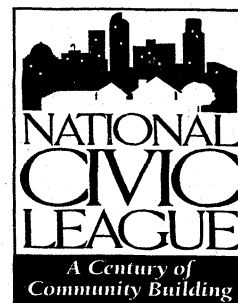


# THE COMMUNITY VISIONING AND STRATEGIC PLANNING HANDBOOK



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*Denver, Colorado*  
*Third Printing*  
*2000*



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Principal Author and Editor

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**This book was developed based on the work and wisdom of the following National Civic League staff and board members. We gratefully acknowledge their important contributions.**

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## FOREWORD

We are pleased to make available to you this third printing of *The Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Handbook*. We continue to be overwhelmed by the response to the handbook first released in 1996. It has become the National Civic League's most requested publication.

The handbook was published originally by the National Civic League Press and served as the first community resource for the Alliance for National Renewal, a program of the National Civic League. It lays out the framework of the successful community planning processes used by the National Civic League and others across the country.

This third printing includes a condensed version of the second edition of the *Civic Index* – a tool for communities to assess their civic infrastructure. This tool was invented and first used in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1989. Since that time, it has been used in hundreds of communities in the United States and in the Philippines and Eastern Europe. The second edition was created over a two-year period and released in January 2000.

The National Civic League's Community Services team members are skilled in helping communities design, develop and facilitate community-wide planning projects. We have pioneered the development and implementation of long-range consensus-based, planning processes that involve entire communities. These processes have been customized and effectively used in numerous places around the country to address a wide range of issues. If you have questions or want us to work with your community, call NCL 1-800-223-6004 or email us at [ncl@ncl.org](mailto:ncl@ncl.org).

It is important to note NCL's history. We were founded as the National Municipal League in 1894 by Theodore Roosevelt and other turn-of-the-century progressive reformers committed to self government at the local level. NCL's philosophy continues to reflect a profound faith in the power of collaborative problem solving and the caring of citizens in America's communities. We believe that the involvement of citizens with diverse perspectives is key to a participatory democracy.

This latest edition continues to be a testimony to those energetic community members who believe that no community issue is too large to tackle if everyone works together.



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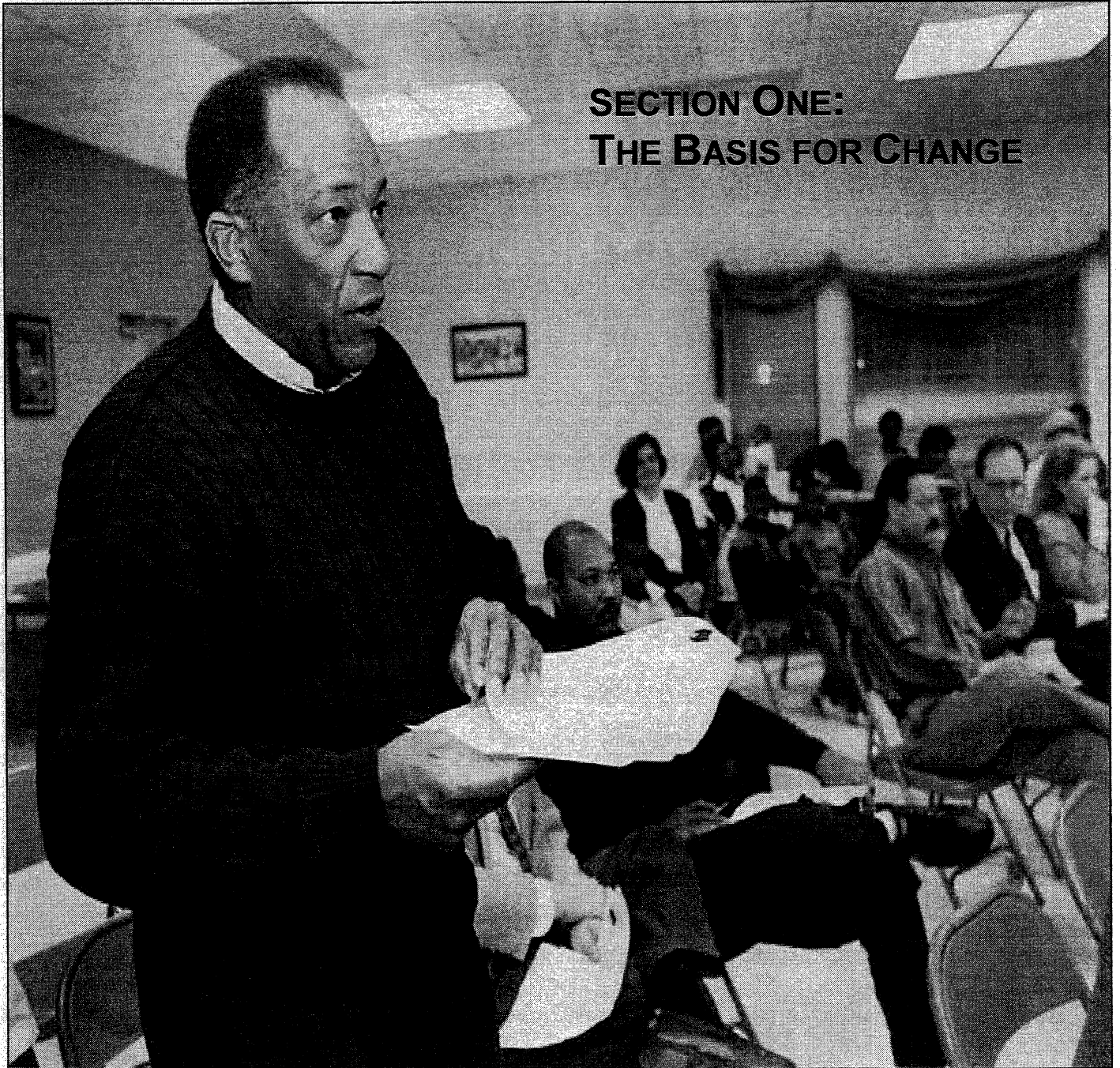
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**SECTION ONE:  
THE BASIS FOR CHANGE**





*By Christopher T. Gates  
National Civic League President*

### **NCL CREATED TO REBUILD AMERICA'S DEMOCRACY**

When the founders of the National Civic League<sup>1</sup> first convened in Philadelphia on January 25, 1894, the condition of America's local government weighed heavily on their minds. America's democracy at the local level was broken. Local government was corrupt. Nepotism, favoritism, and payoffs were taking place in cities all across the country. These practices hindered the ability of local governments to address the challenges facing them. The trust citizens held in governmental leaders was damaged, creating a distrust between citizens and the government that was meant to serve them.

NCL was founded to bridge the disconnect between local government and its constituents which was critical to rebuilding America's democracy. NCL's founders focused on two critical topics: finding ways to professionalize local government and advocating what Teddy Roosevelt called *self government*, where citizens play a key part in making communities work.

Five years later, on November 17, 1899, NCL's Board of Directors approved the first *Model City Charter*. In 1915, NCL adopted a new municipal program, presenting the second *Model City Charter* which advocated the council-manager form of government and gave birth to the profession of city management. This new structure freed elected officials to lead and to work with citizens

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<sup>1</sup> NCL was first founded as the National Municipal League. In 1987, it was renamed the National Civic League.

while a professional manager focused on the details required to run the city.

Citizens also had a role to play by running for elected office and serving on boards and commissions. Citizens had to do more than vote every two years in order to perform their civic duty. The new council-manager form of city government, by encouraging self-government, enabled citizens to live up to, as NCL founder Theodore Roosevelt suggested, being an actor - not merely a critic.

