Plan Worksheet #4 (see Appendix Q, page 137).

2. Potential Supporters

The project team will want to identify and personally visit with other potential supporters of the project to inform them of the vision theme and preliminary action plan, and ask for their ideas and their help.

Complete sections 2a and 2b of Project Plan Worksheet #4 (see Appendix Q, page 137).

3. Potential Opponents

Every vision theme and every project seems to have some opposition. Do not ignore this opposition or try to keep opponents from being involved in the project. It is best for the project team to personally visit potential opponents early on and inform them of the vision theme and preliminary action plan. Determine why they might be opposed to the project, how strongly they are opposed to the project, and if there is a way to incorporate their concerns without diluting the project to the point where it no longer accomplishes the vision. Give potential opponents an opportunity to have real input; to be a part of the project plan and implementation.

Complete section 3 of Project Plan Worksheet #4 (see Appendix Q, page 138).

<u>Needed Information</u>

By working through Project Plan Worksheets #2, #3 and #4, the project team has now identified a list of stakeholders. It is critical to not only have an accurate understanding of a project's stakeholders, but to

also have sound information to provide them with. Often general information is not enough for most public issues. Instead, target the information to the needs of the individual groups of stakeholders. For example, a county commission will need different information in a different form than civic clubs that might support the project.

Complete Project Plan Worksheet #6 (see Appendix S, page 141).

Community Resource Inventory

Rarely does a project team have the resource base to carry out the tasks associated with an entire project, and must instead draw others into the process to be successful. A complete inventory of organizational, business, agency and institutional responsibilities and interests allow for matching project tasks to be accomplished with expressed responsibility or interest. Successful matches will allow the project team to obtain quality performance and involvement. People invest in what they value, and success is therefore based on relating the project and its parts to what is valued. The process of determining purpose, values and vision in the initial community workshop should have created a foundation and ensure that this link is possible.

Complete Project Plan Worksheet #7 (see Appendix T, page 143).

Plan of Action

The project team is now ready to determine a plan of action. Review the critical action steps identified in the preliminary action plan and update if necessary based on the information obtained in the previous seven steps. It is also important to remain flexible and consider all action steps a learning experience.

Complete Project Plan Worksheet #8 (see Appendix U, page 149).

Forming an Organization to Manage Implementation

Now that a plan of action has been completed, the steering committee and the project team should consider what type of organization could best implement the project on a long-term basis. There are two ways to proceed: to work with existing groups or organizations in the community, or to form a new organization.

Working with Existing Groups

The project team should first consider whether or not there are existing groups or organizations currently working on the same project or related projects (see Project Plan Worksheet #3, section 2). Also consider whether or not there are existing groups or organizations working

on similar projects that could be expanded or modified to undertake the project team's goals. Often groups exist in the community but need to be revitalized. A new project may provide the stimuli needed to reorganize existing inactive groups. It is also a good idea to take advantage of organized resources that are already available. Creating a new group or organization with goals that are the same as existing groups creates confusion, possible conflict, fragmented efforts, and spreads scarce resources too thin.

When evaluating existing groups or organizations in the community, consider the following questions:

- Does the organization have the same purpose?
- Does the organization have similar goals?
- Is membership in the organization open to the community?
- Does the organization have the support of the community?
- Does the organization have the ability to handle necessary funds?
- Is the organization effective in its purpose.

If the answer is yes to most of these questions, then the project team should consider using the existing organization or forming a sub-group of the existing organization. For example, many project teams have successfully implemented action plans within the existing Chamber of Commerce or other civic organizations. If several groups exist with interest in a certain issue area, then the project team might want to consider setting up an umbrella organization to coordinate activities and channel information.

Forming a New Organization

If there are no existing groups or organizations in a community to undertake the desired action plan, then the project team will need to form a new organization. A *coordinating council* is an appropriate type of organization for this purpose.

1. Council Responsibilities

- Keeper of the vision and purpose. Communicate it to the community at every opportunity. Suggestions include:
  - Newsletters.
  - Letterhead, business cards and on the back of membership cards.
  - Promotional or educational materials.
- Establish a clear understanding of responsibilities of paid staff versus responsibilities of the council and project volunteers. There is a tendency to shift project work to the paid staff. This will not work if the intention is to build a dynamic action community engaged in creating its own future.

- Coordinate projects. Although it is best to have non-council volunteers managing a project and doing the work on a project, consider appointing a liaison from the council to each of the projects to help with coordination.
- Generate new projects and engage in ongoing planning. Don't worry about generating new projects as long as people can be found to do the work. Be especially alert to opportunities to spin-off projects to existing organizations.
- Communicate progress on a project to the community and to people working on other projects.
- Celebrate contributions and successes at every opportunity. One advantage of having clear action steps within a project plan is the sense of success that can be created by valuing the completion of each step. The council also needs to share credit widely with non-council volunteers.
- Assess capabilities of people in the community, and constantly look for ways to be inclusive and to bring more people into the process.
- Regularly re-visit the project purpose and the visioning process that guided the development of the project and its action plan. Experience shows that many communities need to work through the visioning and action planning process every three years.

2. Considerations for Council Membership

- Council membership should be kept to 12 to 15 people.
- Council membership should represent a broad cross-section of the community. However, this needs to be balanced by a commitment to find the common ground as a basis for action projects.
- Council membership should consist of a set two- or three-year staggered term with members continually rotating on and off the council.
- Council members should be highly trusted in the community.
- Council members should be committed to attending monthly meetings (or more often if needed).
- Council members should be committed to engaging in the planning process (instead of or in addition to implementation).

Managing the Effort over Time

To effectively manage over time not only specific projects, but also the broader community action planning process, the steering committee and the project team(s) will need to:

- Develop leadership.
- Identify and mobilize resources.
- Develop a communications network.
- Monitor changes, evaluate efforts and revise plans.
- Reward participants.

Develop Leadership

The steering committee may want to assess the commitment of those involved in the project teams and their leadership experience. It is important that people understand the goals and objectives of the team and their individual role to help accomplish the goals. Set aside at least one meeting to discuss project team members' roles and responsibilities. If the members do not have any leadership experience or if commitment to the tasks is low, a leadership effectiveness training program at this stage may be appropriate. Following are some leadership questions that should be addressed:

- Does each project team understand its responsibilities?
- When, where and how often will the project team meet?
- Who will establish the agenda for the meeting?
- Do the chairpersons understand their responsibilities?
- Do the members of the project teams understand their tasks?
- Do the members understand the goals of the total effort?
- Are the meetings well organized, staying within the time limits and following the agenda?
- How is information in the project team communicated between members, between chairs and members, and with the public?
- How are members rewarded?

Identify and Mobilize Resources

There are many types of resources that may be needed to carry out a plan of action: human resources (e.g., skills and expertise, personal power and influence); physical resources (e.g., facilities, supplies and equipment); and financial resources. Two primary financial resources that the steering committee and project teams will need are:

- Funding for operating expenses. Costs usually incurred by the steering committee and project teams include travel, telephone, duplicating, printing and postage. Some of these costs may be covered as in-kind services from businesses, utility companies, local government or Chambers of Commerce.
- Funding for specific projects.

Develop a budget and consider possible resources for both types of financial needs. It is best to recruit resources from within the community before attempting to secure funds from outside the community. The steering committee and/or project teams may also want to consider matching financial resources raised within the community with outside dollars.

Suggestions for obtaining the necessary financial resources include:

- Fundraising activities sponsored by local civic and social organizations in the community.
- Grants from state or federal government or private foundations. These are usually granted for a specific program or project rather than for operating expenses of the organization.
- Community foundation grants to provide a mechanism to finance efforts on a long-term basis.
- A local government allocation.

The steering committee may want to consider forming a finance subcommittee to undertake these activities. In some communities it may work better to have each project team secure their own resources as needed. In this case the steering committee or facilitator must coordinate the efforts of the project teams to avoid duplication.

Develop a Communications Network

A communications network is key to successful project implementation. There are three levels of communication that need to be addressed:

- How will members within a steering committee or project team keep each other informed? The flow of information is very important. Frequent phone calls, e-mail messages, mailings and meetings are ways to keep members informed on a daily basis. Take time to talk about a communications system, then stick with it. Everyone plays a part in the communications network.
- How will the community be kept informed? Appoint a committee member or team member to be responsible for this task. Newsworthy articles should be submitted to local, county and regional newspapers. Newsletters, brochures, posters, other printed materials and web-based or e-mail lists will be useful as well. Members communicating through schools, churches and other local organizations that they are involved with can also increase community awareness. Frequent reports are the key to keeping the community aware of and supportive of the steering committee's and project teams' actions.
- How will communication take place with state and federal agencies? Participation in state conferences, workshops and training programs is one way to learn about available resources and what other communities are doing. It is also a way for state-level agencies (e.g., utility companies and state departments of economic development) to learn about the community. Printed materials and videos can help communicate the community's message. In addition, knowing these people on a personal basis can often assist in knowing how to access resources the community needs.

Monitor Changes, Evaluate Efforts and Revise Plans

To reach the community's desired future, it is important for the steering committee and the project teams to have some way to monitor and assess the change that is occurring. If yearly objectives are established, these become measures of the group's progress. At the end of each year, the group can evaluate how well it has met its objectives, modify current objectives and set new ones. What successes were achieved? What would the project team do differently next time? Who helped make things happen? What resources were used and who provided them? This information can also be used to recognize volunteers for their time and effort and to challenge the community to meet new and continuing objectives in the year ahead.

Please note that a chapter on monitoring and evaluation has been included in the *Vision to Action* workbook (see page 79).

Reward Participants

Communities are dependent upon volunteers who donate their time, talents and other resources. Often the only reward they receive is knowing they have played a part in achieving something worthwhile. Setting goals people feel are important and achieving those goals are key to getting people involved and keeping them involved. Recognizing people's efforts throughout the year and having a yearly celebration to say thank you is also important.

For example, one small community organized a "Hats Off Banquet" and invited everyone in town. The members of each project team created a hat and then took their hats off to each other as the accomplishments of every team were announced. At the end of the ceremony those without hats were invited to join a project team, become active participants and don the hat of their choice. Such an event went a long way to recognizing those who were active, to motivating others to get involved, and to having fun.

Outcomes of the Community Action Planning Process

Many things can happen when a community takes part in the *Vision to Action* process. However, the three listed below are considered the hallmarks of a successful effort.

1. Community Action Plan

The community action plan is the first tangible product of the planning process and is an important source of guidance for the organization that assumes responsibility for implementation. The community purpose, values and vision recorded in this plan can be a continuing frame-

work to engage people about the why and what of their community. The extensive list of action ideas can also be developed into new projects.

2. Broadened Citizen Participation

One purpose of the visioning and action planning process is to build energy and commitment to broadening citizen participation. If successful, the process will expand the number of people in the community involved in and contributing to the work of the community.

3. Completed Project

Another important outcome is completed projects. Records need to be kept to provide a history of accomplishment. Communities should also develop strategies for recognizing participants and celebrating their achievements. Publicizing these accomplishments is another important factor in developing the future of the community.

Maintaining Momentum

Even the best community visioning and action planning efforts can reach a stage where they risk losing momentum. Maintaining initial enthusiasm and energy can be difficult with the most effective and well-executed processes. This chapter will:

- Provide ideas for keeping the steering committee, the project teams and the organizations or groups charged with implementation actively engaged.
- Identify signs of declining momentum and suggest specific techniques for staying on track and making needed changes (including reworking the vision and action plans).
- Offer a checklist that can be used to gauge the level of momentum.

Please note that there is the real work involved in keeping the energy, excitement, commitment and spirit alive to foster continued action.

Maintaining Momentum Requires Planning Too

There is no single, easy answer to maintaining the energy, enthusiasm and resource commitments that result from well-done visioning and action planning sessions. In fact, communities need to plan for maintaining momentum as much as they plan for action. Communities that have succeeded in sustaining action and keeping citizens engaged have paid attention to the following:

- Coordination
- Organizational Development
- Emergence of New Challenges, Problems and Opportunities
- Expansion of the Volunteer Base

VISION TO ACTION
Take Charge Too

- Community Ownership and Pride
- New Ideas
- Communication

1. Coordination

Effective coordination among multiple project teams saves time, creates greater results, prevents potential conflict, and builds the teamwork essential for maintaining a sense of community. The steering committee and the chairs of the project teams should undertake coordination as part of their ongoing work. Always be alert to what might be viewed as an overlap of work, and seek out ways to work together with other project teams or organizations. Note as well that new ideas that might relate to other projects need to be shared. Most importantly, understand that there is no substitute for communicating with one another.

Tips for Success

- Build a track record of coordination and open communication from the beginning.
- Recognize that as the number of people involved and the number of projects increases, the situation becomes more complex and coordination becomes even more critical to ongoing success. What worked initially may need to be revised.
- Commit to open communication and nurturing relationships, which are key to coordination.
- Whenever possible, hold concurrent project team meetings.
- Offer a seminar or workshop on networking and collaboration skills.

Success Story

Hillsboro, Kansas (population 3,136) is a Great Plains success story, due in part to the coordination and cooperation of both community and countywide organizations. The Hillsboro Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, and fair coordinator are co-located in a downtown storefront. The community is active in the Marian County Development Council and a unique countywide leadership education program, which graduates people every other year. In recognition of its work, Hillsboro has reached the highest level of achievement in Kansas's PRIDE program.

2. Organizational Development

Every steering committee, project team and organization charged with implementation that keeps its members engaged has developed a structure appropriate to the community itself and the tasks that need to

be accomplished. Over time, the structure needed to accomplish tasks may change. The community needs to purposefully think about and determine changes and shifts needed in the structure, regardless of the formality of the structure. There are no right structures that fit every community. Some communities succeed with a network and some with more structure.

Tips for Success

- Organizational structures work because people make them work. Take the time to create, maintain and expand organizational and personal relationships. Most successful partnerships are based on successful personal relationships.
- Always look for more effective alternative structures and processes. Acknowledge, reorganize and change if that's what is needed.
- Look at what other communities have done successfully. Ask why it was done that way and why it worked.
- Consider bringing in an outside organizational development professional to evaluate progress.

Success Story

Since 1986, Columbus, Kansas (population 3,300) has maintained an effective organization to oversee and foster its continued development. The Columbus Economic Development Steering Committee, better known as the Fat Wednesday Bunch, meets the first and third Wednesday of every month to discuss issues, come up with ideas, determine who is the best person or organization to deal with operations, and to designate who will meet with that group. The Fat Wednesday Bunch grew out of an action planning process that included the following question to community participants: Who are the 12 most respected and trusted people in the community? The top 12 were asked by the mayor to form the initial committee. The group has two basic rules: start at 7:01 and the last person in the door takes the minutes. There is a consistent 80 percent to 90 percent participation rate and the meetings are also open. These people provide the leadership for a web of inclusion in the community and the oversight for continuous attention to planning and conducting well-balanced development.

3. Emergence of New Challenges, Problems and Opportunities

New challenges, problems and opportunities always come along that were not included nor anticipated in the original plan. These can include things like increased demands on infrastructure resulting from economic expansion, an influx of diverse new residents, the closing of a local factory, natural disasters, and emerging telecommunications opportunities.

Tips for Success

- For major issues, hold a meeting of the steering committee specifically to strategize new or modified goals.
- Acknowledge openly that existing projects may need to be put on hold. This does not constitute failure, but rather a resetting of priorities.

Success Story

Pike County is nestled between the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers on the western boundary of Illinois. The county began a strategic planning process with University of Illinois Extension in 1990, and was well on its way to completing a plan with goals, objectives and strategies defined on a countywide basis. However, in 1993 county residents began a battle that would last all summer and, for some, change their communities forever. That summer, the Mississippi River threatened to flood, and eventually did overflow the levees at several points in Pike County. Every resident, government official and agency employee was fully engaged in fighting the flood with sandbags, work crews and salvage procedures. The flood destroyed schools and homes, whole shopping districts and neighborhoods, washed out roads and ruined water systems, and left a thick load of sand over once productive farmland. When the water abated, Pike County got back on track with meetings to define one community objective that they could work on as they cleaned up and, in many cases, started over in building or rebuilding their communities. The planning group decided to work on developing tourism and soon completed several projects, with more efficiency and enthusiasm than they had ever mustered before. Community leaders report that development occurs in "fits and starts," and that some critical events shape the direction of activities more clearly than planning can. Fighting the flood helped residents develop a new sense of community and appreciation for working together. The University of Illinois Extension planning program picked up where the community building aspect of the flood left off—with leaders who could coordinate activities in a positive direction.