### **CHANGING TIMES**

Ironically, 105 years after the founding of the National Civic League, we find ourselves in a situation where, once again, America's democracy is in need of repair. The fact is that times have never been more difficult for communities to meet the challenges they face. The issues have grown increasingly complex. Complicated issues such as poverty, race, jobs, environmental concerns, crime, and education now dominate the local problem solving agenda. Exacerbating this situation are a host of underlying conditions, which further hamper problem solving efforts. Four of the most prominent obstacles to effective local problem solving are:

**Frustrated and Angry Citizens.** The word apathetic has become a popular adjective to describe today's citizens. Low voter turnout and limited attendance at public hearings are often offered by community leaders as examples of apathy. We would argue that apathy is actually a secondary response to something deeper. Citizens-at-large aren't as apathetic as they are frustrated and angry. In our work around the country, we find that citizens care a great deal about their communities, but feel their participation in the

overall governance of their communities simply doesn't matter. Citizens are angry and fed up with politics and politicians. Trust has been eroded instead of infused. "Most feel that public life is beyond their control, that their own values and interests are not reflected in the policies that shape the larger society. Americans feel unheard."<sup>2</sup> As a result, citizens have made conscious decisions to devote their time to areas upon which they feel they can have an impact, such as family, churches, schools, and youth sports.

**Presumption of Bad Intent.** Thirty or forty years ago citizens fundamentally trusted their community officials to represent their interests. There was a general understanding on the part of the community that governmental service was often undertaken at a personal sacrifice; when politicians made policy recommendations, it was understood that they did so with the community's interest in mind. Today, well meaning government officials still regularly suggest proposals to address their community's problems. Yet, no matter how worthy or well intentioned an idea is, a presumption of bad intent is often directed at the individual(s) offering the solution. People assume that individuals must have some ulterior motive or hidden agenda when making policy proposals. No matter who levies the suspicions – the media, other elected officials, or citizens – it results in a community that functions on negative assumptions and fear that severely limit the community's ability to address the challenges it faces.

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<sup>2</sup> Lappe, F.M. ; DuBois, P.M. *Building Social Capital Without Looking Backward.* National Civic Review, Summer 1997, p. 120

**Negative Media.** We hear from communities across the country that the media has increasingly become a barrier to getting things done. Media has become fixated on the sensational; it highlights disagreements and ignores people coming together to find common ground. The media seems to criticize first, looking for ways to discredit ideas and people. Positive events – efforts to produce social change – are often de-emphasized or overlooked. The media plays a powerful role in creating the state of the community psyche. This inclination toward the negative perpetuates the public's cynicism, suspicion, and anger. People begin to lose faith in the possibility of positive change. "Until people who work in the media...fully understand their stake in facilitating leadership and learn how to develop the mechanisms to understand and support it, progress will remain slow."<sup>3</sup>

**Dysfunctional Politics.** People used to believe that politics mattered; they used to believe that social change could occur through political activity. For many community members, politics has become a target of jokes, sarcasm and cynicism. Media and community members mock politicians and the political process. In fact, many people seem to be interested in politics strictly for the purposes of entertainment, focusing on sensational events, not on matters that will make a difference in their lives. They focus on the celebrity gossip: who is doing what to whom or what people are saying about one another and tend to ignore substantive issues when raised in the context of the political

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<sup>3</sup> Kunde, J.E. *American Renewal: The Challenge of Leadership.* National Civic Review, Winter-Spring 1994, p. 22.

scene. Like the other dynamics, dysfunctional politics provide the public with a number of reasons for why *not* to become more involved in their communities.

## **DYSFUNCTIONAL CONDITIONS EQUATE TO STRUGGLING, UNHEALTHY COMMUNITIES**

When all these conditions are present, their interactions create non-functioning, unhealthy communities. Dysfunctional politics becomes a way of doing business and as a result, nothing gets done. A negative media reports on the ineffectiveness of local government. The media spotlight raises suspicion and cynicism within the community and helps perpetuate a presumption of bad intent. The presumption of bad intent fuels the frustration and anger of citizens who choose not to get involved and instead focus on other things they perceive they can control. Dysfunctional community politics has created the need for a different model of community democracy. The current political environment has devolved to the point where solving community issues ends up as a zero-sum fight with different interests choosing sides. Energy is spent on winning the fight rather than developing a solution that all interests are willing to support and help implement.

## **HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY PROBLEM SOLVING**

Several new community problem-solving approaches began to emerge during the 1970s and 1980s in response to the growing litany of local challenges. While these approaches held much promise, as time has passed, each has become less applicable to today's problem solving environment. None of these approaches alone is sufficient to meet today's

challenges. However, each of these approaches, if combined with the others, can provide a valuable building block when constructing a new model of community democracy.

**Public-Private Partnerships.** Building partnerships across the sectors of government and business was one method of addressing community problems that gained popularity in the 1970s. Many community leaders began relying on public-private investment partnerships to meet economic community challenges. This approach to community problem solving did have some positive impact in the 1970s and 1980s, helping to revitalize neighborhoods in some towns and cities. With success, the public-private sector economic development model was adapted to address challenges such as education, crime and health disparity.

**The Emergence of Non-Profits.** At the same time period as the public-private sector partnership model gained prominence, non-profits began to emerge as the keepers of the grass-roots community interest. Increased social needs combined with limited government resources called for a greater contribution of time, money, and services from community institutions. Again, this non-profit sector approach to problem solving had some important strong points, primarily that non-profits were community-based made the needs of the community the driving force of their work. In the 1980's, communities began to treat the non-profit sector as a full partner in the processes of community problem solving.

**The Rise of Citizen Activism.** By the 1990s, tired of others making decisions for them and

having little trust in traditional institutions, citizens began speaking out for more involvement in the decisions and projects that affected their lives. An increasingly diverse group of people were not only demanding that they be included at the decision making table, but that they have real decision making authority. Citizens soon found that they were able to wield some power, but it was largely negative. They often had the power to say “no” and obstruct community actions initiated without citizen participation in the process.

## A MODEL OF CITIZEN DEMOCRACY

**Collaboration between Government, Business, Non-profits, and Citizens.** It has become apparent that the problem solving approaches which gained prominence in the 1970s and 1980s are not sufficient to meet the increasingly complex problems that our communities will face as we enter a new millennium. While these approaches held some promise, each had some serious shortcomings.

Despite promising intentions, the private-public sector model often led to partnerships dominated by the power players who traditionally held influence within the community. Even though non-profit agencies often were the instigators of change at the community level, they were not necessarily the power leaders in the community. They were often viewed by the public-private sector simply as altruistic advocates of grass-roots interests rather than true partners in the community decision making and problem solving process. Consequently, the public-private sector rarely sought to include these organizations in community governing processes. Although citizen activists were demanding to have greater say in community

decision-making, and sometimes were able to manifest just enough power to say “no,” they lacked the power to facilitate positive problem solving.

If communities are to counteract the environment of dysfunctional politics and effectively address local problems, all sectors of a community need to work in concert toward common ends. The issues facing America’s communities are too complex for government to be held solely responsible for their resolution. This is especially true now that federal dollars are decreasing and local governments for the foreseeable future will have to make do with relatively less federal funds. Public-private partnerships alone cannot be expected to resolve local problems. With business becoming more national, and international, in scope, it is subsequently less connected to local concerns. Non-profit organizations alone are not the answer; they are often issue based – formed to address the specific needs of each different population or neighborhood that exists within a community. The successful communities of the 2000s will be those that find ways in which business, government, and non-profit groups work *together* with citizens to help a community reach its collective goals and meet its common challenges.

**Safe Spaces.** For business, government, non-profits and citizens to work together effectively, *civic* or *safe* space must be created. Civic or safe spaces are places where individuals with diverse perspectives are brought together by leaders to resolve differences and develop strategies to address complex issues. There are already plenty of spaces to fight, blame, and take sides in our communities, safe spaces allow people to focus on public deliberation and consensus building.

Any individual, organization or institution can create and convene a safe space. Former NCL Chairman John W. Gardner referred to these conveners as “community guardians.” Community guardians are those individuals who rise above the fray, and convene different groups to focus on the greater good of the community. They are willing to frame the tough issues and ask the right questions rather than provide all the answers.

For community guardians to be credible, they must include key players from all sides, ask the tough questions and allow the group to determine the answers, and focus on building agreements while acknowledging differences. The participants in civic/safe spaces must be willing to ask challenging questions, provide honest answers, find agreements, and all be willing to undergo tough self-analysis.

This new model of citizen democracy can sometimes be messy and time consuming. Building agreement among individuals with different points of view requires patience and strong listening abilities. Finding those issues that diverse perspectives agree on takes time, as does addressing them in a supportive manner.

Communities using this new model, however, have found that they actually save time on the *back end* of the problem solving process. Because different points of view were heard and agreements were established in an inclusive manner *up front*, the implementation has greater buy-in and goes smoother and more quickly. This *go slow to go fast* model used by NCL in hundreds of communities over the past decade also facilitates future problem-solving efforts because it helps build and enhance the community’s civic infrastructure. For example, new relationships, skills, and

networks are created in the process of working together.

### CONCLUSION: REINVENTING DEMOCRACY IN COMMUNITY

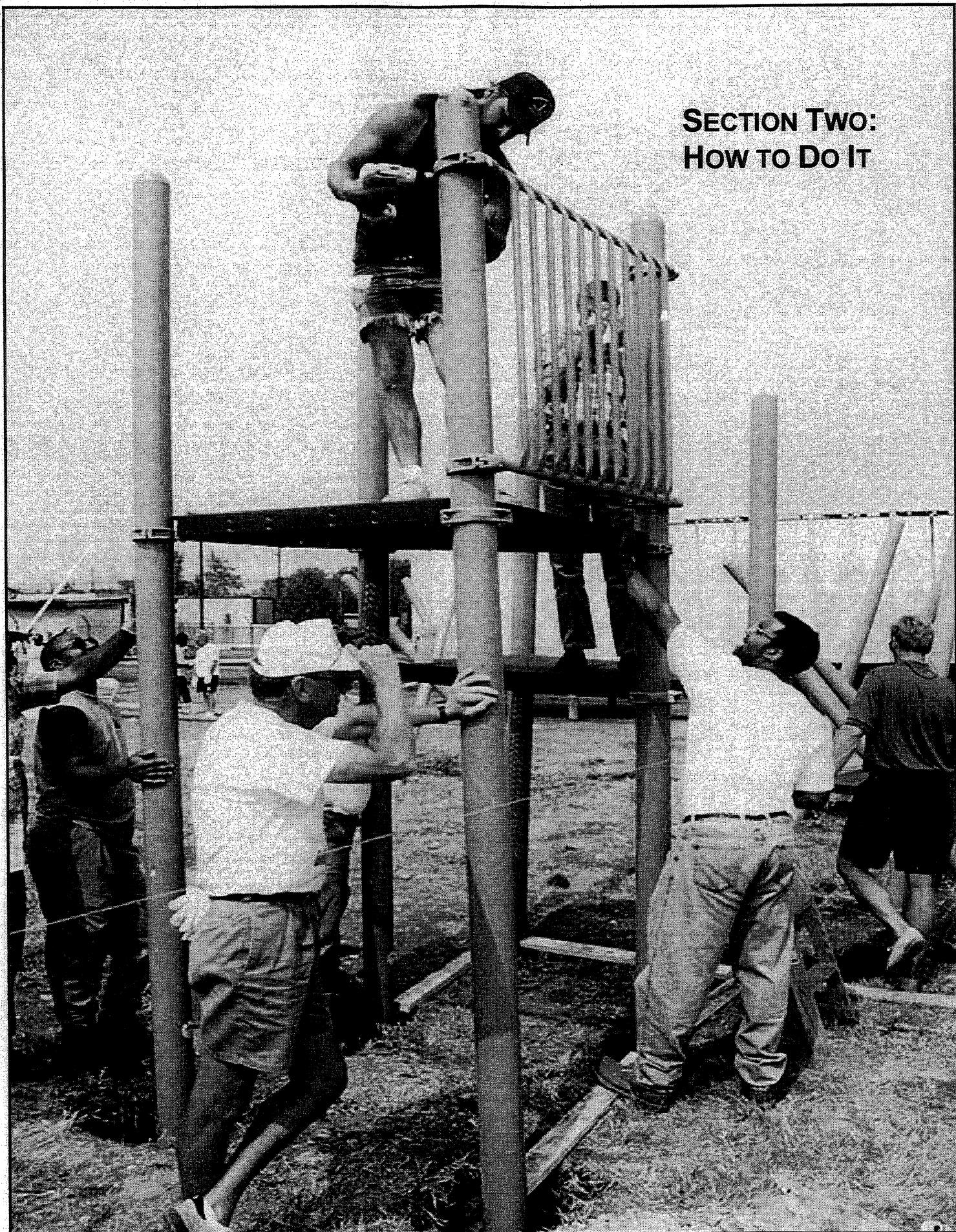
Any community seeking to move toward this new form of democracy can expect struggle and frustration. We can cite numerous examples of communities that have adopted this new model of citizen democracy and, in the process, achieved seemingly unreachable goals. “They are tackling difficult problems not in anarchic or antagonistic ways, but in ways that reflect a new kind of citizenship. It is deeper, more intimate and inclusive kind of democracy...”<sup>4</sup> These communities reaffirm our belief that every community has the ability and wisdom to address any issue it faces.

Successful communities understand that addressing challenges requires different skills than those employed by previous generations of problem solvers. For communities to reinvent themselves and move toward fundamental change they must be willing to redefine what they mean by democracy, community, citizenship and leadership. The National Civic League has come to recognize that issues don’t stop communities, communities stop themselves. No challenge is too big or difficult when government, business, non-profits and citizens come together to identify shared values and to work toward common goals.

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<sup>4</sup> Chrislip, D.D. *American Renewal: Reconnecting Citizens with Public Life*. National Civic Review, Winter-Spring 1994, p. 26)

**SECTION TWO:  
HOW TO DO IT**



# CHAPTER ONE

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE VISIONING AND STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

In 1969, Chattanooga, Tennessee, received the dubious distinction of being named the most polluted city in the nation. Chattanooga's air was filled with particulate and high concentrations of nitrogen dioxide. Its ozone levels trailed only those of Los Angeles. The ridges and valleys of the region, unalterable features of the topography, added to the problem. As visibility continued to deteriorate and respiratory illnesses mounted, Chattanooga found itself in trouble.

The intensity of the problem served as a powerful motivator toward action. Citizens, government, and industry came together to address the issue. Everyone agreed that clean air was desirable, but there was no consensus on how to achieve that goal without harming local industry and reducing the region's employment base. After a series of meetings, local leaders formed the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Air Pollution Control Board. The board set benchmarks and ensured that the city met them. In 1990 Chattanooga was one of the few cities in the southeastern United States to be declared in compliance for all six National Ambient Air Quality standards. On Earth Day 1990, Chattanooga was recognized as the "best turnaround story" in the nation.

But Chattanooga didn't stop with air quality. It implemented a community-wide visioning process in 1992 that produced:

- **223 projects and programs that have served 1.5 million people**
- **1,400 new jobs and an additional 7,300 construction-related jobs**
- **much-needed renovations to historical buildings and sites**
- **a new river park, aquarium, and performance hall**
- **new and enhanced human services to serve public needs**

The investment raised amounted to \$2,778 per person in Hamilton County -- which breaks out

to a private donation of \$2,083.50 and \$694.50 from taxes, per person.



### VALUE OF COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES

There are many examples of communities that have faced highly complex issues and reached their goals through sheer determination and a collaborative spirit. These communities succeeded in large part because they underwent an extensive, sometimes difficult planning process and persevered throughout the plan's implementation. All sectors—government, business, nonprofit, and the citizens themselves—participated in the development of a common agenda. In addition, the community at large received ample opportunity to provide input. Because all sectors of these communities were involved in the creation and ongoing development of programs for the future, such programs received widespread support and encountered minimal resistance.

Some communities allow the future to happen to them. Successful communities recognize the future is something they can create. These communities take the time to produce a vision of the future they desire and employ a process that helps them achieve their goals. Achieving the future you desire is hard work. Yet successful communities understand that the things they dream about will only come true

through great effort, determination and teamwork.