4. Expansion of the Volunteer Base

Continually involving new people who are committed to the work of the community is essential to keeping community action alive and to proceeding with additional projects. It is also important to prevent burnout of existing volunteers. Often the issues are how to link opportunities with people and how to communicate well with existing volunteers.

Tips for Success

- Communicate effectively the process used for developing the vision and action plans, information about specific projects and how people can get involved.
- Give people opportunities to become engaged in a different project or a different part of the process.
- Develop job descriptions for volunteers that include specific information such as length of commitment, specific tasks, etc.
- Create a plan and system for recruiting new volunteers.
- Hold a brief orientation for new volunteers.
- Ask volunteers how they feel about progress and their own involvement; ask them to help evaluate results and for new ideas.

Success Story

Some very successful communities have developed their own system and database for continually cataloging and maintaining information about volunteers and potential volunteers. For example, what do people know how to do, what do they like to do, what are they able to teach others how to do, and what hours or restrictions do they have. The information can be computerized. Douglas County, Missouri has even taken this to the level of people entering their own information on the community web site.

5. Community Ownership and Pride

The sense of community ownership and pride can be nurtured by recognizing people's contributions and celebrating success.

Tips for Success

- Involve the media as partners early in the process.
- Use certificates and plaques or other ways to formally and publicly recognize people's efforts.
- Hold a dinner with project updates.
- Give credit and high visibility to successfully completed work.
- Share the credit broadly.

Success Story

The city of Maywood, Nebraska (population 330) recently won the Nebraska Community Improvement Award. The judges praised them for, among other things, their ability to motivate and involve community members in their projects. Their citizen involvement efforts also included the Maywood for Youth Leadership and Pride project in their school of 200. The community has worked closely with the local

newspaper throughout the award application process by recognizing numerous projects and programs. They continued this relationship by highlighting and celebrating their successes. A celebration dinner was held with more than 100 people present, and there are plans to do more in the future.

6. New Ideas

It is important to create opportunities for new ideas to be put forth openly and incorporated into the existing vision and action plans.

Tips for Success

- Place an idea card at coffee shops, senior centers, churches and city hall for example, to encourage community members to submit new ideas. The cards should be addressed to the steering committee.
- Create a brief *idea generation* presentation for the steering committee or project teams to use with service clubs and other groups.
- Add a time for brainstorming to the agenda of all regular meetings.
- Add an opportunity for idea sharing to a community web site.

Success Story

The city of Rudd, Iowa (population 460) used a highly visual method to assist residents with their visioning and planning process. This created interest in the residents and got them involved. The process began with a community meeting. The meeting proceeded with introductory comments, decades brainstorming, then developing teams to take pictures of the community. Each team was given a role of film and shot pictures of five to 10 things the team members liked and five to 10 things they would like to see changed or improved. The teams submitted their pictures and they were labeled and placed on a large community map. At the next community meeting, team members shared what their pictures were and why they were important or needed changing. One of the nice things about this process is you can involve people who were not at the first meeting. They were able to get high school youth and senior citizens involved who would not have become involved otherwise.

7. Communication

Communication has to occur on all fronts—with the public, with community leaders and officials (e.g., elected and non-elected government representatives), with the private sector (e.g., financial institutions and businesses) and with organizations (e.g., service clubs and religious groups).

Tips for Success

- Develop and carry out a communications plan with emphasis on regular contacts with the steering committee and other project teams.
- Ask for feedback.
- Consider publishing a periodic update or progress column in local papers, newsletters or on the web.
- Invite area legislators in for updates and dialogues on emerging issues.
- Ask for time on the agenda at township and county board meetings.
- Use all available means for communicating.

Success Story

Many communities, both large and small, have developed web sites. It is worthwhile to spend some time on the Internet to find sites that are well done. Minnesota Lake, Minnesota (population 700) has an attractive and useful web site (www.MinnesotaLake.com). Former residents can become a member of Minnesota Lake's virtual community and virtual post office to keep track of family, friends, and local activities and events.

Troubleshooting

It is not uncommon to encounter difficult situations during the implementation process. Listed below are difficulties that typically arise and suggestions for dealing with them.

Difficulty: Projects are not being completed on time or are not being completed at all.

Suggestions for Addressing Difficulty:

- Revisit and revise the action plan and timetable. The time frame may have been unrealistic, or the importance of the project to the group may have changed (has the project become too controversial, too big to tackle, or less important than other tasks).
- Ask the people involved for their thoughts, ideas and suggestions. Sometimes group discussions are valuable. In addition, one-on-one discussions may reveal issues that might not come out in a group discussion (e.g., personality conflicts).
- Make changes in leadership or membership.

Difficulty: Loss of direction or focus.

Suggestions for Addressing Difficulty:

- Spend structured time revisiting the vision and goals in light of changes in the organization and new issues, opportunities and people.
- Evaluate membership of the project teams or organizations charged with implementation. Are there opportunities for people to leave or join?
- Review the structure for coordination and leadership. Is it still relevant?
- Determine whether there is sufficient communication of progress and opportunities.
- Consider the question of ownership (see below).

Difficulty: The question of ownership, or control by a few.

Suggestions for Addressing Difficulty:

- Review the structure for determining leadership. Is there a defined system for rotating leadership? If not, consider options to revise the structure and involve different people.
- Ask an outside person or group to help evaluate the organizational structure. They can provide constructive ways to raise sensitive issues.
- Consider whether there is true shared-decision making among those involved.
- Determine whether there is sufficient and open communication in the organization about what is going on.
- Have a plan for actively recruiting and preparing people to step into leadership roles (e.g., chair and vice chair or chair-in-training).

Difficulty: Conflict and controversy.

Suggestions for Addressing Difficulty:

- Acknowledge and define the differences.
- Bring in a skilled facilitator or mediator.
- Re-examine the action plan and timetable as potential causes.
- Revisit project team membership and make-up.
- Explore and determine areas of agreement and work in those areas.
- Distinguish between personality conflicts or styles and differences around specific issues.

Difficulty: Dealing with failure.

Suggestions for Addressing Difficulty:

- Be up front and acknowledge the failure.
- Work through any possibilities to salvage the effort.
- Look at what was learned from the experiences, especially the positive.
- Rework the plan to reflect necessary changes.
- Acknowledge the contributions people made to the effort.
- Reassign everyone involved in the failed effort to other programs and projects.

Difficulty: Negative publicity.

Suggestions for Addressing Difficulty:

- Convene the board and determine if it's valid. If it is valid, acknowledge it publicly.
- Develop a plan to communicate *all* relevant information to project team members, media, involved parties, and citizens in general.
- Learn from the experience and create a plan to deal with similar situations in the future.

Difficulty: Insufficient resources.

Suggestions for Addressing Difficulty:

- Discuss how resources can be redirected.
- Re-examine the vision and the project. Has the purpose changed for the project? Can the goal be modified?
- Can the project be put on hold?
- Always ask if insufficient resources are a symptom of a deeper issue?

Maintaining Momentum Checklist

The checklist found in Appendix V (see page 151) can be used with community members that have been involved with the steering committee, project teams and organizations or groups charged with implementation. Results can be discussed by the steering committee, or can be shared with an Extension educator or community development professional from outside the community for critique and suggestions.

Questions one through four on the checklist look at the vision and the goals; questions five through eight deal with structure and organization; questions nine and 10 focus on human resources and financial resources; and questions 11 through 15 address communication and collaboration.

Resources

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Peterson, Mark. 1995. *Harnessing the Power of Vision: Ten Steps to Creating a Strategic Vision and Action Plan for Your Community.* Little Rock, AR: University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.

Stern, Gary. 1992. *Marketing Workbook for Nonprofit Organizations.* St. Paul, MN: Amherst Wilder Foundation.

Hein, Clair et al. 1993. *Leadership: Sustaining Action on Community and Organizational Issues.* Ames, IA: North Central Regional Center for Rural Development.

Winer, Michael and Karen Ray. 1994. *Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining and Enjoying the Journey.* St. Paul, MN: Amherst Wilder Foundation.

Community Assessment

The purpose of conducting a community assessment is to create an information foundation for further planning and action. As written upon the tombstone, any analysis and interpretation is relevant only when it becomes useful in making decisions or taking action. Community assessment can occur whenever people need information. Community members may want to collect information before developing goals, or after goals and issues have been identified, or at several points in the process. A variety of tools make assessment a useful exercise as community groups work through visioning, planning and implementation.

While working through this chapter, the *Vision to Action* steering committee or a project team will:

- Specify information to gather for further action or decision making.
- Discover existing information that is ready to use.
- Set a schedule for completing the community assessment.
- Identify and confirm a person to manage the community assessment process.
- Identify and confirm an organization to host the community assessment process.
- Review various assessment strategies.

Introduction

A community assessment can create a sense of where a community belongs, why it exists, where it has strength, where weaknesses lie, and what opportunities are available. The purpose of conducting a community assessment is to create a foundation for planning and action, or to

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."

From a tombstone in Highgate Cemetery, London

VISION TO ACTION
Take Charge Too

broaden participation in the development of a community vision. In short, communities benefit from knowing more about themselves when they are working on projects or making decisions.

Communities want to define themselves by understanding better the characteristics of residents; the types of organizations that are active; the values, beliefs and goals residents share; concerns and problems which should be addressed; how the community compares with other communities; and what is unique about the community. An assessment of a community to address these issues may be approached from many perspectives.

This chapter of *Vision to Action* provides information about community assessments using two types of information-gathering strategies that are often used in tandem. Information can come from existing or secondary data about the community, or primary data gathered expressly for a particular project.

Sources of existing or secondary data will be suggested, and some strategies for collecting primary data will be explored. Usually, communities use existing data along with some data collected expressly for a project or a decision. Some communities choose to involve an expert—someone who can serve as an objective outsider to ensure neutrality in the design of assessment projects or in the collection of data. In most areas expert assistance is available through the Extension Service, a regional planning office, a Resource Conservation and Development office, a USDA Rural Development office, city staff or county staff.

In some communities, the *Vision to Action* steering committee and project teams have skipped the assessment phase and begun working on issues identified as top priorities. These groups often discover that they need the information from a community profile or assessment as they create an action plan to achieve the vision.

Information from a community assessment can be useful at several points in the visioning, planning and implementation process. Some community groups begin with a survey to identify important issues, collect data about those issues or the community to use in developing a plan, conduct focus groups to get feedback about the plan, and then begin implementation. Other groups know which issues are priority areas and begin working on those issues immediately. They may return to complete an assessment when they need more information in the planning or implementation phase.

Information from an assessment of a community is almost always interesting to community groups and residents, especially those involved in making decisions about the community. Therefore, a report to describe the issues and the findings of the assessment has lasting value.

Traditionally, community assessments were focused on the needs, problems or shortcomings of communities. Today, however, many communities are also working to identify assets, capacities or strengths within the community. The reasons for widening the focus to include the positive and the negative are many, including a new energy and drive for change and action which is more often the result of a focus on assets.

In many rural communities and urban neighborhoods, opportunities for change and improvement arise from a positive look at what can be done with current resources. Resources might include the skills, talents, time and ability of residents; a history of community that binds people to a special place; organizations that are rooted in and committed to the community; and strong networks of diverse people who share a common goal of investing in their community.

Considering assets in a community assessment is often a matter of broadening the perspective. For example, community leaders might worry about providing activities for young people to keep them out of trouble because they have nothing to do. From a *needs* perspective, the situation might be described as "what should we do to keep kids out of trouble?" From an *assets* perspective, young people should be viewed as an untapped resource and invited into community planning and community decision making to offer their views and contribute their energy. The extra time they have is viewed as an asset rather than an opportunity to cause trouble. In effective, cohesive communities, leaders find ways for all residents, including youth, to contribute.

Important decisions must be addressed in planning an assessment, including:

- What will the community learn from the assessment and how will the information be used?
- How will this information serve the *Vision to Action* planning effort?
- Is there existing information ready to use? Check with people who use information or know about the community (e.g., local planners, the health department, the librarian, the mayor, the town historian and the town clerk). Information that has been collected for one purpose may serve very well in the community assessment. At the very least, others in the community who might be willing to work on the current project will be identified.
- Who will plan and conduct the assessment—outside experts or inside talent?
- Who will take responsibility to manage the process? (Note that taking responsibility includes the responsibility to delegate.)

- Is there an organization to host the process, provide resources and lend credibility in the community? This might be an existing organization, the *Vision to Action* steering committee, or a committee created to host and manage the community assessment. Chambers of Commerce or economic development offices are sometimes identified as hosts.
- How will the activity be funded? In what form will resources be needed (e.g., will the assessment require time, dollars, office staff, postage, telephones, volunteers or credibility)?
- Will the assessment include a profile of the community using existing data or primary data? Could existing data be used in addition to primary data?
- What will the report look like?
- How will information be shared with community residents (e.g., town meetings, printed report available for pick-up, newspaper articles, direct mail to all residents, information on the community web site, local radio talk show, church bulletins, newsletters from community organizations, posters in public place)?

Another important decision that must be addressed is whether or not to complete the community assessment with volunteers or by hiring an expert. Following is some information on both options.

Volunteers

An advantage to having volunteers complete a community assessment is that control remains within the community. When local residents plan the community assessment they can shape the report to fit local information needs, and create a format that will be easy to share in the community. In completing the community assessment, local residents will learn firsthand about their community. When they attend meetings they will know something about the town, with the data and facts to support their opinions. When local residents think about data long enough to figure out a plan to collect it, they gain a better understanding of how that information can be used to make decisions. Decisions are grounded in a common set of assumptions about the facts. Working together to collect information binds a group around a common experience.

A disadvantage to having volunteers complete a community assessment is that data collection is difficult. It takes time and additional resources.

1. There is no perfect information package. Errors abound. There is the risk of collecting information that is not relevant to the decisions at hand, or is simply outdated or inaccurate. To find accurate and relevant data, the investigator must know of good sources, and this know-how represents a large investment of time and effort (often more than what can be expected of a local volunteer working in his or her spare time).

2. A local resident's proximity to the community puts blinders on his or her ability to see the community objectively, and the assessment process may reflect existing assumptions or perceptions. Completing a community assessment may create goodwill, help local residents build their skills, and generate enthusiasm toward community action. At the same time, local participation can be a liability. Local personalities can taint the information generated by the community assessment if the results of the assessment are closely associated with people (and their history or reputation in the community). An outsider can provide a fresh look, and a perspective gained from experience in other communities.

3. The ability to analyze the data may not reside locally. Analyzing data requires technical skill that is usually available at a university, community college, regional planning council, city planning office, or possibly the health department. Check references and request work samples if you are thinking of contracting for data entry and analysis. Specify the information to be included in the assessment and analysis, and think ahead about where the data should be stored and how it can continue to be accessible.

4. Community assessments take unexpected twists and turns—and usually require more time than is anticipated in planning and in sharing information. For example, a volunteer's resulting expertise in community conditions will make them popular with the local media. They may be answering questions for local reporters or appearing on local radio talk shows.

Experts

The advantage to hiring an expert is gaining from the experience of others. The quick and painless way to conduct a community assessment is to let someone else do it. The community buys the time and expertise of someone who can quickly collect information and who may attract local attention to the activity. An external expert will be perceived as objective, have no ax to grind, and no previous involvement with local issues. The product of the community assessment may be more generic, may have more application and recognition around the region, and thus may be useful in a context other than the local planning and action process.

A disadvantage to hiring an expert is that it is very expensive. Hiring an expert can quickly gobble up resources that could be invested locally. When local people develop skills, they continue to serve as a resource to the community. When the community hires an expert, he or she will come and go according to the contract. The expert may limit the

community's use of the report and/or the data. The expert's detachment from the community may also engender less concern for the questions and less passion for solutions.

Do it Yourself with Help from an Expert

An advantage to using local resources with help from an expert is that costs can be cut without losing relevance and precision. Using a combination of external experts and local teams to conduct community assessments can cut costs, steer the community toward reliable sources, provide an objective external perspective, and allow for local residents to learn skills which will be useful in updating or supplementing the community assessment. If an expert guides the process, community members must make a strong commitment to keep up. This is often the model when communities work with Extension educators; expertise is contributed as community members develop skills. Community members mostly shoulder responsibility for conducting the assessment and sharing the resulting information, with guidance from someone who has experience.