One way of achieving these community goals is through community-visioning project. Such a process brings together all sectors of a community to identify problems, evaluate changing conditions, and build collective approaches to improve the quality of life in the community. The participants must define the definition of a community. Some projects define their community as a neighborhood; others a whole city or town; many projects have focused on regions that include multiple cities, towns, and counties.

## COLLABORATION AND CONSENSUS ARE ESSENTIAL

Successful community efforts focus on ways in which business, government, nonprofits, and citizens work *together*. In reviewing successful collaborative efforts around the country, we have found that all possess the following ingredients:

- **People with varied interests and perspectives participated throughout the entire process and contributed to the final outcomes, lending credibility to the results.**
- **Traditional "power brokers" viewed other participants as peers.**
- **Individual agendas and baggage were set aside, so the focus remained on common issues and goals.**
- **Strong leadership came from all sectors and interests.**
- **All participants took personal responsibility for the process and its outcomes.**
- **The group produced very detailed recommendations that specified responsible parties, timelines, and costs.**
- **Individuals broke down racial, economic, and sector barriers and developed effective working relationships based on trust, understanding, and respect.**

- **Participants expected difficulty at certain points and realized it was a natural part of the process. When these frustrating times arose, they stepped up their commitment and worked harder to overcome those barriers.**
- **Projects were well timed—they were launched when other options to achieve the objective did not exist or were not working.**
- **Participants took the time to learn from past efforts (both successful and unsuccessful) and applied that learning to subsequent efforts.**
- **The group used consensus to reach desired outcomes.**

These ingredients make up the essence of collaboration itself. True collaboration brings together many organizations, agencies, and individuals to define problems, create options, develop strategies, and implement solutions. Because they typically involve larger groups, collaborative efforts help organizations rethink how they work, how they relate to the rest of the community, and what role they can play in implementing a common strategy. Many times it becomes clear that no single organization has the resources or mandate to effectively address a particular issue alone. A group effort can help mobilize the necessary resources and community will.

Effective collaboration requires that decisions be made by consensus. In *A World Waiting to Happen*, M. Scott Peck describes consensus as

*a group decision (which some members may not feel is the best decision, but which they can all live with, support, and commit themselves not to undermine), arrived at without voting, through a process whereby the issues are fully aired, all members feel they have been adequately heard, in which everyone has equal power and responsibility, and different degrees of*

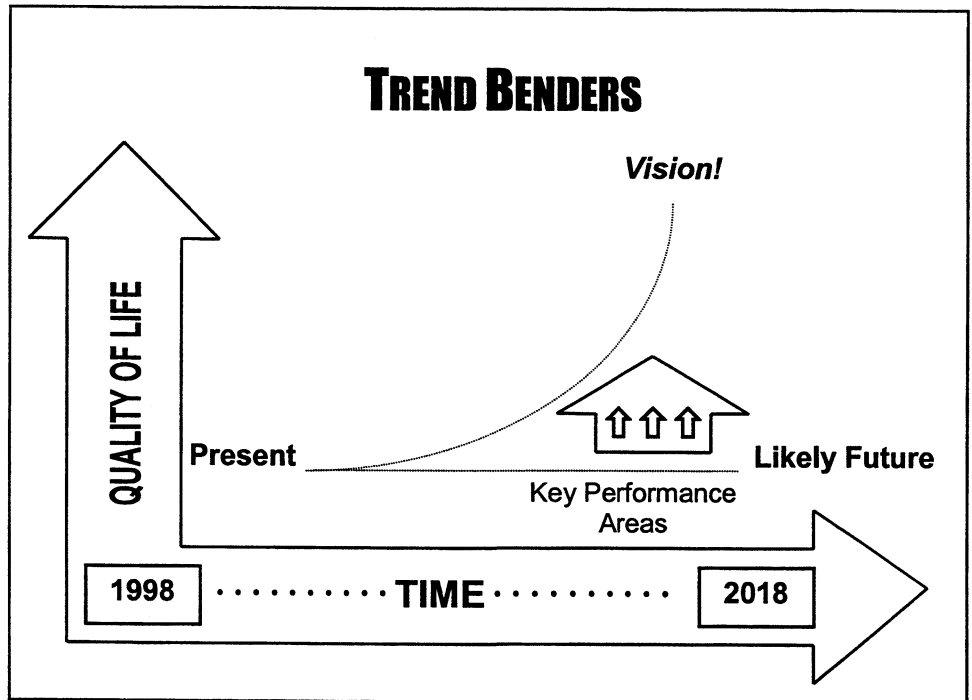


*influence by virtue on individual stubbornness or charisma are avoided so that all are satisfied with the process.*

Though a consensus-based decision-making process takes more time on the front-end, it can save time during the back-end of the implementation phase of a visioning project where blocking ordinarily occurs. If citizens are provided a forum in which their ideas and opinions are heard, seriously considered, and incorporated into the action plan, they will be less inclined to resist or ignore new initiatives. Community "ownership" of a plan and willingness to assist in its implementation often corresponds directly with the public's level of participation in the plan's development. As a result, projects can be completed in timely fashion through the consensus-building process.

In 1994 the Colorado State Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) was required by the federal Centers for Disease Control to develop a community-based statewide HIV/AIDS prevention plan. Officials at CDPHE recognized the polarized nature of perspectives throughout the state. They also realized that people from all perspectives would have to agree on the prevention plan for it to succeed. Yet just two years before, voters in Colorado had passed Amendment 2, which prevented gays and lesbians from receiving protection under the state's civil rights law. Could citizens, religious groups, people living with HIV/AIDS, educators, community activists, service providers, and other officials come to agreement on a plan?

They could and they did. The process, facilitated by third parties, was challenging, the dialogue intense. People listened to one another, agreed and disagreed. Yet, regardless of perspective, all committed to the goal of preventing HIV/AIDS and considered every approach. In December 1994, 70 community members—including people with HIV/AIDS and representatives of ACT-UP (a gay community activist organization), the religious right, and local providers of health services—simultaneously stood up and cheered as true consensus on the statewide prevention plan was reached.



In collaborative processes, the sharing of information and pooling of resources build understanding and lead to better decisions. Special interests are not as inclined to block implementation of the plan, since it reflects their own interests and efforts.

While collaborative problem solving is not appropriate for every issue and situation, it is an absolute necessity for a community visioning project. Collaborative problem solving should be used when:

- the issues are complex or can be negotiated
- the resources to address the issues are limited
- there are a number of interests involved
- individual and community actions are required to address the issue effectively
- people are interested and willing to participate because of the importance of the issue
- no single entity has jurisdiction over the problem or implementation of the solutions

Successful visioning projects usually follow a number of concrete steps. Each of these components will be described in depth in the following chapters. The nuts and bolts of successful visioning projects follow.

## THE INITIATING COMMITTEE

This preliminary phase brings together a team of project "champions," or initiators, to lay the foundation for the community visioning effort. This group of 10 to 15 individuals representing the broader community focuses on the process and logistics of the visioning project, not the content. Their participation on this Initiating Committee (IC) adds credibility to the project, because diverse interests and perspectives are represented from the beginning.

## THE PROJECT KICKOFF

A kickoff event serves to promote understanding of the project and allows participants ("stakeholders") to get to know one another and begin developing into a high-performance team. Most important, it demonstrates why an inclusive approach is being used, why community members were chosen to participate, and what the desired outcomes are for the entire community.

## THE ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

This exercise identifies external forces, pressures, and trends that are impacting the community from the global, national, and state levels. Though much of the planning will focus on the areas directly within the control of the community, it is nonetheless important to be aware of how factors outside its control may affect it and how such effects can be addressed.

## THE COMMUNITY SCAN

Here participants evaluate the future their community is likely to face if no significant intervention occurs. Weighing this scenario against the desired future helps to define key areas where change must be effected. Secondary data and indicators are combined with subjective perceptions to develop a rough consensus of current circumstances (both positive and negative) in the community.