A disadvantage to using a combination of external experts and local teams is that it gets complicated. Logistics in managing data collection from a variety of sources and methods can be time consuming and frustrating. Data gathering and reporting can become fragmented and difficult to incorporate into either vision development or action planning. When hiring an expert to work with community volunteers, a clear and detailed schedule is critical to completing the assessment. Since Extension educators have conducted community assessments previously, they often have a schedule and format to guide the process.

Using Existing Data

Creating a Community Profile

Numbers, and changes in numbers, describe a community and can indicate trends over time. Vital statistics are compiled from local, state and national records of births, deaths, marriages, divorces, and sometimes health. Using local statistics might identify factors affecting changes in population, which are described in the census. For example, an increase in population may be due to natural increases (births), or due to people moving into the community.

These records can be used to determine whether there has been a change in the number of households or in household composition. As a population ages, for example, households may be made up of older, single adults, rather than young adults and children. Census and vital statistics can be used to form a detailed description of residents according to such characteristics as ethnic background, age, gender, marital

status, income and education. Use this information to make comparisons with other communities undergoing similar patterns of growth. If, for example, household income appears to be lower than it is in neighboring communities, what might be the reason for that? Maybe households in the study community are predominantly single retired persons living on fixed incomes, or maybe the major employer in the area offers low wages to workers.

Selected indicators that provide a profile of the community are listed below. There are no magic numbers to explain entirely the changes that may be taking place in a community, or the composition of a community. The numbers collected will identify areas where more can be learned.

Community Profile Listing Selected Indicators

Indicators include:

- Total population for the community and the region or state.
- Population change in the last decade (percent and absolute numbers).
- Age/sex pyramid.
- Changes in the age block (use another pyramid to see change).
- Ethnicity (major languages).
- Per capita income.
- Change in per capita income.
- Household income.
- Change in household income.
- Average rent.
- Value of housing units sold.
- Median cost of housing units.
- Level of educational attainment.
- Occupations of residents.
- Employment in the community.

Sources include:

- U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau: http://www.census.gov/.
- Data Center Program: (301) 457-1305. (Includes contact information for the State Data Centers, Business and Industry Data Centers, and Census Information Centers.)
- Iowa State University: http://www.profiles.iastate.edu/. (At this site you can see economic profiles by county or by state for the Midwest.)
- County and City Data Book and U.S. Statistical Abstract. (Hard copy is in local libraries and government repositories. Also available on the World Wide Web at the U.S. Census Bureau.)
- Local health departments keep statistics including births, deaths, marriages and divorces.

Sample Population Pyramid

The population pyramid is a useful tool to create a picture of the community or county population. Use information from the census bureau or the state data center to plot the number of persons by gender and by age group. Population pyramids represent the age distributions, grouped by gender, of the living population.

Each character in the chart below represents 0.5 percent of the population. The intervals correspond to the points—five years, 10 years, and so on up to 100, by five-year increments. Individuals one year old and older are represented by F (females) or by M (males). Children less than one year old are represented by lower-case letters, f (for females) and m (for males), at the outer edge of the 5-and under line.

```
                                  Years of Age
                                      100
                                      95
                                      90
                MALE                  85                FEMALE
                                      80
                                      75   F
                                M     70   FF
                               MM     65   FFF
                              MMM     60   FFFF
                             MMMM     55   FFFFFF
                            MMMMMM    50   FFFFFFFF
                           MMMMMMM    45   FFFFFFFFFF
                          MMMMMMMM    40   FFFFFFFFFFF
                         MMMMMMMMMM   35   FFFFFFFFFFFFF
                        MMMMMMMMMMM   30   FFFFFFFFFFFFFFF
                      MMMMMMMMMMMMMM  25   FFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFF
                    MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM 20   FFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFF
                  MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM 15   FFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFF
                MMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM 10   FFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFF
            mmmmmMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM 5    FFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFFffff
 +    +    +    +    +    +    +    +    +    +    +    +    +    +
15%  10%  5%   0%   0%   5%   10%  15%
```

The pyramid above shows a growing population, with many persons at younger levels and fewer people of either gender in the older age brackets. For some communities, such as retirement communities, the pyramid is turned upside-down, with very few characters representing people in the younger age brackets and more and more in the upper age brackets. To create such pyramids, use spreadsheet software and the histogram option. It's useful to create pyramids for a community over time, to see how the population is changing. In many rural communities, the population is aging and their pyramids are top-heavy. For more information on creating and analyzing population pyramids, go to the Population Reference Bureau web site at www.prb.org.

Collecting Data from Community Residents

Collecting information directly from community residents is useful when the steering committee needs to know how people think, and how many community residents hold which views. Community assessments can also be used to identify the strengths and resources of community residents in an effort to focus on what they can contribute to a project and what they want to accomplish. Community assessments may collect information that is specific to a clearly defined issue, or the assessment may be general. (For example, the survey questionnaire could ask specifically about support for development of a new park downtown. Or the survey could ask generally about attitudes toward funding new development projects such as parks.) Various strategies to collect and analyze information from community residents are available. Several are listed below.

Conducting a Community Survey

When citizen groups want to take action, influence policy, list their strengths and assets, change things around or shake things up, community surveys are an effective way to find out what people are thinking and how they feel. Surveys allow citizen groups or a sponsoring agency to:

- Gather information on resident attitudes and opinions regarding precisely defined issues, problems or opportunities.
- Determine how residents rank issues, problems and opportunities in order of importance and urgency.
- Give citizens a voice in determining policy, goals and priorities.
- Determine citizen support for initiatives.
- Evaluate existing programs and policies.
- End speculation about what people are thinking or what people really want.

The survey process typically requires the following steps:

1. Form a steering committee to define a limited number of issues and manage the survey process.
2. With information from community members, list no more than five important issues around which the survey will gather information. It may be more useful to address only those issues over which changes can be made. For example, one area of emphasis may be to increase retail activity in the downtown. With that goal in mind, use the survey to identify which features or assets might be most attractive to local residents. For example, if there was a play area downtown, would parents leave their children there to play while they shopped? Issues that cannot be controlled, such as agricultural commodity prices, are not suitable topics for a survey. Important as these topics are, more information about how people feel will not enable better decisions to be made, nor affect economic conditions.

3. With a few issue areas identified, check to see if those people who have an interest in the topic are involved—these are the stakeholders. These are the people who are necessary to the implementation of any changes made after the survey has been completed, or the people who can stop those changes. Stakeholders must be aware of the plan to conduct a survey and must be invited to participate in the selection of questions.
4. List the population groups to survey and design the survey sample.
5. Select questions for the survey instrument. The University of Illinois has a bank of questions available for use. See http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/~lced/.
6. Create a final draft of the questionnaire. Test it with someone unfamiliar with the process to identify any confusing instructions or questions. Revise the draft as necessary, then print as many copies as needed for the first round and half again as many for people who lose the first copy and need another.
7. Organize for data collection. Several options are available, including face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, a mailed questionnaire, and a hand-delivered questionnaire. Generally time must be allowed to distribute the questionnaire, complete the interviews or fill out the questionnaire, pick up the completed questionnaires, get second copies to people who have lost the first copy, and pursue stray uncompleted copies until the response rate goal has been reached.
8. Enter data from the questionnaires and conduct analysis.
9. Report findings and recommendations.

This is a deceptively simple list of activities required to complete a survey. More information is available online from the Laboratory for Community and Economic Development at the University of Illinois (http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/~lced/).

Completing a Survey—What's the Best Method?

There are several good methods to distribute and complete survey questionnaires. The best choice depends upon the community's objectives and constraints. A short description of the most popular methods can be found in the table on page 67.

Conducting Focus Groups

Focus groups are labeled appropriately—a group of people, specifically and purposely selected, to engage in discussion around a focal point. The purpose of the discussion is likewise clearly defined, although purposes from group to group vary considerably. All focus groups, however, are designed to collect qualitative data. Groups formed to resolve conflicts, make decisions or solve problems are not focus groups.

The following four characteristics distinguish the focus group process from other information-gathering procedures.

1. The interview engages a number of people simultaneously. A distinguishing mark of the focus group process is that a number of people participate in the question-and-answer discussion together.
2. Respondents interact during the interview. Respondents are encouraged to listen to one another and interact with one another as they respond to questions and to each other.
3. A skilled moderator guides the interview. The moderator's role is critical, since he or she alone has questions for the group, and guides the discussion with the research objectives in mind. While the group is not limited in its responses regarding the topic, the moderator works to keep the group on target with comments relevant to the question at hand.
4. A discussion outline guides the process. While many information-gathering processes use a formal, close-ended survey instrument, the focus group moderator uses a general outline, with a few open-ended questions or statements to guide the group's discussion.

Method	Cost	Time Required	Response Rate
Face-to-Face Interview	Very expensive, unless volunteers conduct the interviews.	Allow 90 minutes per completed 60-minute questionnaire.	Usually more than 70 percent.
Hand-delivered Surveys	Less expensive if volunteers deliver and retrieve questionnaires.	Allow several weeks for delivery, responding, pick-up and retrieval, and follow-up calls with replacement questionnaires.	Usually very high response rate.
Mailed Surveys	Inexpensive--pay for postage to send and return.	Allow several weeks for mailing, responding, return mailing and follow-up mailings.	Low--usually 30 percent to 50 percent with one mailing.
Telephone Interviews	Less expensive than face-to-face, but more expensive than mailing a survey.	If you use a bank of callers, the survey can be completed very quickly.	Very good response rate since it is inexpensive to go to alternate households.

The focus group process was developed in part to improve upon the limitations of survey methods, by offering respondents few prompts and unlimited options for answers. Comparing the focus group process with surveying yields the most useful components of each, as depicted in the table below.

Characteristic	Survey	Focus Group
Size of Sample	Size increases strength of results. Repeated, high incidence outcomes strengthen results.	Size must be limited per group, and there are few advantages to finding repetitive information.
Range of responses	Limted to responses suggested on survey form, with few options for open-ended responses.	No limitations on responses (with respect for subject of question, however).
Depth of information	Shallow, but with implications for population.	Rich, but without predictive power.
Use of information	Predict trends and numbers.	Create lists of choices, possible outcomes, preferences, etc.
Research time	Requires more time from other participants (distributing and collecting surveys, data entry).	Requires more time from research principals to create questions and summarize results.
Research questions	"What?" and "How many?"	"How?" and "Why?"
Research Results	Quantitative.	Qualitative.

While information from a focus group does not forecast opinions or attitudes held by a larger group, the information can be used to design surveys, or develop expectations about the range and type of responses that might be found in the larger population. The focus group setting allows respondents to qualify their responses to questions; provide details that go beyond the superficial, structured responses of a questionnaire; and introduce contingencies and connections that the researcher may not otherwise include. A focus group allows the respondents to explore more fully the reasons why they hold certain opinions, or why they make the decision that they do.

Focus groups are useful before and after a survey. Before the survey, a focus group might help the survey organizers identify appropriate questions and anticipate responses. After a survey, a focus group can provide depth and insight into the numbers generated by the survey. The depth and scope of information collected using various methods can be visualized along the continuum on page 69.

The focus group process depends on some similarity among group members, and therefore participants are selected according to clearly

defined criteria. Consumer marketing researchers may select focus group participants from their target market, which could be defined by age, gender and income. Educators may select focus group participants from the audience they hope to attract to future programs, or from people who have attended a program and can evaluate the experience.

It is much easier to evaluate the findings from a focus group if its members are more alike than different. For example, there may be strong preferences for delivery methods of educational programming based on age and gender. These strong preferences will not be clearly identified if age and gender are mixed within groups.

Grouping by meaningful characteristics suggests that as many groups as characteristics should be formed and interviewed. If you need information from a variety of groups, organize focus groups by characteristics that will allow free and open discussion. When issues are heated, a group of like-minded people will speak freely and without argument, which allows you to fully explore their point of view. If you mix positions, the discussion may degrade into an argument from which you, as the moderator, will learn little about the issue. Better to host two or more focus groups to accommodate differing perspectives, with reports generated to reflect truly and sincerely the positions held.

Focus groups are most effective when six to 10 people participate. When fewer people are present, one or two people may dominate and the discussion does not expand as people react to and comment upon ideas and statements. When larger numbers participate, people listen to one or two initial points, then orient their comments around the few which have already been presented. Large group discussions become difficult to control, and there is a good chance that the group will run out of time before it addresses every question.

Questionnaire, Specific questions, choice of responses	Questionnaire, Open-ended questions.	Foucs Group, Specific questions.	Focus Group, Specific topic, open-ended quesions.	Focus Group, General topic, open-ended questions.
Researcher Directed				Respondent Directed

When six to 10 people are present, each person tends to participate and expects other to take turns contributing. There also seems to be less hesitation to suggest something that contradicts a point already made. When people discuss a topic of shared interest, they become excited, creative and expansive in their ideas. This synergism among group members is a valuable component of the focus group process.

Use the focus group method when:

- Creativity applied to a problem or situation is needed.
- The problem is complex or in the long term.
- There are many different stakeholders and/or perspectives.
- The environment is uncertain and it is necessary to break out of the rut to find answers.
- It is difficult to understand the issue or people's responses.
- It is necessary to get reactions or think about a particular response.
- Looking for feelings and perceptions that require explanations.

A focus group is useful when:

- Wanting to know in advance how people will react to programs, methods, policies, products or services.
- Identifying problems, constraints, costs or benefits; stimulating creative thinking about solutions, opportunities and linkages; or identifying potential outcomes.
- Setting priorities or narrowing a problem.
- Seeking richer, deeper information about issues that surfaced in a survey.
- Wanting to understand a different perspective (e.g., learning about teenagers' preferences for programs).
- Trying to attract a new target audience and wanting to know what is valued and why.
- Wanting to get reactions to an idea, method or project.

Asset Mapping

Communities and neighborhoods are collections of people and resources. The process of asset mapping identifies the abilities, talents, gifts, skills and capacities of residents, and helps residents apply those resources and capacities to community goals. An asset approach to community assessment sees the glass as half full rather than half empty. The process focuses on the resources which can be rallied for the community or the neighborhood rather than the community's shortcomings and needs.

Assets are inventoried on three levels: the individual, the organization (e.g., clubs and churches) and the institution (e.g., schools, businesses and agencies). According to Kretzmann and McKnight, asset mapping is based on three characteristics:

1. The community development process begins with what is present in the community or neighborhood—the assets. The focus in on the capacities of residents and the associational and institutional strengths, not with what is wrong or what is missing or what is a problem.

2. The community development process is internal to begin with. Activity revolves around building an agenda and identifying skills in the community. The result is a clearly defined local agenda, involvement and investment by residents, creativity, hope, control and self-reliance.
3. An asset approach to community assessment is based on relationships because people must work with one another to define the approach and depend on one another to see it through.

For a complete description of asset mapping with charts, case studies and how-to information see Kretzmann and McKnight's book titled *Building Communities from the Inside Out.*

Using Key Informants to Provide Information

Key informants might include client groups, service providers, community leaders, elected officials, parents, youth or others who are in the know regarding the issue at hand. Key informants can provide information and/or provide links to others that are in the know. To identify key informants, it is useful to think of people in a community as being linked together, and focus on the nodes of communication and who might be at each node to observe.

Key informants might have a formal community role such as an elected official, a director of a government agency or the head of a corporation or institution (e.g., town clerk, member of the clergy, officer of the historical society, librarian, university president, firefighter). These positions provide access to an official information exchange.

Key informants might have a decision making role such as controlling community or private resources (e.g., business owners, school superintendent, bank officers, newspaper editors, members of local service groups that fund projects). People in these roles usually have multiple associations and memberships, and carry information and opinions from group to group in the community.

Finally, key informants might have an informal community role (e.g., neighborhood opinion leaders, bartenders, community stalwarts who have an unofficial leadership role). Each person can suggest another person who should be contacted so the key informant list snowballs with additional names.