## THE CIVIC INDEX

Communities use the Civic Index, a tool developed by the National Civic League, to measure their planning and problem-solving capacity. The stakeholders assess and then consider methods to enhance the community's civic capacity and build its civic infrastructure—the skills, processes, and relationships that a community needs to deal effectively with its specific and unique concerns.

## THE COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENT

A vision is a useful tool on which to focus the hopes and aspirations and to frame the project and set priorities. This vision describes where committee members would like the community to be in key quality-of-life areas 10, 20, or 30 years into the future. The vision statement must reflect the commonly held

values of the community and guide stakeholders for the remainder of the visioning process.

## IDENTIFYING KEY PERFORMANCE AREAS

With a firm grasp on the desired future of the community, stakeholders focus their action planning by identifying Key Performance Areas (KPA's). If these are addressed effectively, they will "bend the trend" toward the desired future.

## ACTION PLANS

Participants must integrate their work and develop a strategy for implementation, monitoring, and follow-up. They must identify responsible parties, set timelines, estimate costs, and find sources of support to keep the project rolling.

## THE COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

Visioning projects should always conclude with a community celebration acknowledging the planning work of the stakeholders and various contributors, announcing the plan to the community, and commencing the implementation phase.

## SHIFTING FROM PLANNING TO IMPLEMENTATION

The transition from planning to action is crucial. The finalized action plans have articulated a "game plan" of specific projects and policy recommendations, and the lead implementers must build on these commitments and begin their work immediately. Responsible parties should capitalize on the momentum surrounding the celebration and publication of the final report to facilitate rapid movement.

## THE IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

Successful visioning projects must have some kind of entity to oversee and support the implementation process. This committee, often made up of participants in the planning phase and other key players, ensures that plans remain on track, prioritizes key efforts, assists responsible parties with the action steps when necessary, and troubleshoots when unforeseen barriers arise.

## CONCLUSION

In this initial chapter, we have articulated the value of collaborative community-based planning processes and consensus-based decision making. We also have provided an overview of community vision planning and implementation.

It is important to understand that visioning projects come in a variety of forms. Each community process is different in some way. \*Chattanooga's project maintained the crucial principles of community participation, yet the process they followed was far different than the one we are suggesting. Visioning projects and pilot programs at the local, state, national, and international levels differ substantially in their focus and organization. However, all possess a goal of improving the quality of life and increasing the well-being of all members of the community. To succeed, community-based visioning projects must involve representatives from all parts of the community.

## SETTING THE STAGE: HOW TO BEGIN A COMMUNITY VISIONING PROJECT

Community visioning is both a process and an outcome. Its success is most clearly visible in an improved quality of life, but it can also give individual citizens and the community as a whole a new approach to meeting challenges and solving problems.

Citizens of all types who care about the future of their communities conduct community visioning projects. These people are collectively called "stakeholders." The stakeholders in successful visioning efforts represent the community's diversity—politically, racially, geographically, ethnically, and economically—lending different "stakes," or personal and group interests, to the process. They form the core planning group for the visioning effort, perform community self-evaluation, set goals, and develop the action plan and implementation strategy. To ensure the success of the stakeholders' work, effective process design and structure are essential.

During the 1980's, Chatham County, Georgia, and its largest city, Savannah, were splitting along a number of seams at once. Voters defeated an important school bond referendum; the central business district was deteriorating; and economic growth was weak. In addition, there were substantial tensions between Savannah and the other towns in the county, as well as more general tensions of race and class.

Facing the challenges, the City of Savannah and Chatham County began a community-wide visioning process in 1989 to create a plan for the future of the region that would bridge traditional racial, economic, and city/county divisions. But at the start, Vision 20/20 was just a "working committee" of the ten established leaders from the five founding institutions. The committee soon hired an outside consultant to design a process centered on a community leader retreat. After the consultant talked to the working committee and to other community leaders and residents,

everyone involved realized that a top-down process wouldn't work.

"As the consultants started talking to people, they realized the level of distrust in the community," said Vision 20/20 Coordinator Chris Morrill. "There was just a feeling that the same old leaders always made decisions. It just wouldn't be productive for them just to go (on a retreat). We needed the community involved." Another leader aptly stated, "At first we saw it as a traditional top-down process, but the message we got was that that would be a waste."

Immediately, the working committee and the consultant set out to make a "really democratic process." First, in order to expand the planning to the larger community, they added five local black leaders to the working committee. "We needed minority participation early in the process," said one participant. "We had to make sure it was not just the established leadership appointing people."

Credibility of the process soon became apparent. "It was more successful in getting minority participation than any other project ongoing at the time," said Richard Shinhoster, one of the black leaders who joined the working committee. "The organizers were determined from the very beginning and went right to the minority community to get people who were interested...They were willing to open it up and bring in a cross-section of people."

The inclusion of the broader community resulted in minimal dissent that had been seen in past efforts. "There wasn't so much opposition as having to overcome the inertia of the belief that things weren't going to change. Given the size of the effort, there was very little organized vocal opposition," said a local leader.

As for its results, the project has changed attitudes in the region. One leader stated, "Vision 20/20 has helped create a greater sense

of the whole...The process itself was a success. It re-energized the community to move forward."

## PROVIDING THE GROUNDWORK FOR THE VISIONING PROCESS

### THE INITIATING COMMITTEE

Successful visioning efforts start with an Initiating Committee (IC) consisting of 10 to 15 people. These individuals must be willing to invest a substantial amount of time over roughly three months in the development phase of the project. They may or may not wish to continue on as members of the stakeholder group for the planning effort itself. The Initiating Committee needs to reflect the community's diversity in terms of race, gender, economic sector, and place of residence and employment. Each member of the Initiating Committee should wear "multiple hats", or represent multiple interests. The Initiating Committee will make the first statements about the visioning initiative to the community, so it must be credible and well balanced.

The two crucial attributes of the Initiating Committee are diversity and credibility. A good question to ask while forming the group is: "Will any community member be able to look at the Initiating Committee membership and say, 'Yes, my perspective was there from the beginning?'" If this isn't the case, then the missing perspective must be identified and a credible individual recruited to participate.

The purpose of the Initiating Committee is to focus on the process and logistics required to move the project forward. The content of the community vision will be developed during the broader stakeholder planning phase. The diverse voices on the Initiating Committee must create and agree to methods by which stakeholders can equitably address complex and controversial issues.

### TASKS OF THE INITIATING COMMITTEE

In order to create a safe environment for discussion of difficult issues, the Initiating Committee must complete a number of tasks. These tasks include the following:

#### IDENTIFYING WHO MUST BE AT THE TABLE

Using a "stakeholder analysis," the Initiating Committee must identify a group of 100 to 150 individuals to serve as the core planning group. The stakeholder group must be as diverse as possible and represent every major interest and perspective in the community. Even more than the Initiating Committee, the stakeholder group must represent the community's demographic diversity in terms of age, race, gender, preferences, and places of residence and employment.

In selecting stakeholders for the community visioning process, the Initiating Committee must consider the diverse sectors and various interests and perspectives of the community. The committee must avoid "rounding up the usual suspects" or forming a "blue ribbon panel" of the same community leaders and organizations that always involved been involved in past community efforts. These active people are valuable contributors, but this type of project must tap into populations and people that are traditionally excluded from community processes. A balance of the "old guard" and "new blood" is useful. Further, it is important that participants act as citizens with a stake in the quality of life in the *whole* community, not simply as representatives of a particular organization, part of town, or issue. In this process, stakeholders should be effective spokespersons for their interests and perspectives, but they should not simply serve as advocates for their agencies and organizations.

One of the most critical groups of stakeholders will be those who have a stake in the future of the community but have little political or financial

power. It will also be important to include both "yes" people and "no" people in the stakeholder group. It is easy to pick positive people who have the power to get things done. It is harder, but no less important, to pick people who have the power to stop or delay a project. As with the Initiating Committee, it is useful to look for people who wear multiple hats or fall into a number of categories: for example, a single parent with kids who is a banker and lives in a northwest-quadrant neighborhood, or a small business owner who is on the planning commission and serves as a soccer coach his child's team.

A sample of the categories in identifying the stakeholders in the community may include:

- **Pro-Growth/No Growth**
- **Business Type (Small, Corporate, Industrial)**
- **Old/New Resident**
- **Conservative/Liberal/Moderate**
- **Geographic Location**
- **Age**
- **Ethnicity/Race**
- **Service Provider**
- **Income Level**
- **Education Reform/Back to Basics**
- **Elected/Appointed Leadership**
- **Single Parent/Dual Parent House**
- **Institution Type (schools, police, etc.)**
- **Inside/Outside City Boundaries**

### DESIGNING THE PROCESS

It is important to note two fundamental premises about the community visioning process. First, key leaders and the community as a whole must empower the stakeholder group to make decisions. Citizens are too knowledgeable to accept the role of only advising officials and community leaders, who may or may not choose to accept their advice. Although elected officials clearly have legal authority over issues such as taxes and the provision of services, and corporate leaders are free to determine their own business development strategies, they must participate in

this process as peers and agree to honor, while not necessarily rubber-stamping, the stakeholder group's conclusions. If the process works correctly, honoring the conclusions should not be a problem since the "power" people were a part of building the same conclusions.

Second, the orientation of the entire process, from the very beginning, has to be proactive. Too many community task forces have been convened over the years with marginal results. The goal of this effort is not to conduct interesting discussions or forge new relationships, though these will certainly result. The goal must be to develop a broad, implementable, community-owned renewal plan that will truly serve the whole community – and then to put that plan into action.

The process must be customized to fit the community's needs and desired outcomes. It must take into consideration local realities (budget, time constraints, etc.) and complement other useful community efforts. Also, the outreach process of the project must take into account the community's political, social, cultural, and geographic characteristics and fit the specific language, literacy, and accessibility needs of the local population.

### SETTING THE PROJECT TIMETABLE

The experience of successful efforts has shown that a comfortable schedule for the visioning project is to have the stakeholders meet once every three weeks over ten to twelve months. Some extra time may be taken to work around major holidays or significant community activities. The Initiating Committee may choose to meet more frequently, such as once a week, in its preparatory work to speed up the process. The time frame will depend on the nature and needs of the community, local scheduling realities, and the urgency surrounding issues in the community.

The timing of stakeholder meetings is an important factor. Successful visioning projects have made accessibility and participation in the project a priority. Therefore, stakeholder meetings often took place in the evenings to allow working people to participate on a regular basis.

## **DESIGNING STRUCTURE TO COORDINATE THE PROJECT**

The project should have a project chairperson, at least three small subcommittees, and adequate staffing. Stakeholders, not those individuals staffing the project, must lead committees. Though Initiating Committee members may take leadership positions on subcommittees in the early phases of the project, new leaders may be available after the project kickoff, once stakeholders are more involved and further recruitment can take place. The Coordinating Committee and the Outreach Committee are the best places to involve stakeholders who want to contribute.

## **SELECTING A CHAIRPERSON**

All successful community projects have strong and fair leadership. Therefore, the selection of the project chairperson is critical. She/he must be (and must be perceived as) open, fair, neutral, and likeable. The chairperson's duties include:

- **formally opening and closing every stakeholder meeting,**
- **chairing the meetings of the Coordinating Committee,**
- **appointing the chairs of the other committees, representing the project in the press,**
- **leading the fundraising effort,**
- **being the spokesperson for the project to the broader community,**
- **resolving any disputes within the group, and putting out any fires that may flare up during the course of the project, and**
- **working with the facilitation team to assure the meetings run effectively and a**

**safe environment for discussion is maintained.**

The chairperson also submits recommendations for the composition of the Coordinating Committee to the Initiating Committee.

Every process goes through challenging periods, and heated discussions may take place during meetings. The chairperson has a crucial role to play during these periods. She/he must work closely with the project facilitator to remind stakeholders of the project purpose and goals and to keep the environment safe for discussion from all perspectives. Above all, the chairperson is a role model for the whole group and must have a strong commitment to the project and participants. If she/he is accountable, the entire group is more likely to be accountable. She/he must be willing to devote a substantial amount of time to the community visioning project.

## **FORMING AN OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

The first subcommittee is the Coordinating Committee. This group of 10-15 stakeholders manages the process, but not the content, of the project. Its members guide the plan and schedule; serve as liaisons with the stakeholders; fundraise; supervise the other committees and the project staff; and generally keep the effort on track. They will also "own" the project on behalf of the entire community to ensure that the visioning process does not become merely an advisory effort. The Coordinating Committee will need to hold a planning/debriefing meeting for each meeting of the larger stakeholder group. Work will often have to be done between sessions, and the Coordinating Committee, with the support of staff, will need to ensure its completion. Some members of this committee, which begins its service at the kickoff and continues into the implementation phase, will likely have served on the Initiating Committee and in some cases,





through secondary research). Most information can be gathered from local health departments, census data, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, chambers of commerce, local colleges and universities, and so forth.

The Research Committee's work must begin with the Initiating Committee to assure availability of appropriate materials for the presentations during the stakeholder planning phase.

### STAFFING THE PROJECT

Administrative staff play a crucial role in the visioning process. The staff's ability to coordinate and complete the many logistical tasks involved often makes or breaks the overall effort.

Administrative staff handle the following types of tasks:

- **General communications (phone and written correspondence with stakeholders, committee members, and the community)**
- **Coordination of mailings and meeting-reminder postcards**
- **Coordination of speaker and information requests**
- **Preparation of meeting room and other meeting logistics (refreshments, supplies, etc)**
- **Taking of attendance at stakeholder sessions**
- **Preparation of meeting materials**
- **Taking of meeting notes**
- **Copying and other general administrative tasks**

Should staff members come from the chamber of commerce, city government, or other influential body, it is critical that citizens, not staff, direct the stakeholder planning and outreach effort to avoid accusations that the recommendations were developed by individuals with a hidden agenda.

### SELECTING A NEUTRAL, OUTSIDE FACILITATOR

In visioning projects, it is helpful to have an experienced outside facilitator run the community visioning meetings. Such a facilitator or facilitation team can assist in several ways, including:

- **Helping to design the process;**
- **Keeping the effort true to its purposes and values;**
- **Ensuring that the process stays on track and on schedule;**
- **Helping to identify experts from around the state and nation on various issues of priority importance to the community; and**
- **Facilitating the large group stakeholder meetings- including encouraging wide participation and discouraging any personal attacks or group domination**

It is essential that the facilitator(s) be a neutral third party not connected with any organization in the process and possessing no specific stake in the outcome. As the project progresses, stakeholders from can facilitate the small groups and task forces.

### IDENTIFYING FUNDING SOURCES

Visioning projects require financial resources and in-kind contribution of other resources where possible to cover administrative, logistical, research, outreach, and facilitation costs. Successful visioning efforts have made a point of gathering financial and other resources in cooperative fashion from throughout the community to ensure broad ownership of the project. Developing these resources early can help ensure success in the planning phase and guarantee the availability of adequate funding for those portions of the action plan requiring financial investment and other resources. Community-wide visioning projects usually range from \$75,000-\$200,000 when all costs are taken into account.