Key informant interviews can provide the steering committee and project teams with insight as to how ideas might be accepted in the community, who to involve, resources that might be available, or others in the community who could participate. Write out the objectives of the interviews and how the information will be used. This will help describe

intent when speaking with key informants. When the interviews are successful they provide an insider's view of events and may identify opportunities or obstacles for future projects. When many interviews are conducted, the picture becomes more detailed. Therefore, it is important to seek out key informants from the entire community that hold a range of perspectives.

To prepare for interviews with key informants, write out a statement about the information that is being sought and the project or organization being represented. For example:

> *"I'm working with the* Vision to Action *group and we're exploring the idea of hosting a festival next fall. Your name came up as someone who would know what happened last time we organized a community-wide event, and what we could do better if we were to do it again. Would you be willing to talk with me for 30 minutes about your experiences and your ideas? Are there others with whom I should be talking?"*

If the *Vision to Action* steering committee and project teams are diverse and well-connected to the community, the key informant process can be conducted by members themselves. The process almost always occurs informally anyway, so adding some structure will provide much information with very little additional effort. To formalize the key informant process, the *Vision to Action* committee should create a set of questions to address the issues at hand. As committee members meet with others in the community they can collect and record responses to the questions. These can be shared with the group. As always, the questions should solicit information relevant to the decisions at hand. This process will generate some interest in the *Vision to Action* process and interviewers should be prepared to share information about the larger *Vision to Action* community visioning and action planning effort.

Nominal Group Technique

The nominal group technique is useful when groups are struggling with issues that are critically important. In some cases, issues are so important that people can't seem to commit to any decisions. The nominal group technique allows several of these important issues to be sorted into priorities, gaining input from all participants without undue deliberation. Nominal group technique follows these seven steps:

1. The question (may be a ranking of issues) is put before the group verbally and in writing.
2. Working alone, each participant lists items to share with the entire group. Items are briefly described and specific. Allow five minutes.

3. Each group member takes a turn stating one item from his or her list. Items are recorded on newsprint and are numbered as they are presented. Members take turns in order until all items on each person's list are on the newsprint. Offering items in order ensures equal participation and encourages members to combine subsequent items with those already listed.
4. After all items are recorded, members may ask for clarification or additional information about any item. If an argument develops, the facilitator reminds the group that they need only remember each perspective. The group does not have to resolve any disputes or decide the fate of any items as a group.
5. Each person will vote for a limited number of items that he or she considers most important. Usually each person lists the five most important items on a slip of paper.
6. If the votes are scattered across many items, the group may return to step four for additional information.
7. The group identifies a limited number of high priority items and decides how to proceed.

Gaining Consensus

When groups agree to use consensus decision making they agree that each person's views will be addressed and each person's support of the final decision is mandatory. Note that this is a far cry from taking a vote and letting the majority win. Consensus decision making avoids the inevitable minority loses outcome of voting. The process of gaining consensus takes time, often generates creative solutions that were not part of anyone's agenda, and requires strong facilitation and leadership to guide the group. The benefits, however, are many. With the entire group supporting the decision, there will be no faltering steps during implementation.

Large Group or "Official" Gatherings

Community groups may gather information during large, open meetings in the community. The meeting may be called specifically to address the topic, or the information-gathering activity might be an additional agenda item at a general town meeting. A crucial aspect of an open meeting is structure—there must be enough structure to ensure that people have equal opportunity to speak and be heard, and not so much structure that participation is stymied.

The purpose of collecting information during large group meetings is usually to provide residents with descriptions of current activities and opportunities for participation, and to gather their thoughts and ideas regarding the project. Unless the large meeting has been designed to define and solve problems, the purpose should be limited to collecting information. When residents provide information, their views and

opinions should be recorded without criticism or comment. Information gathered at a large group meeting usually does not reflect the views of the entire community, since only those who decided to attend the meeting are heard. This strategy must be used with other strategies to develop a complete picture of the community.

Visual Assessment

An easy way to conduct an assessment of the physical features of a community is the windshield survey conducted alone or in a group. Topics for assessment can be identified before embarking on the tour. (For a sample Community Assessment Guide, see the web site for the Laboratory for Community and Economic Development at the University of Illinois at www.ag.uiuc.edu/~lced/.) Items for assessment typically include:

- Approaches or entrances to the community. Is the community name clearly marked? Are entrances attractive? Are signs helpful and easy to find?
- Housing conditions, types and upkeep. Are houses neat and well-kept? Are neighborhoods appealing? Are sidewalks accessible? Are there choices of high-cost and low-cost housing? Is there housing for seniors?
- Schools. Are schools well-kept? Is there evidence that the community supports schools, and that schools involve the community?
- Churches. Are buildings well-kept? Are there choices of denomination? Are signs directing visitors to churches and services clear?
- Downtown. How many services and retail stores are available? Are buildings attractive? Accessible? Are store hours coordinated and are stores open evenings and weekends?
- Other retail. Where are other retail stores? Services? Grocery stores? Are they easy to find?
- Recreation. What is the quality and range of recreational opportunities?
- Tourism. Is the community capitalizing on tourism?
- Visitor and community information. Was it pleasant and easy to visit?
- Health care. What facilities are available?

A visual assessment might be completed using disposable cameras that provide fodder for discussion. Photographers might be sent out to take the best and worst in the community—some photos end up in both categories and point out potential attractions which now exist only as eyesores. If photographs will be used in a large group meeting, use color slide film instead and project the slides for the entire group. For a complete program on visual assessment between two communities that swap reports, see *Community Swap: Finding a Fresh Perspective on Your Community* published through University of Illinois Extension.

Rapid Rural Assessment

Rapid rural assessment or rapid appraisal is a procedure designed to get practical information quickly. To efficiently use time and money, rapid rural assessments intend to gather just enough information to make necessary recommendations and decisions. This procedure incorporates a wide variety of tools and techniques to gather information. Appraisal methods include collecting information from people in large groups and from individuals using mapping exercises, diagrams, ranking activities and interviews.

Rapid rural assessments use triangulation to avoid bias. Triangulation implies that the person gathering information will look at any situation from at least three different perspectives to avoid bias. Biased results are not an accurate reflection of reality, since the information is gathered from only one perspective that does not provide the complete picture. Information that is gathered only from men is gender biased. Information that is gathered only from adults is age biased. Information that is gathered only from people who are active in the community may be income biased, or biased against new residents who are not yet active in a community work. Information that is gathered from people who pick up and complete a survey may be biased toward politeness if people are afraid to complain, or biased toward negativity if only dissatisfied people have enough energy to complete the survey.

Triangulation is included in community assessment at three levels.

1. The community assessment team or *Vision to Action* steering committee or project teams are triangulated by including at least three people who have different perspectives or points of view (e.g., women/men, experts/lay persons, newcomers/old timers, youth/elders).
2. People and organizations providing information are triangulated when a wide range of people are interviewed and all information is verified by at last three different sources.
3. Methods are triangulated when information is gathered using several tools (e.g., interviews, surveys, historical accounts and maps).

Rapid rural assessments use the information gathering process and the reporting process to help residents contribute information to decision making and to better understand the issues, choices and concerns in the community.

Sharing Results

Sharing results from any assessment activity is critically important. The following questions might be useful in thinking through a strategy for sharing information:

- What information is useful to the audience? For example, elected officials might want a level of detail that the general public won't want. When writing an article for the newspaper, consider linking the project to current issues in the community so that the topic is timely and relevant.

- How should information be shared? Consider creating summaries for publications that are available widely, through a newspaper series or a newspaper insert; creating a presentation that steering committee members use at speaking engagements; volunteering for the local radio call-in talk show; creating articles for newsletters; making up posters to display in public places—anything that provides information about what was learned through the assessment and how that information will be used in decision making. Each person should have written "talking points" that accurately outline the most important messages.

- Who will answer questions? One person or organization needs to be available to answer questions. It's very helpful if an organization will host this information clearinghouse, so that someone is ready with answers or with the appropriate contact.

- What will be suggested as follow-up? Specific action steps, outlined by the steering committee, should be presented at every opportunity.

- Can something more be built from this effort? Once there is attention for the assessment information, use it to talk about follow-up. Suggest a process for next steps. Describe ways that people can become involved. Make it easy for people to step in a little bit and they might just find themselves fully immersed in a great project.

A written report should include:

- A one-page summary of the highlights (an executive summary, or "talking points").
- The purpose or objective of the report, and a call to action.
- Brief description of how the information was gathered, organized and analyzed. This description validates the collection and analysis.
- Summary information from data, along with interpretive comments.
- Recommendations, by issue area if appropriate.
- Acknowledgment of each person and/or organization that contributed to the process.
- How to get more information and how to become involved.

Resources

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Monitoring and Evaluation

Communities engaged in planning are generally concerned with getting things moving. Few communities take time to monitor their progress and evaluate their efforts even though measuring change resulting from a planning process is important for several reasons.

- People who participate in developing the plan and in doing the work will be more likely to continue the effort if *tangible* results can be seen. Therefore, collecting information on immediate successes, even if they are small successes, can help maintain the overall effort.

- Indicators of progress help leaders communicate with participants and the community at large. Local leaders and residents can see what is working and the progress underway without relying on experts to tell them what should be done. This issue is especially important for indicators involving more than increases in jobs or growth in income.

- Demonstrating success builds pride among participants and the public at large. These successes can be displayed at public meetings or other events and will help encourage others to join a "successful" community endeavor.

- Carefully monitoring community changes in light of stated goals can help communities make changes in policies when necessary. Changes in community attitudes and participation can sometimes be difficult to document, but certainly are worth evaluating when feasible.

- An evaluation can provide important feedback. Improvements in the plan can be made after the process and the outputs or outcomes of the action plan are evaluated.

Monitoring

Monitoring is an assessment of the planning process. The purpose of monitoring is to provide indications of whether corrections in the action plan should take place. Steering committee and project team members should ask the following questions of each stage of the action plan:

- Are the time deadlines being met?
- Is the budget appropriate?
- Is the staffing appropriate?
- Is the amount of work realistic?
- Are priorities receiving the appropriate amount of attention?
- How are participants working as a group?
- Are participants learning something important to share?
- What else needs to be done?
- Have unanticipated issues or problems emerged over the course of the planning process?

Appendix W (see page 155) provides a sample Gantt Chart for a housing project. The chart provides a schedule for completing various tasks in a project. Monitoring should begin when the planning process begins.

Evaluation

Evaluation focuses on the specific accomplishments of a plan. A distinction should be made between measuring *outputs* and *outcomes*. *Outputs* are usually things that can be counted and result from the action plan. Examples of outputs could include number of jobs created, houses built, or the number of roads improved. *Outcomes*, however, are usually much more long term and are more difficult to link to specific elements in the action plan. Examples of outcomes would be decreased levels of poverty or increased levels of personal income, more people accepting leadership roles, or improved social networks among residents.

Specific measures of success might include the number of regular members in voluntary organizations, the number of people who attend organization activities, the number of volunteer hours in each organization, or the number of new members in the organization. Specifically, participants in the *Vision to Action* process should ask how a community is better off as a result and then try to measure success in terms of goals stated in the action plan.

A solid evaluation process requires continual monitoring by a representative group of participants and policymakers. This group should be objective and have the time and skills to keep track of progress, or lack thereof, in the program. A small budget may be needed for support staff and/or travel as part of the monitoring and evaluation process.

What to Measure

Simply gathering information about community change or surveying residents about their perceptions regarding change is not enough to understand or evaluate the effectiveness of planning. The data must be examined in the context of elements of the planning process. These components are described next and are followed by specific ways to collect and organize data to monitor changes in the community.

Clear Statement of Vision and Agreed-Upon Goals

A clear vision of where residents want the community to go plus a list of agreed-upon goals are key to a meaningful evaluation process because they literally define successful outcomes. Vision and goals are two separate concepts. The vision statement identifies a state where the participants would like the community to be at a set time in the future. The goals are specific measures that, if accomplished along the way, will lead the community to the vision. For example, if the vision includes an economically healthy downtown, then several goals might be appropriate, including a beautifully landscaped business district and a diversity of stores. Strategies are specific actions that will help a community achieve its goals and, ultimately, its long-term vision. Monitoring the levels and types of retail sales or businesses in the central business district, therefore, makes sense in the evaluation process.

Similarly, if the vision is a high quality of life, including environmental preservation, then goals could include improvements in the environmental quality using specific measures of air, soil and water conditions. The strategies could involve public policies or actions to reach these goals.

Action Plan including Benchmarks

A written action plan containing benchmarks or performance indicators describing the points of success along the way when possible is nearly essential in monitoring results. Benchmarks are especially useful for long-term projects. For instance, a community may have a long-term vision that involves high quality health care. Reaching this vision may involve a set of goals and strategies that span several years. Knowing the number of people without access to health care or the number of physicians in the community at the start of the project helps local leaders track their progress.

The benchmarks should be reasonable in terms of what can be accomplished in a specified period of time, while remaining focused on the ultimate goal(s) in the strategic visioning document. In this regard, pictures of the community when the visioning process started can be useful in making before and after presentations to show that benchmarks, such as improvements in buildings or streets, have been met.

In designing benchmarks or performance indicators, however, community leaders must recognize that community development is not limited to job and/or income creation; rather it should include sustainability, historic preservation, health care, education, recreation, and other essential characteristics of a healthy and vibrant community.

Linking benchmarks to each goal provides residents with information on progress in each section of the plan. When one part of the overall effort is not performing well, adjustments can be made to bring it in line without substantially changing the entire approach. Regular reviews of the action plan and comparisons with benchmarks can be very useful. Showing progress on small projects can build confidence and encourage more involvement by residents and businesses. Nothing breeds success like success—this is called the success multiplier.

For example, preserving the historic character of a downtown may be a necessary first step to attracting new stores to the business district. Preservation programs may not immediately generate many permanent high-paying jobs, but the physical attractiveness of the downtown may make the community a more desirable place to live, leading to population growth and business expansion in the long run. Intermediate benchmarks can keep efforts focused on the long-term goal of additional stores and better shopping experiences in the community. See Appendix X for a sample list of benchmarks (page 157).

Building a Database

At the heart of an effective monitoring and evaluation program is a consistent database that supports, and is linked to, the decision making process. These data are available from several primary (data collected by the community for an express purpose) and secondary (existing data collected by someone else) sources. Primary data will often come from public agencies, businesses, and surveys of community residents. In many ways, primary data are the hardest to standardize and collect, but may, in practice, be the most beneficial in measuring outcomes, especially in terms of residents' perceptions. Converting data into information that can be communicated to residents and local officials is crucial to the overall visioning and action planning process. In some instances, help can be obtained from groups such as Extension Service or other university-based organizations.

Depending on how the information is going to be used and the sophistication of its users, it helps to think of indicators in terms of three stages: leading, current and lagged measures. In monitoring and/or evaluating the development process a combination of these measures can allow practitioners to watch the efforts of various strategies.

A leading indicator might include building permits or planned expansions that show the types and amount of housing planned during the next year. A current indicator might be housing starts that show the progress underway in housing construction at present time. Lagged indicators might be population growth, reduction in vacancy rates or other measures of housing adequacy that show the effects of policies in the past several years. By framing these indicators in different time sequences, community leaders can trace the effects of activities and show how future efforts build on past successes.

Public Agencies

Various agencies in the city government regularly collect information that can be used to show the effects of community development actions. The city clerk often collects data on building permits that reflect the type of construction and the relative cost of the structure and/or land. In many cities, the permits process includes remodeling as well as new construction. Comparing this data series over time yields insights into changes in the level of economic activity. It also helps assess whether the quality and price of housing under construction meets community needs or whether the business expansions fit within the overall development goals of the strategic vision.

Businesses

Utilities have information on the number of phone hook-ups, water and sewer connections, and cable connections, although with deregulation this information is becoming more difficult to assemble from one source. While it may have to be obtained from a regional office of the utility, this information should be available on request. Organizing the information by location within the city, as well as by type of establishment when possible, is especially useful in monitoring areas of the community requiring additional development or, alternatively, certain areas that may be developing in ways incompatible with the overall vision. Having a bank or utility collect the information and periodically sending it to the steering committee or a project team makes them more involved in the economic development process as well.

Newspapers also are an important source of information for monitoring progress in addition to communicating the benefits accruing to the community from visioning and action planning efforts. Having a committee or person responsible for clipping pertinent articles from the

local newspapers and communicating with residents at public hearings is a valuable activity to demonstrate progress.

Other groups in the city are important information sources as well. Banks, for instance, can provide general information about the volumes and types of business or homeowner loans. They cannot divulge detailed data, but can assist in monitoring the overall level of activity in the community. Involving them in this process also helps gain support for the community development effort because it shows financial institutions how they benefit directly and gives them a role to play in the overall development evaluation process.

Community Residents

Community groups wanting to determine outcomes are increasingly using a survey of residents. For example, a survey may be used to evaluate the adequacy of public services or to obtain residents' attitudes about specific needs. Surveys must be designed carefully to obtain meaningful results and they can be expensive to conduct and tabulate. Sample questions are available from a variety of published and Internet sources, such as http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/~lced/.

Special care should be taken to ensure that a broad cross-section of residents is included in the groups surveyed. Segments of the community that are less active in local organizations or individuals that don't have a permanent address for example, can inadvertently be overlooked (e.g., minorities, female-headed household, renters, migrants workers). Meaningful comparisons of community development outcomes require inclusion of these groups in the data collection efforts.

Several low cost ways to survey residents include working with churches, social and professional organizations, and/or placing survey instruments in central places. A major difficulty with the latter approach, however, is that certain groups of residents may be disproportionately represented on an issue. Nevertheless, the additional information obtained at virtually no expense can be useful in monitoring conditions, or at least perceptions, in a community.

Internet Data Sources

The Internet is also a rich source of data useful in evaluating the results of development efforts. The Bureau of the Census, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Department of Commerce agencies such as the Regional Economic Information Series (REIS) have detailed information on many characteristics (e.g., employment, wages) in the Censuses of Business. In addition, the Department of Commerce collects detailed information on governments every five years as part of the Census of Governments.

The Internet provides numerous examples of cities or states that have attempted to monitor the effects of economic development efforts. The Oregon Progress Board, for example, has worked on the measurement issue since the early 1990s (http://www.econ.state.or.us/opb). Sustainable Seattle is another example of how to monitor progress (http://www.scn.org/sustainable/susthome.html). Many of the measurement efforts have arisen in conjunction with the sustainable development movement, but in many instances the measures used extend beyond environmental quality concerns. See, for instance, http://www.profiles.IAstate.edu for information in Iowa.

One Approach for Establishing Outcome Measures

With measurable outcomes, the community is better empowered to manage its progress and to achieve the vision outlined in the community action plan. Following a few simple steps should allow any community to construct a set of clear and measurable outcomes in a relatively short period of time. Following is a suggested process.

1. Define all vital key result areas.

Performance categories often relate to the broad long-range goals stated in the community action plan. These are, after all, the general areas in which the community would like to produce results. Although it is recommended that a separate group of participants manage the monitoring and evaluation process, key results for each performance category should be based on the expectations of those most likely to benefit from the intended changes or improvements in the community. The importance of focusing on results rather than on activities cannot be overemphasized. Performance measurement is more concerned with achieving desired outcomes than it is with the activities, actions or behaviors employed to effect the change(s).

Who completes this step? Members of the steering committee and project team leaders should share the responsibilities of forming the evaluation team, interviewing key stakeholders in each performance category, and identifying the results *stakeholders* would see during the next one-to-three years. For example, if one goal of the community is to attract *(x)* number of families to the city during the next 12 months through some type of housing project:

- A local banker might track total assets and loan/deposit ratios.
- The village clerk might monitor retail sales tax collected (e.g., for grocery stores, gas stations, lumber and hardware establishments), water billings, and number of building permits issued each month.
- A realtor might track real estate transactions and changing property values.
- Landlords might provide quarterly vacancy rates.

- The school superintendent would watch for increased enrollments.
- The local electricity provider might provide total kilowatt usage, and so forth.

The task of the steering committee is to coordinate, collect and summarize a set of measures that could be retrieved on a regular basis.

When is it done? Stakeholder interviews should be completed immediately following the first (or next) strategic visioning and planning cycle. Once the vision and goals have been created, performance measures can be instituted.

2. Set expectations for each performance category.

Expectations should state the community's requirements in such a way that they evoke a sense of change, renewal or improvement. Residents should be able to see how the community is better off today than it was a year ago. Words such as create, develop, establish, engage, grow, retain, increase, expand, share and deliver can help articulate meaningful outcomes for community performance. An expectation should also be written as specifically as possible in order to minimize its misinterpretation by the general public. For example, the expectation of "more positive attitudes toward economic development" would be more specific and measurable if stated as "the percentage of positive remarks collected on community comment cards in December is higher than last year." Using the housing example again, the evaluation team might obtain historical data on building permits during the past three years and then set targets for the next three years.

Who completes this step? The role of the committee, team or agency overseeing the monitoring and evaluation process includes carefully drafting the performance expectations to be tracked. Next, the raw data may be collected from numerous sources throughout the community, but the collection, interpretation, and ultimately the presentation of the results, are also managed by the evaluation team. Independent stakeholders supply the data; the evaluation team converts the data into information.

When is it done? A full review of performance expectations at least every three years is recommended. Data collection must be conducted at regular intervals (e.g., monthly, quarterly, biannually or annually) to ensure comparability over time.

3. Measure current performance/community status.

Strategic gap analysis is a very useful approach for measuring where the community is currently performing versus the desired *outcome* it is

seeking. Performance gaps can actually serve as focal points for setting new or continuous improvement objectives. Although the targets may be established for annual review, monthly or quarterly figures can provide participants with valuable information about where they stand at specified intervals during the year.

For example, a goal for December 31 might be to reach 28 building permits for new single-family homes, but a strategic gap analysis shows that only three have been issued between January 1 and April 30. The housing project team may want to review its marketing and/or residential development strategies and make adjustments to accelerate the progress over the remaining eight months.

Who completes this step? The evaluation team monitors gaps between "what is" and "what ought to be" at specified points in time. Deviations from the progress that was initially expected would be relayed to the appropriate project teams who would then review their strategies and make necessary adjustments when possible.

When is it done? Periodic gap analysis should occur at regular intervals and examine performance measures that are readily available. At a minimum, annual reviews are recommended—more frequently for aggressive/higher-risk projects. Some community development organizations that meet weekly or monthly can cover several indicators each time. Annual reviews are logistically easier to manage. However, it is more difficult to reverse negative trends that began six months ago than poor results that were discovered earlier.

4. Set or readjust objectives.

Annual objectives, created early in the community strategic visioning process, should be directly related to the community's expectations and strengthened by key performance gaps identified in step three. The evaluation team should make certain that expectations are relevant to the community's vision and that each performance indicator is stated as a clear, realistic, consistent, fair and legal measurement that will add value to the overall community and economic development effort.

Who completes this step? The community evaluation team, in consultation with key stakeholders in each performance category, must reach a consensus for readjustments of the community's annual goals. It is essential that all participants in the evaluation/continuous improvement program understand how the effort relates to them and why their participation is essential to have a successful performance measurement program.

When is it done? At least annually.

5. Monitor and communicate results.

Periodic gap analysis and communication with participants to let them know how they are doing and, more importantly to identify problems, are important. With a sense for continuous improvement, project teams are more likely to remain focused and help identify new opportunities. In addition, the strategic visioning and planning leaders, local officials and/or project team leaders should present an annual "State of the Community" address or report at some type of interactive, public forum (e.g., annual town hall meeting, community festival, annual business and industry banquet). Press releases, newsletters, community bulletin boards, Internet web sites, brochures, annual reports, and presentations at various civic meetings or events are examples of other excellent public communication tools that can increase civic pride, public trust and confidence. Efforts to continuously monitor and report progress can present new opportunities for people to become more involved in the community and economic development process.

Who completes this step? The community evaluation team, local officials, and/or project team leaders.

When is it done? At least annually.

Additional sources of information for measuring oucomes can be found in Appendix Y (see page159). A sample worksheet for measuring success can be found in Appendix Z (see page 161).

Resources

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Appendix A

Evaluation Guide

This Year's Objective #1: _____

_____

_____

What We Accomplished: _____

_____

_____

Resources Used: _____

_____

_____

People or Organization Responsible: _____

_____

_____

This Year's Objective #2: _____

_____

_____

What We Accomplished: _____

_____

_____

Resources Used: _____

_____

_____

People or Organization Responsible: _____

_____

_____

This Year's Objective #3: _____

What We Accomplished: _____

Resources Used: _____

People or Organization Responsible: _____

This Year's Objective #4: _____

What We Accomplished: _____

Resources Used: _____

People or Organization Responsible: _____

Reprinted with permission from *Take Charge: Economic Development in Small Communities*, page 225. 1990. North Central Regional Center for Rural Development.

Appendix B

Determine Community Readiness Checklist

To determine your community's readiness for the *Vision to Action* process, read through the following characteristics. Put a plus sign (+) in the space next to those that are areas of strength in your community. Put a minus sign (-) in the space next to those that are areas of weakness in your community.

_____ Leadership Capacity
Are leaders willing to act? Complete a realistic assessment of the leadership required and the leadership ability of the community. Also evaluate the time that may be required for volunteers or paid staff to carry out projects selected in the *Vision to Action* process.

_____ Attitudes toward Community Development
Assess the attitudes of the community towards community development. A survey could help in this process, but community leaders are usually able to assess the general attitude of their constituency and the support and motivation for community development. Do residents exhibit loyalty, pride and commitment to their community? Is the community prepared for the change that may result from this process?

_____ Political Clout
Assess the political clout of the community by determining the leadership's ability to influence local political decision makers, as well as the resident's ability to influence non-local decision makers as needed.

_____ Cooperating with Neighboring Communities
Is cooperation with neighboring communities possible (where appropriate for a given project)? Is the community willing to pool resources and talents with other communities to achieve common goals? Is there a sense of trust and willingness to share power with neighboring communities? Is there a history of old disputes that may prevent cooperation? (Sometimes the *Vision to Action: Take Charge Too* process can bridge old disputes and bring about new energy for cooperation. Note that this characteristic applies more to community of place than to community of interest.)

_____ **Organizational Structure**
Does the community have, or can they obtain, the necessary organizational structure to engage in the *Vision to Action* process and accomplish project planning and implementation?

_____ **Diverse Participation**
Can the community engage broad citizen participation in the process, representing the diverse people of the community? What level of controversy exists in the community and can the process involve and balance someone controversial? Who are the people who get things done and who have the time to participate and carry through selected projects?

_____ **Civic Involvement**
Does the community value participation and meaningful engagement of its citizens in community issues?

_____ **Media Involvement**
Will the local media support the *Vision to Action* process and provide coverage of the community workshop and selected projects in order to inform the greater community?

_____ **Financial Capacity**
Are there members of the community with grant-writing experience? Can the community organize its own fund-raising events?

_____ **Private Sector Involvement**
Will the private sector support the *Vision to Action* process, both financially and otherwise? Will employers and employees from local businesses be involved?

Assessing your Community's Score

With 8 to 10 plus marks, your community has an excellent chance of success with the *Vision to Action* workshop.

With 5 to 7 plus marks, your community's chance of success with *Vision to Action* are fair, but the steering committee should look at the areas of weakness and address them, perhaps by getting some training in those areas prior to *Vision to Action*.

With fewer than 5 plus marks, it is not recommended that your community undertake a *Vision to Action* workshop without first getting some training in the areas of weakness. For example, if financial capacity is low, trainings on grant writing or fund-raising may be appropriate. If leadership capacity is low, the steering committee may initiate leadership training in the community prior to *Vision to Action*.

Appendix C

Significant Segments of the Community and Decision Makers

Agriculture

Banks/Financial Institutions

Chamber of Commerce/
Commercial Clubs

Churches

Civic Organizations

Community Improvement/
Betterment Groups

Educational Organizations
Schools
Extension Service
Other

Elderly

Health Care

Industry

Local Development
Organizations

Local Government
Town Board or City Council
Park Board
Zoning Board or Planning
Commission
Economic Development
Commission

Professionals (attorneys, accountants, architects, marketing specialists) _____

Real Estate _____

Retail Businesses _____

Unions _____

Utility Companies (electric, gas, railroads) _____

Youth _____

Reprinted with permission from *Take Charge: Economic Development in Small Communities,* page 81. 1990. North Central Regional Center for Rural Development.

Appendix D

National Civic League Stakeholder Model

The National Civic League Stakeholder Model is used with permission by the National Civic League. For more information contact:

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The following stakeholder analysis is used to identify the perspectives and interests of the community which the steering committee may wish to involve in the *Vision to Action* process. Note that these categories are provided as an example rather than the rule of thumb. Communities may choose to rename, change or drop some categories. Definition of categories will have to be agreed to by the steering committee as well.

It is best for the steering committee to brainstorm the above different interests and perspectives within their community themselves. It is important for the group to focus their brainstorming on the interests and perspectives rather than organizations and people. Place these interests and perspectives into related groups. For example:

<u>Business</u>
- Corporate
- Small
- Labor Unions
- Housing Builders and Developers
- Communications Technology

Education
- Life Long Learning
- Universities and Community Colleges
- Vocational and Job Training
- Alternative Schools
- Early Childhood Education
- Private Schools
- Education Reformers
- Back-to-Basics

Once the steering committee brainstorms the perspectives and they are categorized, names that fill each category can be written down. Fill in the specifics for each individual (or fill in what is known about the person). It is important to note that "yes" and "no" people be listed. These data are often placed in a database program to break out the final demographics to uncover under-representation or over-representation of the stakeholders. A balanced representation of the community is key to the success of *Vision to Action*.

To balance representation for the *Vision to Action* process, many communities go through the database and create an A list and a B list. "A" refers to those people whose participation is crucial for the success of the project. The "B" list reflects the individuals who are important, but not as crucial. If people on the "A" list decline to participate or drop off, people from the "B" list can be recruited.

It is important to note that the group is talking about people and this exercise and the discussion about them should be kept within the group.

Key to Abbreviations on Stakeholder Names Matrix
(see pages 98-99)

Gender
Male—M
Female—F

Ethnicity
Hispanic—H
Native American—NA
African American—B
Caucasian (Anglo)—C
Asian—A
Bi-ethnic—D

Residency
Established—E
New Resident—N
Part-time—PT

Language
Spanish—S
English—E
Other—O

Income
Working Poor—WP
Lower Income—LI
Middle Income—MI
Upper Income—UI

Age
Teen—T
Young Adult—YA
Baby Boomer—BB
Middle Age—MA
Senior Citizen—SC

Differently Abled
Challenged Mentally—CM
Challenged Physically—CP
Health Challenged—HC

Education
Non-High School Graduate—N
High School Graduate—HS
College Graduate—CG
Graduate School—G

Marital Status
Single—S
Married—M
Divorced/Not Remarried—D
Widowed—W
Single Parent—SP

Sexual Orientation
Heterosexual—H
Lesbian—L
Gay—G

Stakeholder Names Matrix

Proposed Stakeholder	Organization	Gender		Ethnicity						Residency			Language		
		M	F	H	NA	B	C	A	D	E	N	PT	S	E	O

Income				Age					Differently Abled			Education				Marital Status					Sexual Orientation		
WP	LI	MI	UI	T	YA	BB	MA	SC	CM	CP	HC	N	HS	CG	G	S	M	D	W	SP	H	L	G

Appendix E

Guidelines for Getting a Positive Response from the Media and Promoting your Project©

1997 Tri State Community Development Conference
Sharing Ideas for Community Growth
Luther College, Decorah, IA

Workshop Presentation Summary

Plan Ahead

Assign one person to handle the publicity for your project and make him or her the only contact that is authorized to answer questions and deal with the media. Make sure that person is available for calls, interviews, and briefings at the times and days that the media would want responses. Be sure that person is well trained and has all the information to cope with media, including negative publicity. It is desirable to have an answering machine, fax and e-mail for rapid sending and response. Be sure that the representative is consistent in the message delivered. The representative should have a strong commitment to the project, because the commitment is evident when he or she presents the message.

Plan your marketing strategy for your project as far ahead as possible, preferably when developing the project.

Incorporate into your start-up things that attract attention and that provide photo opportunities. Demonstrations, displays, open houses (especially those that serve refreshments), special media briefing events and tours all spark interest and get people talking about your project.

Keep the media informed and involved as the project grows. This means sending frequent news releases or making personal visits to the media offices. You are in effect "selling" an idea, so it is to your benefit to establish personal relationships with the media representatives to help

that process. Ask the media representatives what interests them and for tips on how to get coverage from each individual type of media.