In developing a project budget, a community must consider the following questions:

- **What types of resources are required (and in what amounts) for the successful completion of the planning phase of this project? Costs may include:**
  - **staffing (\$15,000-\$25,000);**
  - **facilitation costs (\$30,000-\$75,000);**
  - **food (\$7,500-\$15,000)**
  - **printing, copying and office/administrative costs (\$4,000-\$7,500);**
  - **travel (\$1,500-\$7,500);**
  - **community meeting-related costs (\$4,000-\$7,500);**
  - **outreach-related costs (\$3,000-\$10,000);**
  - **research-related costs (\$1,000-\$10,000);**
  - **equipment and meeting materials (\$2,500-\$7,500);**
  - **the final report (\$3,500-\$15,000); and**
  - **the community celebration (\$3,500-\$10,000)**
- **What money and in-kind resources can be raised from within and outside of the community for implementation of the various action plans determined by the stakeholder group?**
- **Who will take the lead on resource development?**

## CREATING A NAME FOR THE PROJECT

Giving the visioning process a name is an early way to develop project identity and a following for the project. Some names of visioning projects from around the country include:

- **Out of the Blue and Into the Future – Blue Springs, Missouri**
- **Project Tomorrow: Creating Our Community's Future – Fargo, North Dakota/Moorhead, Minnesota**
- **Howard County: A United Vision – Howard County, Maryland**
- **Lee's Summit: 21st Century — Lee's Summit, Missouri**

- **Our Future By Design: A Greater Winter Haven Community – Winter Haven, Florida**
- **Invent Tomorrow – Fort Wayne, Indiana**
- **Foresight 2020: Linn County's Tomorrow — Linn County, Iowa**

Project names should give the stakeholders a sense of ownership and enable the general public to identify with the effort.

## SELECTING A GOOD MEETING SITE

An accessible and neutral meeting site with a large and open layout, available parking, and supporting facilities is a must. If possible, avoid governmental and organizational facilities to prevent the perception that the effort is being driven by that entity. The site should have quality lighting, good acoustics, and no pillars to block the sight of participants. The room should have adequate wall space for the hanging of flip charts. The building should have adequate parking, restrooms, air conditioning, tables, chairs, a kitchen, and separate rooms for child-care needs. Community centers, schools, or churches typically serve as good neutral sites for meetings. In considering a site, room layout considerations must be taken into account.

The 100-150 stakeholders typically sit around moveable round tables arranged comfortably around the room. One end of the room should be reserved for the facilitators, flip charts, screen, and an overhead projector. With large groups, two or three wireless microphones are crucial to aid people whose voices don't carry well.

## RECRUITING THE STAKEHOLDERS

A broad-based community visioning effort should start with an initial list of 300-400 prospective stakeholders. This list will be whittled down to a committed stakeholder group of 100-150 individuals who will attend all regular planning sessions. Past visioning

projects have regularly shown that 50-70 percent of prospective stakeholders initially agree to participate in the effort. Of these, 5-10 percent never attend stakeholder meetings. An average of 15 percent of those invited turn down the request because they are unable to attend a regular session at any given time.

### PLANNING FOR THE PROJECT KICKOFF

The final tasks of the Initiating Committee are to ensure that all logistical details are covered and that significant public awareness of the community planning effort exists leading up to the kickoff. All staff and committees—especially the Research and Outreach Committees—should be in place and carrying out their tasks by that time. Composition of the stakeholder group and committee composition may require fine-tuning through the first one or two stakeholder meetings. Also, the stakeholders will be strongly encouraged to assist in the outreach effort by spreading the word to other community members and through other strategies developed by the Outreach Committee. The Initiating Committee must devise a plan to bring early attention to the project and focus media and public attention on the kickoff. Press conferences, public events, and other communication means have proven to be effective in building community awareness.

### CONCLUSION

The process of building a solid foundation for an effective community visioning project includes a number of key tasks. The first is the selection of an Initiating Committee, a small group of 12-15 individuals that represent a slice of the community.

Their job includes:

- selecting a stakeholder group that reflects the community's interests and perspectives
- designing a process that will reach the desired outcomes of the community effort
- forming subcommittees that will play key roles throughout the project
- addressing key logistical issues such as staffing, siting, scheduling, fund-raising, and the project name

The Initiating Committee focuses on process, allowing the broader stakeholder group to work on content (identifying problem areas, formulating action plans, etc.). Preparation and completion of logistical tasks can send the visioning effort on its way toward success.



An essential key to the success of the community visioning process is an active community outreach effort. Despite all efforts to recruit a stakeholder group that is representative of the community's diversity, there will be some gaps. For a variety of reasons, certain groups cannot or will not participate in stakeholder meetings. If certain groups cannot come to the stakeholder meetings then the means must be developed to go out to them.

Different strategies must be employed simultaneously to ensure that all sectors and segments of the community's population are kept informed throughout the life of the project. An effective two-way dialogue between the stakeholders and the community is a critical component in creating a relevant, widely supported, and effectively implemented action plan. An outreach effort running parallel to the stakeholder planning process, with activities at several key steps along the way, is necessary to test current thinking within the community and allow citizens to have input on an ongoing basis.

An Outreach Committee of 10-20 stakeholders coordinates the effort. To attain its goals and objectives, the Outreach Committee will need the active support of project staff and the stakeholder group as a whole.

The community outreach continues the principles ingrained in this community-based planning model by emphasizing and all-inclusive approach. An indication of a thorough outreach program is the absence of surprise and backlash when the action plan is released to the public. This is because people are already knowledgeable of the plan's content because of the ongoing information loops established by the Outreach Committee.

## **APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

### **PROJECT KICKOFF**

The project kickoff has two primary audiences. The first consists of the stakeholders, who hold their first regular session and become familiarized with the project purpose, the planning process, and their colleagues. The second audience is the community as a whole. The kickoff can be the most effective way of introducing the visioning initiative to the media and the citizens whose support will be required throughout the project.

Visioning teams often hold a public event/press conference prior to the kickoff to generate publicity. They may invite media representatives, key community leaders, and the public to a 30- to 45-minute presentation on the project given by three or four spokespersons (perhaps including the chair and/or a member of the Initiating Committee or Coordinating Committee). The guests would be able to learn about the work completed to date and receive detailed information about the participants and the planning and implementation effort. The presentation might be followed by a 10- to 15-minute press conference wherein reporters would be able to ask additional questions. It is essential to prepare project fact sheets and media kits in advance.

### **SURVEYS**

At certain points throughout the community visioning process, the stakeholders will need specific feedback from the community in order to direct or refine their planning actions. Surveys and focus groups are common instruments for gathering such information. An entire industry centers around the effective use of these very powerful research tools. In this limited space, therefore, we can only introduce the subjects and encourage participants to seek professional assistance or

to read further about these tools before using them to enrich the community project.

There are many types of surveys, and any number of them may be used depending on the information needed. Standard surveys characterize a given problem after it has been identified but before a solution has been selected and implemented. Surveys should contain specific questions about individual topics, although multiple topics can be addressed in a single survey. A survey may provide guidance on the most appropriate methods to use in addressing a given issue. In addition, surveys may be applied during any phase of the process to monitor the effectiveness of approaches being used.

Survey questions must be specific, designed to minimize the chances of misinterpretation by respondents (something that can skew the results). Moreover, questions must be relevant to the target population or, again, the results will be inconsistent. Finally, the analysis of the survey results will be invalid if it does not take historical patterns into account.

Surveys can be administered in person, over the phone, or through forms filled out anonymously by large numbers of people. It is often effective to code the forms by the respondent's area of residence, income group, organization, and/or other characteristics.

Citizens from all walks of life in Mobile county, Alabama, came together to begin Mobile 2000. Businesspeople completed surveys. Citizens filled out forms that arrived with their Alabama Power bills. Students discussed and reached consensus about their rights to a quality education and the conditions under which they should receive it. Parents completed slightly longer surveys about changes they would like to see in the schools to improve their children's chances for academic success. After reading thousands of comments about what their community expected of its educational system, Mobile

2000 stakeholders created a vision. They described an educational system that would produce as an end result a professionally competitive population of critical thinkers who are engaged in the life of the community.

Outreach committees in other communities took the time to identify certain segments of the population that are ordinarily overlooked in community processes. In Sioux Falls, South Dakota, the outreach committee went to public assistance offices and had front line workers survey individuals. In Atlanta, Georgia, outreach committee members went to homeless shelters and held focus groups with individuals to get their input on the issues directly affecting them. Input from these individuals was brought back to the larger stakeholder group and incorporated into the action planning.