When developing a marketing/public relations plan, incorporate some paid advertising into it whenever possible. The reporters, printer, rent and phone company all have to be paid in order for the media to exist. The advantage of paid advertising is that you dictate exactly what goes into the ad or script. Be sure to choose the media that best represents the image you are trying to promote and the coverage you need. Cost per thousand is only one factor.

Utilize newsletters of pertinent organizations such as your local chamber of commerce, contractors, suppliers and your state Department of Commerce or Development.

Be aware of what the media considers news and what is considered advertising. There are differences from one media to the next and even within the same, but competing, media.

Remember the details

Obtain deadlines and get things to the media well **before** the deadline. Information is more likely to get attention if there is sufficient time to work with it. If it is delivered on time, presented in an interesting enough format or has broad appeal, you may be able to get a feature story from it.

Know where to send the information and the correct name of the position/person you are sending it to. A 10-second phone call to obtain a correct name will pay large dividends. A release sent to the wrong address or person can delay or result in your release being discarded.

Never assume that the media will know the facts or the details or that they are aware of your project or event. Staff members change, shifts rotate, reporters daydream and don't always remember details correctly, so always provide the basic who, what, why, when, where and especially how this applies.

Be accurate. **Never** guess at names, dates, times or places. Check the spelling of every name carefully.

Type and double space when possible. Never write on the back of a piece of paper. Include the name and phone number and e-mail, if applicable, so you can be contacted if there are additional questions or if someone would like to take a photo.

Start your own rumors

Use the media to provide favorable press for your project. Utilize letters to the editor, positive statements from prominent officials, testimonials and a web page where information about your project is displayed.

Provide photos or photo opportunities

Photos require advance planning on the part of the media and you. If you have an event that you think merits a photo or TV coverage, phone ahead. A week's notice is not too much advance notice. A manager or editor needs time to schedule a photo whenever possible.

If you are providing a photo, call ahead to find out what format the paper would like. Many print media have gone all-electronic and only use negatives that are scanned into a computer. There is no use going through all the expense of having photos printed if all they use is a negative.

Describe the photo and the appeal it will have for the public or your audience. Make it interesting to others. For example, a check-passing photo for a piece of fire department equipment is boring and not likely to get much response from an editor, but if the recipient can demonstrate the equipment and show a benefit to the community, you are more likely to get a positive response from both the media and the public.

Thank You

A simple thank you to the media in the form of an occasional phone call or note will be appreciated and will assure that you will be remembered. A letter to the editor can make your message even more effective.

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Reprinted with permission from Gretchen Skoloda. The writer notes that this information was presented in 1997, and additional opportunities now exist with e-mail and the World Wide Web.

General Facilitation Suggestions

- Establish ground rules about how the group will operate. See Appendix G for samples (page 107).
- Tell people how long they have.
- Consider how to draw the group's attention back together without having to yell or be too obnoxious. Some people use a musical triangle, others a bell.
- As facilitators, roam around so people can ask questions, while still allowing the small groups to lead and manage themselves.
- Write the critical questions on a flip chart or put them up on an overhead projector so participants can refer to them as they develop purpose, values and individual vision statements. See Appendix H for sample statements (page 109).
- If the sharing of tasks within the small group is likely to be an issue (which generally it is not), have people rotate the roles of recorder, reporter, etc.
- Suggest to groups that they might want to share "round robin," that is each person shares one thing and then it moves around to the next person. This is repeated until all of the ideas have been put forth. This serves to prevent someone from dominating the group and helps move things along quickly when the task is to hear everyone's ideas.
- As a facilitator, assist with removal of flip chart paper from walls, and with collection and labeling of the work so that the transcriber's task is easier.

Appendix G

Sample Operating Guidelines or Ground Rules

Brainstorming

Brainstorming helps groups develop creative solutions. In brainstorming, people in the group freely exchange ideas to stimulate new concepts in the minds of others. An idea from one person often stimulates wild responses from another which, in turn, causes still more creative thought.

Guidelines for Effective Brainstorming

1. **Understand the question or problem.** Present the necessary background to the group.

2. **Write all generated ideas on a chalkboard** or large sheet of paper **where everyone can see them.** Use words, phrases or pictures—anything that will quickly capture the essence of the ideas as they flow from the individuals in the group.

3. No "no-no's." Generate ideas, not judgments. Let your mind run wild to eliminate mental blocks to creative solutions. If you or others have an idea, do not say "I won't say it because they'll think I'm stupid." **Judge the ideas generated after, not during, the session.**

4. **Hitchhike.** Offbeat and impractical ideas trigger still other ideas. Ridiculous ideas can prompt others to think of a smart one.

5. **Do not narrow your vision.** Search for ideas that relate to the problem from literature, yesterday's breakfast, or an insect's mating habits. Connect ideas that do not seem to belong together.

6. **Concentrate on quantity, not quality.** Produce as many ideas as possible to give you more from which to pick the best. It is difficult to increase a short list of ideas.

7. **Keep loose.** Do not command people to perform. Do not force new ideas. Do not structure. Keep an open and free environment.

8. **Last is best.** The last half of a brainstorming session is often the best. The first half gets all the usual responses and habitual solutions out of the way. Remove them, and you get new ways of looking at the problem.

9. Brainstorming is a popular, creative technique. The reason: It works if it is done right.

—Adapted from Osborn (1979)

Reprinted with permission from *Working with Our Publics Module 4: Situational Analysis*. Instructional Aids.

Dialogue

1. **Be aware of your intentions.** Ask yourself: "What is my intention?" and, "Am I willing to be influenced?" Be clear about what you want and do not mislead others as to your intentions.

2. **Balance advocacy with inquiry.** The lack of balance between defending your position (advocating) and asking about the details of others' positions (inquiry) is likely to lead to misunderstanding and poor decisions; and there are not enough resources available to afford poor decisions.

3. **Build shared meaning.** Words often mean different things to different people. Recognize this and ask what people mean when they use specific words. This will prevent misunderstanding and build shared meaning in your group communication.

4. **Use self-awareness as a resource.** Ask yourself, at moments when you are confused, angry, frustrated, concerned or troubled:

   - What am I thinking?
   - What am I feeling?
   - What do I want at this moment?

   You may gain insights about your group's or your own concerns and be able to raise these concerns without casting blame.

5. **Explore impasse.** Ask yourself: What do we agree on, and what do we disagree on? Can we pinpoint the source of the disagreement? Simply agreeing on the source often allows people to learn more about the situation, clarify assumptions, and move forward.

Appendix H

Sample Purpose, Values and Vision Statements, #1

Bombala and Delegate District, New South Wales, Australia

"The issue of building community value statements is I believe a foundation stone for community development. For me the 'community value statement' is a point of reference that is respected by all community interests and can be a rallying point, conflict resolution aid and a basis for negotiation both within and beyond the community. I do not believe a checklist is particularly useful as values are unique statements of belief held within a community. They are the assumptions, worldviews that impact on everything that a community does and therefore have to be mined and made conscious by community members. I have found that starting with community concerns and getting those who raise the concern to keep asking the question 'why is this a concern' until a fundamental and usually emotional point is reached where the person says with passion 'because I believe . . . . '."

Bruce McKenzie

Values Statement

We the residents of Bombala and Delegate area seek to build and promote a quality of rural life that is shaped and managed against the following values:

COLLABORATION: Decisions are made sensitive of the fact that we are all linked and that actions by one interest group will affect all.

ECONOMIC VITALITY: That the economic survival of the region will be achieved through decisions that enhance personal and enterprise stability.

SELF ESTEEM: Each person will be supported to find a pride and confidence in their contribution to the community and their community's contribution to Australia.

DIVERSITY: Diversity of interests, beliefs and activity are important within the area when they embrace tolerance and appreciation of each other's right to be heard and participate in decisions that affect the area.

OPEN COMMUNICATION: Communication between the district's residents and from the district to other institutions needs to be honest, relevant and timely.

BELONGING: The communities of the district are havens for families that celebrate the traditions and achievements of past generations and seek relationships between families and family members built on mutual commitment, respect and tolerance.

CONSULTATION: Interactions with governments will seek to foster self reliance and respect the unique diversity of interests and aspirations of individuals and enterprises.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: Encouraging, recognising and rewarding innovation and creativity that seeks to improve everything we do.

ACCESS: Infrastructure, regulations and protocols will be built and maintained to enhance the opportunity of all residents to access services and information needed to enjoy full participation in our community.

SUSTAINABILITY: Acknowledge the need for our natural environment both developed and undeveloped to be maintained in a sustainable manner for following generations.

RECOGNITION: Seek to recognise and celebrate the achievements of institutions and individuals who demonstrate the maintenance of these values and the corresponding enhancement of everyone's quality of life.

We therefore call upon our political, church, industry and organisation's leaders to consciously frame their policies, strategies and activities to reflect these values. Further, we call upon our neighbours throughout the district, as we promise ourselves, to respect and encourage each other in applying these values. (November 1998)

Courtesy of Bruce McKenzie, Centre for Systemic Development, University of Western Sydney, Richmond, NSW, Australia.

Sample Purpose, Values and Vision Statements, #2

Columbia & Boone County (Missouri) Neighborhood Alliance

This is an example of the use of the action planning process with an organization, but grounding it in the community of place.

The Columbia and Boone County Neighborhood Alliance had existed for several years. It had sponsored several annual conferences, was led by a steering committee, and had an electronic and postal mailing list that was used to get the word out regarding impending city and county actions and issues. The action planning process was used to develop a stronger organization grounded in those represented. The process was promoted as the 1998 annual conference. The conference was split into two three-hour workshops held on Friday nights one month apart.

During the first workshop, the following was developed by participants:

- Purpose, values and vision of individual neighborhoods as a context for the purpose, values and vision of the alliance.
- Purpose for the alliance.
- Vision for the alliance.

A small task force met between the two workshops to wordsmith the purpose and vision.

During the second workshop the following was accomplished:

- The refined purpose and vision statements were revisited with ample dialog, revised, and finalized by consensus.
- Action areas (themes) were determined from the vision and task groups identified actions and priorities for action.
- Participants volunteered for specific participation in priority actions within each theme area and began the task of project planning.
- A date for completion of project plans was set and the steering committee agreed to serve on an interim basis with the addition of several new members as leaders.

Purpose of the Neighborhood Alliance

The purpose of the Neighborhood Alliance is to assist and empower neighborhood associations to determine and achieve their unique and mutual goals. (4/98)

Vision/Action Areas and Projects Developed for Each

Encouraging individuals to come together with their neighbors and helping them form associations:

- Host a big, well-advertised picnic.
- Develop explanation for association existence.
- Encourage neighborhood watch group formation.

Aiding neighborhood associations with resources for communication, training and leadership development to improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods:

- Develop training budget and train trainers.
- Secure resources.
- Develop publicity and information sharing.

Providing a forum for the associations to interact with and learn from each other's shared goals and visions and unique needs and interests:

- Develop web site on Columbia Online Information Network.
- Hold quarterly meetings with program.
- Develop e-mail listserv.

Facilitating communications and planning between the neighborhood associations and governmental bodies to ensure that decisions are based on neighborhood needs, interests and values:

- Develop neighborhood resource center.
- Interact with government bodies and others.
- Encourage city and county cooperation on planning and zoning.
- Gain recognition by city as viable advisory entity.

Developing leadership processes and functions and internal communication/coordination consistent with the purpose and vision of the Alliance:

- Planning retreat for decision making norms.
- Create interim steering committee for Alliance governance. (4/98)

Sample Purpose, Values and Vision Statements, #3

Hickory County (Missouri) Focus on the Future

The action planning process was used in Hickory County as a means to energize the community, to plan the future of the county, and to involve more people in creating the future of the community.

While the final report from the committee responsible for wordsmithing the results looks like a traditional mission and goals statement, it represents use of the action planning process as laid out in *Vision to Action*.

The rudimentary purpose statement and vision statements, the vision areas, lists of actions and first stage of project plans were developed in one five hour community workshop held on a Saturday.

The Hickory County Focus on the Future Committee is the steering body that evolved to coordinate and give leadership to the implementation and ongoing process.

Mission Statement

It is the mission of the Hickory County Focus on the Future Committee to bring together highly motivated, creative and insightful people to formulate, develop and implement concepts that will empower all citizens of the county to obtain and maintain a high standard of healthy living.

Goals

- To seek countywide participation in the decision making process.
- To inform citizens on issues that concern them.
- To encourage, direct, support and assist with positive-planned growth in our community.
- To foster attitudes of dignity and respect for one another.
- To embrace the qualities of country living while working together to maintain a clean environment and a safe, strong community.

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Summary Statement

We are Hickory County residents who are optimistic about the future and what it holds. We are friends and neighbors who want to assure that this is the best place for everyone to live and prosper.

We are identifying problems and offering solutions, examining the way things are and exploring the possibilities of how to make them better. We believe most residents share in these concerns. We want to facilitate the exchange of information and believe we can be a positive influence on public awareness and action.

We are here because we care.

VISION TO ACTION
Take Charge Too

Sample Purpose, Values and Vision Statements, #4

Focus 20/20–Dallas County, Missouri

Dallas County also undertook the action planning process as a means for engaging the community actively in determining and building the future. The five hour community workshop was also held on a Saturday. The process used mirrored the *Vision to Action* process.

What appears here is the verbatim version of the workshop results for the portion dealing with purpose, vision, vision themes and identification of vision elements within each theme.

Purpose of Our Community

- Ensure our future; provide for accessibility to social, spiritual, physical, mental and economic development.
- To get things done; meet the needs of people; prepare for the future together.
- Sharing resources; common bonds; sharing goods and services; security and safety; economics; improve quality of life.
- Support one another; provide comfort; knowing each other: gives a sense of belonging; provides trust.
- Education with ethical standards; jobs; health and welfare.
- Integration of diverse communities; involvement of local resources; provide adequate services — road, sewer, water, waste management; self-supporting community rather than bedroom community; provide sense of belonging.
- Provide the basic needs of life.
- Build strong families; educate; employ; help and support others; teamwork; accomplish more as a group; emotional, mental and spiritual growth; sense of belonging; meeting basic needs; fun.
- Nurture—provide an environment for growth and care; support—processes to assure stability and safety; educate—school retraining and adult literacy; be fully aware of all the needs of the total family.
- To promote a quality lifestyle, a safe haven of growth, a progressive, caring environment and a good educational system.

Vision Elements by Vision Themes for Dallas County 2020

ENVIRONMENT

- Total recycling.
- Pride in physical appearance.
- Clean environment.
- Excellent water and sewer systems.
- Retain beauty of the Ozarks.
- Well-planned beautified community.
- Quality, realistic planning and zoning.
- Safe environment for all.
- Strong light manufacturing sector that supports change from a bedroom community.
- Walking and biking trails.
- Excellent environmental communication.
- Solid infrastructure with well-planned and maintained roads (paved).
- Pin oak in every yard.

RECREATIONAL/SOCIAL:

- Large outdoor community theater.
- Adequate facility for community events with adequate parking.
- Excellent eating establishments.
- Recreational facilities used and enjoyed by young.
- Parks.
- Quality systems with recreational programs.
- Exercise facilities for all.
- A mall.
- Recreational facilities for community regardless of social economic status and age.
- Walking and biking trails.
- Excellent family structures that support and nurture children's growth.
- Community that completes what it starts.
- Churches which have programs for all age groups.
- Quality entertainment opportunities.
- Sidewalks.

EDUCATION:

- Progressive school system able to support projected 4,000 student population.
- One hundred percent graduation rate from college.
- Excellent libraries.
- Campus of Ozarks Technical Community College.
- School-based social worker.
- Ninety percent of eligible voters participating.
- Excellent family structures that support and nurture children's growth.

HOUSING:

- Safe affordable housing for all.
- Quality, realistic planning and zoning.
- Total recycling.
- Affordable fuel for homes and businesses.

COMMUNITY PRIDE AND PARTICIPATION:

- Physical appearance of community.
- Clean environment.
- Inclusiveness of all persons.
- Solid infrastructure with well-planned and maintained roads (paved).
- Retention of Ozarks' beauty.
- Variety of attractive images.
- Environmental recycling.
- Community follow-through.
- Total, broad participation from community's citizens.
- Smiling, polite people.
- Strong, intra-dependent community.
- Community development process.
- Peace: locally and worldwide.

QUALITY GOVERNMENT
AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

- Excellent and totally supported police and fire protection.
- Sidewalks.
- Nice shops on square with decent sidewalks.
- Excellent water and sewer systems.
- Solid infrastructure with well-planned and maintained roads (paved).
- Clean environment.
- Walking and biking trails.
- Visionary leadership in government and all leadership.
- Humane Society.
- Accessibility/public transportation to all services.
- Quality infrastructure which supports the desired economic development.
- Excellent tax base (no nagging).
- Zero unemployment.
- Sufficient jobs to keep youth in the community.
- Quality, realistic planning and zoning.
- Full range of goods and services.
- Monitoring of handicapped parking.

SOCIAL SERVICES/HEALTH CARE:

- Excellent day care for children and adults.
- Healthy lifestyle (all practicing).
- School-based social worker.

- Excellent family structures that support and nurture children's growth.
- Accessibility to all services (transportation).
- Accessibility to health care for all.
- 24-hour emergency services.
- Excellent health care.
- Victims shelter.
- Affordable and available fuel for homes.
- Safe, quality, affordable housing.
- Humane social services (health issues).

Projects Selected for Planning by Dallas County 2020

- Countywide planning and zoning.
- Plan to entice manufacturing companies.
- Business beautification.
- Community Betterment Club.
- Use current facilities while working toward a recreation facility.
- High-quality park and recreation program.
- Register all eligible families for Medicaid.
- Require family and child development classes in the high school.
- Recycling program.
- Low-income housing program.
- Adult education program.
- Raise all levels of education.

Appendix 1

Directions for Recorders of Vision

- The task of the recorders is to capture accurately what people are sharing as vision statements. It's best to write things as you hear them unless the person has agreed to alternate wording as part of the clarification process.

- Usually there will be two recorders each with a flip chart. The facilitator(s) will direct the traffic flow. It works best if the recorders alternate items reported so they can keep up. If you don't catch all of what is said, tell the facilitator.

- When recording, label each sheet as Vision.

- Also when recording, use two colors of markers and alternate colors when listing the items. This makes it easier for everyone to read. Don't use red, orange or pink as people can't read them well from a distance.

- Work out a signal with the person(s) who has volunteered to hang the sheets.

- Don't worry if every last word is spelled correctly or if you have the best handwriting. People will appreciate your willingness to assist. If you feel extremely uncomfortable about your spelling or penmanship, ask the facilitator(s) to find someone else and offer to help in some other way.

- If you have questions, ask the facilitator(s).

- Thanks for your valuable assistance and contribution.

Alternative Visioning Exercise*

You are part of a team of people working on the special annual progress edition of the local newspaper.

Write the success stories that will be captured in this edition of the newspaper in the year _____.

Possible topics for news stories:

- Housing
- Economic Activity
- City/County Government
- Schools
- Religion
- Social Services
- Health Care
- Recreation
- Tourism
- Entertainment
- Attitude Adjustments
- New Leadership Development

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* This exercise can be another way to create vision. It can also be used to create specific project ideas within topical or theme areas. In doing the latter, you may create the vision by the means suggested earlier, but use this exercise for theme groups. The topical areas for news stories might well be the topical/theme areas you have generated. This exercise can also be a good transition activity for participants to take home, discuss with others before the workshop that specifies specific strategies and plans of action.

Appendix K

Action Planning Worksheet

Vision Theme:	Project:				
Purpose of Project:				Time frame for completion:	
Members of Task Group developing this plan:				Date:	
Critical Steps	Who will be involved & make decisions (names)	Resources available	Information and assistance needed	Time to complete task	How we'll know we have successfully completed this task

What difficulties do we anticipate and how will we deal with them (or put them on the agenda)?	
Temporary project contact:	Phone:
Suggested chair for project and contact info (organization, address, phone, e-mail, fax, etc.):	
Names and any contact info for others to involve in the project:	Best person to contact them:
30 day goal for this project (What is reasonable to accomplish in the first 30 days?):	
Next suggested meeting date to engage others and work on details of plan and implementation:	

Transition Worksheet

Name and Contact Information	Three things to Preserve, Change or Create			What person would like to do to assist
Name: Address: Phone: E-Mail:				
Name: Address: Phone: E-Mail:				
Name: Address: Phone: E-Mail:				
Name: Address: Phone: E-Mail:				
Name: Address: Phone: E-Mail:				

Collector's Name:
Address:
Phone:
E-Mail:

Dreaming Up Our Future and Filling in the Details

Vision Themes[1]	Preserve[2]	Change[3]	Create[4]

[1] These are the areas determined by participants in the workshop, such as environment, education, etc.

[2] Communities should preserve things that have lasting value such as historic records, beautiful old buildings, open space and meaningful traditions.

[3] Every person, family, company, organization, city or county department needs to improve continuously. This can happen when the old attitudes and ways of making decisions are revised.

[4] The creation process should be encouraged.

Project Plan Worksheet #1 Action Planning Worksheet Review

Refer to the action planning worksheet prepared in the community workshop to complete the three items below:

1. Vision Theme

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Project

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Purpose of Project

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Project Plan Worksheet #2 Analyze the Impact on Groups and Individuals

1. Who will potentially benefit from this project and how?

   Who: _____

   How: _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. Who will potentially be harmed by this project and how?

   Who: _____

   How: _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

Project Plan Worksheet #3
Analyze the Situation

1. Where does this project fit into current community priorities?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. Are there groups currently working on the same project or related projects?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. Have there been past attempts to accomplish the same project or similar projects?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. Have other communities attempted to accomplish the same project or similar projects?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. Where will the decisions be made?

Decisions to be made:	Where the decisions will be made:

6. How will the decisions be made?

Decisions to be made:	How the decisions will be made:

7. When will the decisions be made?

Decisions to be made:	When the decisions will be made:

8. What are forces that might help in reaching the desired outcome?

Helping force:	How can the helping force be used:

9. What are the forces that might hinder in reaching the desired outcome?

Hindering force:	How can the hindering force be overcome:
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Project Plan Worksheet #4
Seek Ideas and Approval

1a. Who are the decision makers (formal and informal, individuals and organizations, internal and external) that can make or break this project? Who should contact each?

Decision makers:	Who makes the contact:

1b. What strategies will we use to influence the decision makers?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2a. Who are potential supporters of this project? Who should contact each?

Potential supporters:	Who makes the contact:

2b. How do we enlist their support?

_____

_____

3. Who are potential opponents of this project? Who should contact each?

Potential opponents: **Contacted by:**

_____ _____

Objection: _____

_____

Strategy to overcome objection: _____

_____

_____

_____

Potential opponents: **Contacted by:**

_____ _____

Objection: _____

_____

Strategy to overcome objection: _____

_____

_____

_____

Potential opponents: **Contacted by:**

_____ _____

Objection: _____

_____

Strategy to overcome objection: _____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix R

Project Plan Worksheet #5 Interview Form

Name of Interviewee: _____

Occupation: _____

Age group (circle one):

Teen 20—30 30-40 40—50

50—60 60—70 Over 70

Household Income Group (circle one):

Under $30,000 $30,000—$45,000 $45,001—$60,000

$60,001—$90,000 $90,001—$125,000 Over $125,000

Location (part of community or area): _____

Other identifier information: _____

1. What do you think of _____ Vision?

_____

_____

2. What do you think of the proposed project?

_____

_____

VISION TO ACTION
Take Charge Too

3. How would you go about implementing the proposed project?

_____

_____

4. Who should be involved in the proposed project?

_____

_____

5. How would you like to be involved in the proposed project?

_____

_____

Project Plan Worksheet #6 Needed Information

Information: _____

_____

For whom: _____

In what form: _____

_____

Information: _____

_____

For whom: _____

In what form: _____

_____

Information: _____

_____

For whom: _____

In what form: _____

_____

Information: _____

_____

For whom: _____

In what form: _____

_____

Information: _____

_____

For whom: _____

In what form: _____

_____

Information: _____

_____

For whom: _____

In what form: _____

_____

Information: _____

_____

For whom: _____

In what form: _____

_____

Project Plan Worksheet #7
Community Resource Inventory

People

SKILLS, EXPERTISE

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

PERSON, POWER

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

INFLUENCE

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Physical

FACILITIES

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

SUPPLIES

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

EQUIPMENT

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

OTHER

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Information

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Financial

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed: _____

Who has it: _____

Where we will get it: _____

Resource Needed:_____

Who has it:_____

Where we will get it:_____

Other

Resource Needed:_____

Who has it:_____

Where we will get it:_____

Resource Needed:_____

Who has it:_____

Where we will get it:_____

Resource Needed:_____

Who has it:_____

Where we will get it:_____

Project Plan Worksheet #8
Plan of Action

Action Step: _____

Resources needed: _____

Person in charge: _____

Date to be completed: _____

Action Step: _____

Resources needed: _____

Person in charge: _____

Date to be completed: _____

Action Step: _____

Resources needed: _____

Person in charge: _____

Date to be completed: _____

Action Step: _____

Resources needed: _____

Person in charge: _____

Date to be completed: _____

Action Step: _____

Resources needed: _____

Person in charge: _____

Date to be completed: _____

Action Step: _____

Resources needed: _____

Person in charge: _____

Date to be completed: _____

Action Step: _____

Resources needed: _____

Person in charge: _____

Date to be completed: _____

Action Step: _____

Resources needed: _____

Person in charge: _____

Date to be completed: _____

Action Step: _____

Resources needed: _____

Person in charge: _____

Date to be completed: _____

Action Step: _____

Resources needed: _____

Person in charge: _____

Date to be completed: _____

Appendix V

Maintaining Momentum Checklist

Use this checklist with any or all community leaders actively involved with the work. Make discussion of the results a steering committee agenda item. Another option would be to share the results with an Extension educator or other community development professional from outside your own community for critique and suggestions.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Committee, task forces, and other leaders often make reference to the vision and goals.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
2. Results from the work are evaluated on a regular basis.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
3. If asked, the community would say the vision and goals are still relevant.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
4. Most involved community leaders would say progress is being made.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
5. Committees/project teams continue to meet on a regular basis.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
6. Reorganization of committee/project team structure is needed.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
7. There needs to be more coordination.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
8. Communication between all involved could be better.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

9. New people continue to join the work in progress.

1 **2** **3** **4**

10. There doesn't seem to be adequate financial and other resources.

1 **2** **3** **4**

11. Programs and projects (the work) from the vision and goals are visible in the media.

1 **2** **3** **4**

12. There appears to be an above normal amount of conflict and controversy.

1 **2** **3** **4**

13. Turf battles have emerged and seem to be working against accomplishing the goals and vision.

1 **2** **3** **4**

14. Our partners continue to support and participate in the work.

1 **2** **3** **4**

15. There is opposition to the vision and goals from some segments of the larger community.

1 **2** **3** **4**

Maintaining Momentum Checklist Results

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4
Question	Number of Responses			
#1				
#2				
#3				
#4				
#5				
#6				
#7				
#8				
#9				
#10				
#11				
#12				
#13				
#14				
#15				

Questions 1-4: Look at the vision and goals. One of former Vice President Hubert Humphrey's favorite expressions was "when in doubt, talk." It applies here. Set aside brief but structured time on a regular basis to revisit the relevancy of the vision and goals. Revise, add and delete as needed including timetables. Evaluation is essential, even though it means additional time and effort. Your Extension staff is experienced in evaluation and can work with you. Review the trouble-shooting suggestions under "projects and programs not being completed" and "loss of direction or focus."

Questions 5-8: Deal with structure and organization. When problems surface first bring those to the attention of the committee and project team chairs. Use the troubleshooting guide to critique. Is there a controversy? Is the problem a loss of direction/focus or insufficient resources? Are volunteers burning out? Surface these questions and others. This may be another place where a facilitator from outside the community may be needed to help sort symptoms out from the problem itself.

Questions 9-10: Focus on human and financial resources. Evaluation of committee progress and work is important here. The ideas talked about under structure and organizations apply here also. Review the troubleshooting suggestions under "projects and programs not being completed on time" and the section on "insufficient resources." Readjust but don't do away with your timetable. Having them is critical completion of tasks.

Questions 11-15: Can serve as your check on communication and collaboration. The steering or coordinating committee needs a well thought out plan with all segments of the community, private and public. Acknowledge and openly address conflict and controversy. Ask for help from outside the community if needed. Collaboration and networking are challenging tasks. Build enough time and resources into your workload to adequately deal with them.

Sample Gantt Chart for Community Visioning Project for Housing

	Jan. 99	Mar. 99	April 99	May 99	July. 99	Sept. 99
Conduct a Housing Assessment	———					
Analyze Housing Data		———				
Develop Specific Goals and Strategies			———			
Obtain Public Input on the Project			———			
Meet with Housing Authority				———		
Conduct Meetings with Banks					———	
Begin Construction						———

Appendix X

Benchmarks for the City of Portland, Oregon

The Portland (Oregon) Multnomah Progress Board publishes one of the most detailed reports on community benchmarks. In 1996 they analyzed information concerning 76 benchmarks and they continue to collect data on 24 other benchmarks. The Board focuses its evaluation on six clusters: The Economy, Education, Children and Families, Quality of Life, Governance and Public Safety. Several benchmarks under each cluster are analyzed with a discussion of why these benchmarks are important. Below, we provide several examples of these benchmarks under each cluster:

Economy

- Per capita income.
- Average annual payroll.
- Percentage of people with incomes above the federal poverty level.
- Total employment.
- Unemployment rate.
- Percentage of income from goods and services sold outside of the U.S.
- Number of small business failures.
- Total employee time actually used for on-the-job training.

Education

- Percentage of 25-year-olds who have completed a certificate or diploma from any post-secondary training or educational program.
- Percentage of students who earn a Certificate of Advanced Mastery.
- Percentage of students who achieve at the "proficient" or "advanced" level in each subject area tested.
- High school completion rate.

Children and Families

- Pregnancy rate per 1,000 females age 10-17.
- Percentage of healthy birth weight babies.

- Percentage of infants whose mother did not use the following: illicit drugs, alcohol and/or tobacco during pregnancy.
- Percentage of two-year-olds that are adequately immunized.
- Percentage of child care facilities that meet established basic standards.
- Percentage of students not involved with alcohol and/or tobacco.
- Percentage of people who have access to basic healthcare.

Quality of Life

- Number of park acres and protected green spaces per 1,000 residents.
- Percentage of residents who rate their neighborhood livability high.
- Percentage of people who commute fewer than 30 minutes one-way between home and work.
- Percentage of people who commute to and from work using public transportation.
- Number of days per year the community meets government ambient air quality standards.
- Percentage of jobs in the Portland Metropolitan area located in downtown Portland.
- Percentage of people who rate their streets acceptably clean.

Governance

- Total taxes per capita.
- Real per capita capital outlays for public infrastructure.
- Percentage of registered citizens over 18 who vote.
- Percentage of people who feel local government is doing a good job at providing services.
- Percentage of people over 18 who volunteer at least 50 hours of their time per year to civic, community, church or nonprofit activities.

Public Safety

- Reported incidents of spouses or domestic associates abused per 1,000 people.
- Number of crimes per 1,000 population.
- Number of arrests per 1,000 population.
- Number of crime victims per 1,000 population.
- Percentage of adults who use illegal drugs or abuse alcohol.

Source: *Benchmarks: Progress Measured One Step At A Time* (1996 Annual Report). Portland, Oregon: Portland Multnomah Progress Board.

Sources for Measuring Outcomes

Aspen Institute Study

In 1996, the Aspen Institute Rural Economic Policy Program, with support from the Ford Foundation, created a workbook, *Measuring Community Capacity Building: A Workbook-in-Progress for Rural Communities* that explores various alternatives to monitoring outcomes from community capacity-building efforts (Aspen Institute). The project identifies eight capacity-building outcomes:

- Expanding Diverse, Inclusive Citizen Participation
- Expanding Leadership Base
- Strengthened Individual Skills
- Widely Shared Understanding and Vision
- Strategic Community Agenda
- Consistent, Tangible Progress Toward Goals
- More Effective Community Organizations and Institutions
- Better Resource Utilization by the Community

The workbook goes on to include examples of output measures that can be monitored and/or tabulated to monitor gains in capacity-building. Community leaders interested in monitoring their efforts can use this workbook as a reference in building a monitoring system suitable for their area.

North Central/USDA Forest Service Study

The North Central Regional Center for Rural Development working with the USDA Forest Service prepared a workbook, *Working Toward Community Goals: Helping Communities Succeed,* for use by community groups trying to monitor the outcomes of strategic planning and visioning efforts. This workbook is intended as an aid to community leaders in devising an evaluation system for development efforts. In addition to a detailed discussion of methodology, numerous suggestions for specific indicators that could be used in the community are provided. Information is also provided regarding sources of data, frequency of collection, and ways to compile the information.

Although the workbook can be of immense help in designing a monitoring and evaluation system, the types of indicators suggested are not

ranked as to importance or usefulness. Potential users can examine the appropriateness of the measures for objectives or goals in their community. The workbook, however, is intended mainly as a resource, not as a template to be implemented directly in a community.

Oregon Shines II

Since 1996, the Oregon Shines Task Force has refined the previous strategic planning efforts by the Oregon Progress Board initiated in 1989 (Oregon Shines II). Oregon was one of the early states to include a major set of benchmarks in its strategic planning efforts. Benchmarks are important in monitoring and evaluating progress. While the Oregon efforts are aimed at state programs, the approaches and some of the data are useful at the local level as well.

One of the more interesting elements of the Oregon Shines report is the inclusion of benchmarks for each objective. Oregon has gone through two series of benchmarks, the first generating so many as to be unmanageable. The revised document contains approximately 90 benchmarks covering a wide range of statewide development initiatives. Many of these benchmarks can also be used by communities in monitoring efforts.

Minnesota Approach

In 1995, the State and Local Policy Program at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs released a report, *Emerging Principles in Economic Development: A Benchmarking Tool*, describing many of the issues involved with establishing and using benchmarking to monitor economic development efforts at the state level. As with other similar projects, many of the concepts apply to local governments but the specific benchmarks may have to be modified for local use.

Worksheet for Measuring Success

Project: Housing--Expanding the Availability and Affordability

I. Accomplishments	**Year 1**	**Year 2**	**Year 3**
Collecting Data and Obtaining Financing	X		
Razing Old Homes	5	10	15
Building Rental Units		12	24

II. Project Outputs

Select benchmark indicators to reveal the impact of this project on our community and chart them on a bar chart, including what they have been in the past and our targets of what we want these benchmark indicators to be 2, 5 and 10 years from now.

Benchmark Indicators				**Targets**			
Benchmark Indicator	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010

NCRCRD

North Central Regional Center for Rural Development
107 Curtiss Hall Iowa State University Ames, IA 50011-1050
(515) 294-8321 (515) 294-3180 fax www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu

Program Objectives

- Use a participatory process to engage the entire community or organization rather than just leaders.
- Develop a community action plan identifying what will be done, who will do it, and when it will be accomplished.
- Focus on the future, emphasizing what the community or organization wishes to preserve, change or create.

Getting Started

- Form a steering committee.
- Define community boundaries.
- Determine expected outcomes.
- Determine community readiness.
- Identify community participants.
- Determine role of the media.
- Prepare for the workshop.

Form a Steering Committee

Ensure that a broad cross-section of the community is represented on the steering committee. Plan to involve people who might not normally show up.

Define Community Boundaries

- Community of Place
- Community of Interest

Community may be a group of people who live in the same area, or who share an interest or concern that brings them together. Organizations can be called communities as well.

- What are our concerns as a steering committee in this community?
- Do we plan to create new committees, organizations or networks out of this process?
- Do we pass the information generated through this process on to other groups in the community?
- What method will be used to evaluate the outcomes?

Determine Community Readiness

- Leadership Capacity
- Attitudes toward Community Development
- Political Clout
- Cooperating with Neighboring Communities
- Organizational Structure
- Diverse Participation
- Civic Involvement
- Media Involvement
- Financial Capacity
- Private Sector Involvement

Identify Community Participants

- Major agencies and organizations in the community from which resources can be derived.
- Decision makers in the community who have the authority to allocate resources.
- General citizenry who can provide community support and new leadership.
- Citizens who will be affected by this plan, including those that might normally be left out.

Determine Role of the Media

- Consider media involvement in the steering committee.
- Plan when the media will be there with cameras and microphones.
- Identify a spokesperson to interact with the media.

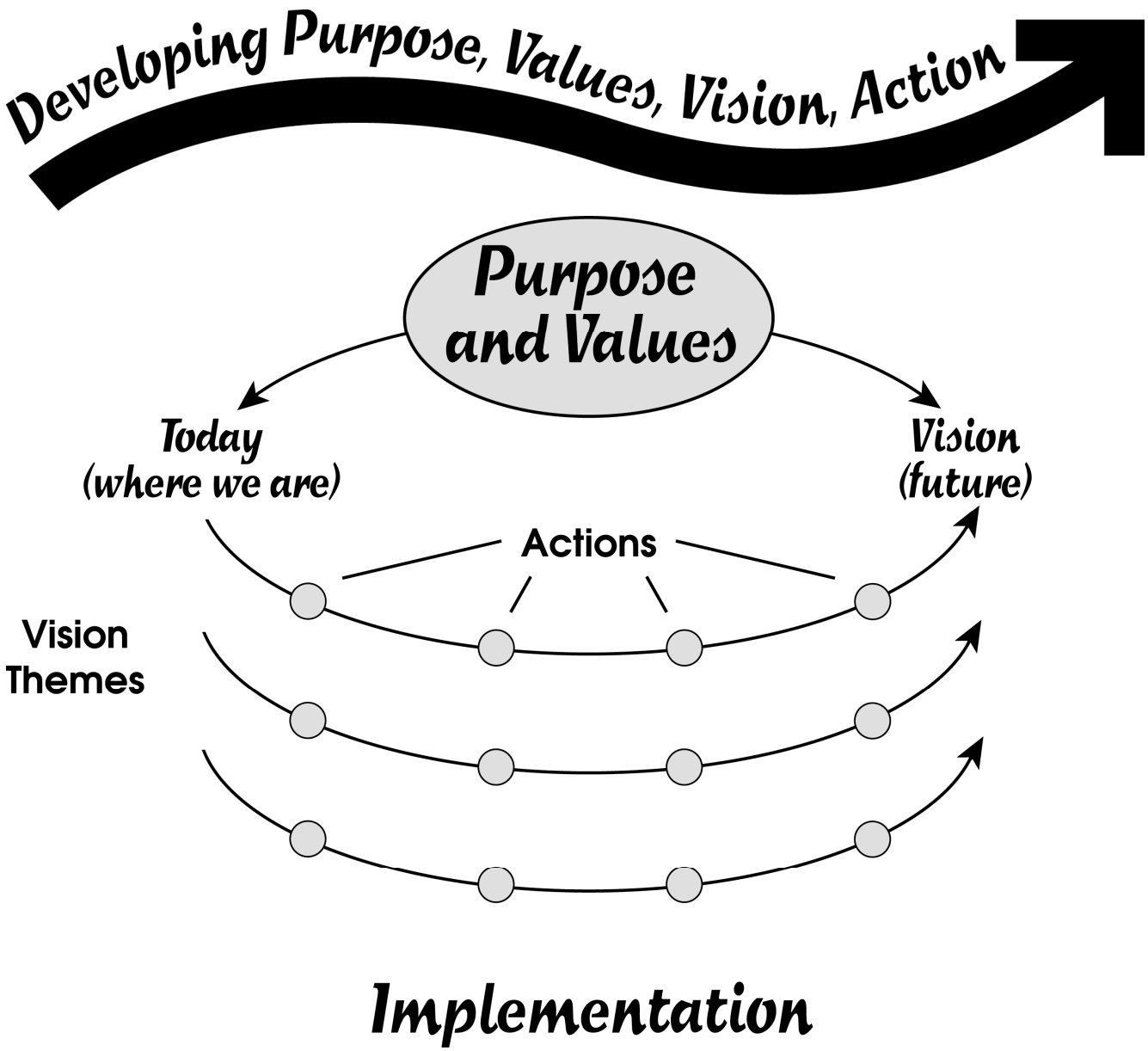
Prepare for the Workshop

- Budget
- Logistics
- Marketing and Public Relations
- Invitations
- Recording the Event

Good planning starts with a clear and shared sense of purpose, values and vision.

Developing Purpose, Values, Vision, Action

- Purpose defines why we as a community or organization exist and are engaging in creating our future.
- Values are the beliefs and principles that we hold in common as a community or as members of an organization.
- Vision tells us where we are going. It is our overall sense of direction, the desired destination.
- Action or strategy steps are how we get there.


Developing Purpose, Values, Vision, Action
Purpose and Values
Today (where we are)
Vision (future)
Actions
Vision Themes
Implementation

- What is the purpose of our community? Why do we exist?
- What are the shared values that underlie our purpose as a community?

Critical Purpose and Values

Questions for Organizations

- What is the purpose of our organization? Why do we exist?
- What are the critical values that our members share in common? What are the values that a person affiliated with this organization is expected to accept?

What is Development?

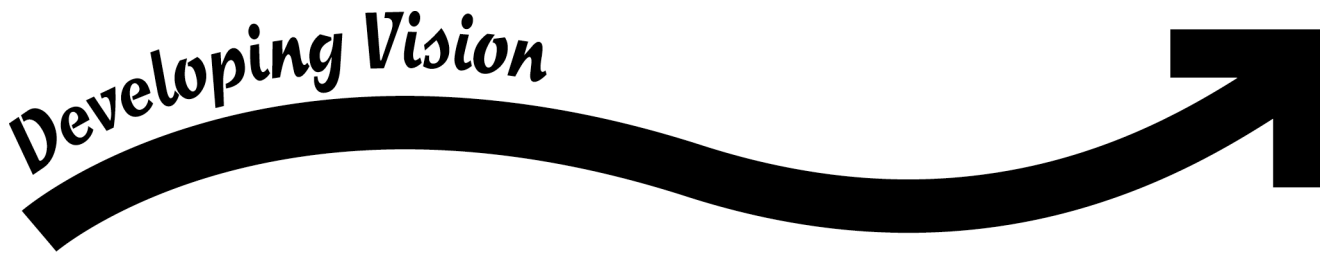
Development ≠ Growth

What is Development?

Development is:

- Accomplishing purpose with quality and balance.
- Sustaining the community for the future.

Whose job is development?



Vision tells us where we are going. It is our overall sense of direction, the desired destination.

Developing Vision

It is the year 2025. You as a group of community citizens have successfully created the ideal and desired community. Describe what the community is like—its characteristics, functions, etc.

Remember that visioning is not to define what people can perceive as probable. It is to leap past the present to identify dreams.

What major topics capture the nature of the vision statements?

Critical Action Question

What are three things that you think need to be done in order to accomplish some aspects of the vision statements listed in your theme area?

- What happens next?
- Who is coordinating the project planning and implementation?
- How will we continue to communicate with each other?

Developing Project Plans

A viable plan is one that people commit to and work to bring to life. The process used to develop the direction can make the difference between a plan that collects dust and one that really guides the community in purposeful development.

Developing Project Plans

- Analyze the Impacts on Groups and Individuals
- Analyze the Situation
- Seek Ideas and Approval
- Needed Information
- Community Resource Inventory
- Plan of Action

Forming an Organization to Manage Implementation

Now that a plan of action has been completed, consider what type of organization could best implement the project on a long-term basis.

- Working with Existing Groups
- Forming a New Organization

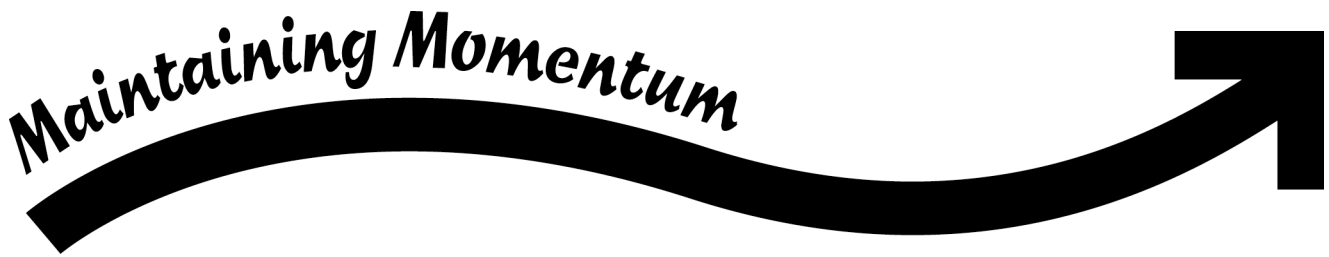
Managing the Effort over Time

To effectively manage over time not only specific projects, but also the broader community action planning process:

- Develop leadership.
- Identify and mobilize resources.
- Develop a communications network.
- Monitor changes, evaluate efforts and revise plans.
- Reward participants.

Hallmarks of a Successful Community Action Planning Process

- Community Action Plan
- Broadened Citizen Participation
- Completed Project



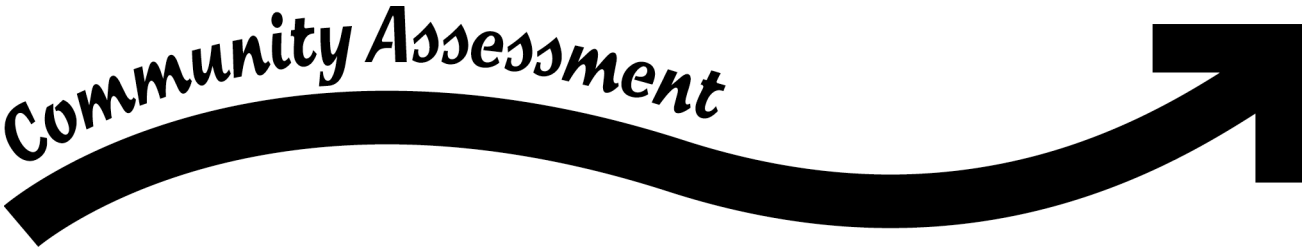
Communities that have succeeded in maintaining momentum and keeping citizens engaged have paid attention to the following:

- Coordination
- Organizational Development
- Emergence of New Challenges, Problems and Opportunities
- Expansion of the Volunteer Base
- Community Ownership and Pride
- New Ideas
- Communication

Community Assessment

Communities benefit from knowing more about themselves when they are working on projects or making decisions. A community assessment can create a sense of:

- Why a community exists.
- Where it has strengths.
- Where it has weaknesses.
- What opportunities are available.



An important decision is whether to complete the community assessment with volunteers or by hiring an expert.

Community Assessment–Volunteers

- An advantage to having volunteers complete a community assessment is that control remains within the community.
- A disadvantage to having volunteers complete a community assessment is that data collection is difficult. It takes time and additional resources.

Community Assessment–Experts

- An advantage to hiring an expert is gaining from the experience of others.
- A disadvantage to hiring an expert is that it is very expensive. Hiring an expert can quickly gobble up resources that could be invested locally.

Using Existing Data

- Community Profile
- Population Pyramid

Collecting Data from Community Residents

- Community Survey
- Focus Groups
- Asset Mapping
- Key Informants
- Nominal Group Technique
- Gaining Consensus
- Large Group of Official Gatherings
- Visual Assessment
- Rapid Rural Assessment

Monitoring is an assessment of the planning process. The purpose of monitoring is to provide indications of whether corrections in the action plan should take place.

Evaluation focuses on the specific accomplishments of a plan. A distinction should be made between measuring outputs and outcomes.

- Outputs are usually things that can be counted and result from the action plan. Examples include number of jobs created, houses built, or roads improved.
- Outcomes are usually much more long term and are more difficult to link to specific elements in the action plan. Examples include increased levels of personal income, more people accepting leadership roles, or improved social networks among residents.

What to Measure

- Clear Statement of Vision and Agreed-upon Goals
- Action Plan including Benchmarks

Building a Database

- Public Agencies
- Businesses
- Community Residents
- Internet Data Sources

One Approach for Establishing Outcome Measures

- Define all vital key result areas.
- Set expectations for each performance category.
- Measure current performance/community status.
- Set or readjust objectives.
- Monitor and communicate results.