### **FOCUS GROUPS**

Focus groups are a form of survey designed to identify and solve problems. Surveys help communities determine a course of action once a problem/issue has been identified; focus groups help them find what problems/issues actually exist and how they should be defined. Focus groups are in-depth, specific interviews with people representing a cross-section of the community based on ethnicity, race, age, socioeconomic status, perspective, and so forth.

Focus groups are time-consuming, usually requiring a minimum of one month to assemble and conduct. It is critical to ask the right questions of the right people and then base the conclusions on historical trends and community background. The focus group leader must make sure the respondent pool reflects the demographics of the community to ensure a valid sampling of perspectives.

Because focus groups (and surveys) must be designed carefully if they are to achieve sound results, it is advisable to look carefully

at your group's capacity before undertaking such projects without guidance. If no one on the planning team has extensive experience with surveys, college research departments or outside professionals should be consulted or even hired to do the job.

A few tips for surveys/focus groups include keeping the language on the survey simple to allow participation by people of all levels of literacy/language proficiency. Also, surveys should be translated into the language of non-English-speaking residents; focus groups for non-English-speaking residents will need a translator. Finally, allow sufficient lead time for each method to give the designers a quality sampling of the community.

### **TOWN MEETINGS**

Town meetings are large gatherings at which the stakeholders and planners can inform the public about the project and receive valuable feedback from community residents. Anyone may attend to listen, learn, and voice their opinions, interests, and concerns. An effective town meeting includes presentations by the planners, but most important it allows for public input. Individuals from all sectors of the community are encouraged to attend through carefully planned, highly proactive recruitment strategies. People tend not to come to meetings without a strong sense of their importance—especially the types of folks whose input is most critically needed. It is precisely the most marginalized community members who typically do not participate in such activities.

We recommend that at least three major town meetings be held during the planning phase of the visioning project. The first meeting should take place after the "current realities and trends" stakeholder session, just prior to the first visioning session. This meeting is intended to get the word out about the purpose and nature of the project and to solicit ideas from citizens on their visions for

the future. The second town meeting should come after the visioning sessions and prior to the KPA sessions. At this gathering, stakeholders present their consensus on the vision and receive community input on KPAs and ideas for "trend-bending" action strategies. The third meeting takes place after the stakeholders have reached a rough consensus on the action plan and implementation strategy but before they have finalized that work. The community has the opportunity to give suggestions and help fine-tune the strategies prior to final consensus.

A strong turnout by community members and interested parties is crucial for town meetings. The Outreach Committee can employ various strategies to ensure adequate participation representative of the many sectors of the population. To begin with, the stakeholders themselves can spread the word. In addition, the Outreach Committee can send press releases to print, radio and television media; mail flyers to key contacts or place them in conspicuous places; translate written materials for non-English-speaking populations; offer assistance with transportation and day care; and so forth.

Neighborhood meetings are a variation on the town meeting theme. Such gatherings can target specific parts of a community whose residents might not attend larger meetings in other parts of a city.

### **PRESS RELEASES**

Communities must enlist the aid of local experts in working with the media. Their knowledge of how to approach and follow up with news organizations can be crucial in effectively getting the word out about the community effort.

A first step in publicizing a town meeting, the kickoff, or any major part of the visioning process is to maintain regular contact with the

media. The most common tool in this effort is the press release, a very specific document announcing an event or major benchmark. Press releases will frequently need to be drafted and sent to pre-developed contacts at each print, radio, and television news organization in the region. This mailing should always be followed up by a phone call to answer any questions and to lobby for coverage of the news item in question.

The press release should be accurate and succinct. Media will cover events that are well supported (i.e., those with large attendance numbers, community leader participation, etc.). Press releases should be delivered to local, regional, and even statewide news organizations if appropriate. The papers who print the announcement will sometimes translate the text for specific non-English-speaking populations.

**FLYERS**

Flyers advertise upcoming events on single, brightly colored sheets of paper that give the group's name, date and time of the event, location, nature of the event, a contact phone number, and specifics regarding refreshments, transportation, and child care. Flyers may be posted in public places and/or handed out to individuals on busy street corners. Flyers that catch the eye, are positive, and evoke an atmosphere of importance and fun are most effective.

**SPEAKERS BUREAU**

Stakeholders can utilize their public speaking talents to spread specific messages to the community about the progress of the community visioning project. This is an effective way to receive input, share information, and promote visioning efforts in the community.

Within certain pockets of the population, such as communities of color, it may be best to have a face-to-face meeting with elders or

other community leaders to explain the program. Once they buy in, they may be able to inform their community and recruit new participants more effectively than "outsiders" could on their own. If these individuals do not have time to assist the Outreach Committee, ask for names of other people within the community who may be available.

It is important to train members of the speakers bureau together and provide them with good fact sheets and an overview of frequently asked questions so they will deliver a consistent message to the public. In addition, preparation will assist in effectively reaching the targeted population. Consider the following:

- **Accountability and follow-up plans should be addressed. The group needs to ask itself the following questions: "How can we ensure that people will show up for the meetings?" "How can we keep their attention once they are present?"**
- **A sign-in sheet for attendees should be used. The individual's name, address, and phone number may be valuable as the group attempts to recruit new members and to keep the community updated. Such information also supplements the record of the meeting itself.**
- **Finally, a contact person or persons should be designated so those who didn't give feedback at the town meeting may do so at a later date, if desired.**

**OP-ED ARTICLES**

Opposite-editorial articles ("op-ed" stands for "opposite editorial," as in "opposite the editorial page") are written by non-journalists, usually community leaders and citizens, and are printed periodically by newspapers. They offer insight into local happenings, express

grassroots perspectives and interests, and update ongoing community programs.

A newspaper's ultimate goal is to sell papers; for this reason, publishers want articles that are of high quality, are timely and in the public interest, and are positive in nature. They want to produce something the public will want to read.

To get an op-ed article published, begin with a query letter to the editor. This letter should be short and to the point, including such facts as what inspired the effort, who is involved, how the project arrived at its current stage, where it is headed, and how specific plans will be implemented. This correspondence needs to be well written—the editor will look upon the letter as a sample of the author's writing ability.

The language of the article itself should be positive, focusing on the action the group is taking. Write about specifics—the obstacles the project has overcome, how breakthroughs were achieved, changes in team members' thinking. Focus on what the project is about, what it has accomplished, and what it will accomplish in the future. The writing should be inspiring for readers and leave them wanting to be a part of the effort or, at the very least, highly supportive of and informed about its progress. Finally, the article must be concise and should not be more than 1,000 words long (the newspaper will probably shorten the text of the article anyway).

High-quality writing is critical to acceptance of the op-ed article. If the writing is good, the editor may ask for more articles to print in the future.

#### **PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Radio and television stations were once required by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to provide public service

announcements (PSAs). Many stations still do so as a community service. A PSA is a 30- or 60-second spot, provided free of charge, that informs the public about a cause, issue, program, service, or opinion.

When contacting a broadcast outlet, ask for the individual in charge of PSAs, ask what the station's preferred PSA format is, and follow it carefully. Many PSAs are not broadcast because they do not follow the station format.

When working with the media, always strive to minimize the amount of work they must do.

#### **WEB SITES/PROJECT HOME PAGES**

In the technology age, an effective way to get the information out to the community is through a project home page. Most projects have stakeholders or other professionals who will gladly donate their time to create a project home page. These home pages can provide “surfers” with background information and the work to date. In addition, the home page can provide users the opportunity to add their input through online surveys or feedback boxes on the website that the Outreach Committee or staff access and distribute to the proper committees.

#### **SPECIAL ACTIVITIES/EVENTS**

##### **THE VISION BOARD**

It can be very effective to place a draft of the vision statement or the KPA action plans on a large wall space or in some other highly visible public place. Volunteers who solicit input from passersby (best option) or unstaffed (with paper or postcards provided for individuals to write suggestions) can staff these. The library, a shopping mall, grocery stores, and community centers are examples of good locations. Feedback on the draft vision or plans can be processed and



integrated into the outreach report at the next stakeholder meeting.

process. Your initiative's success will depend on it.

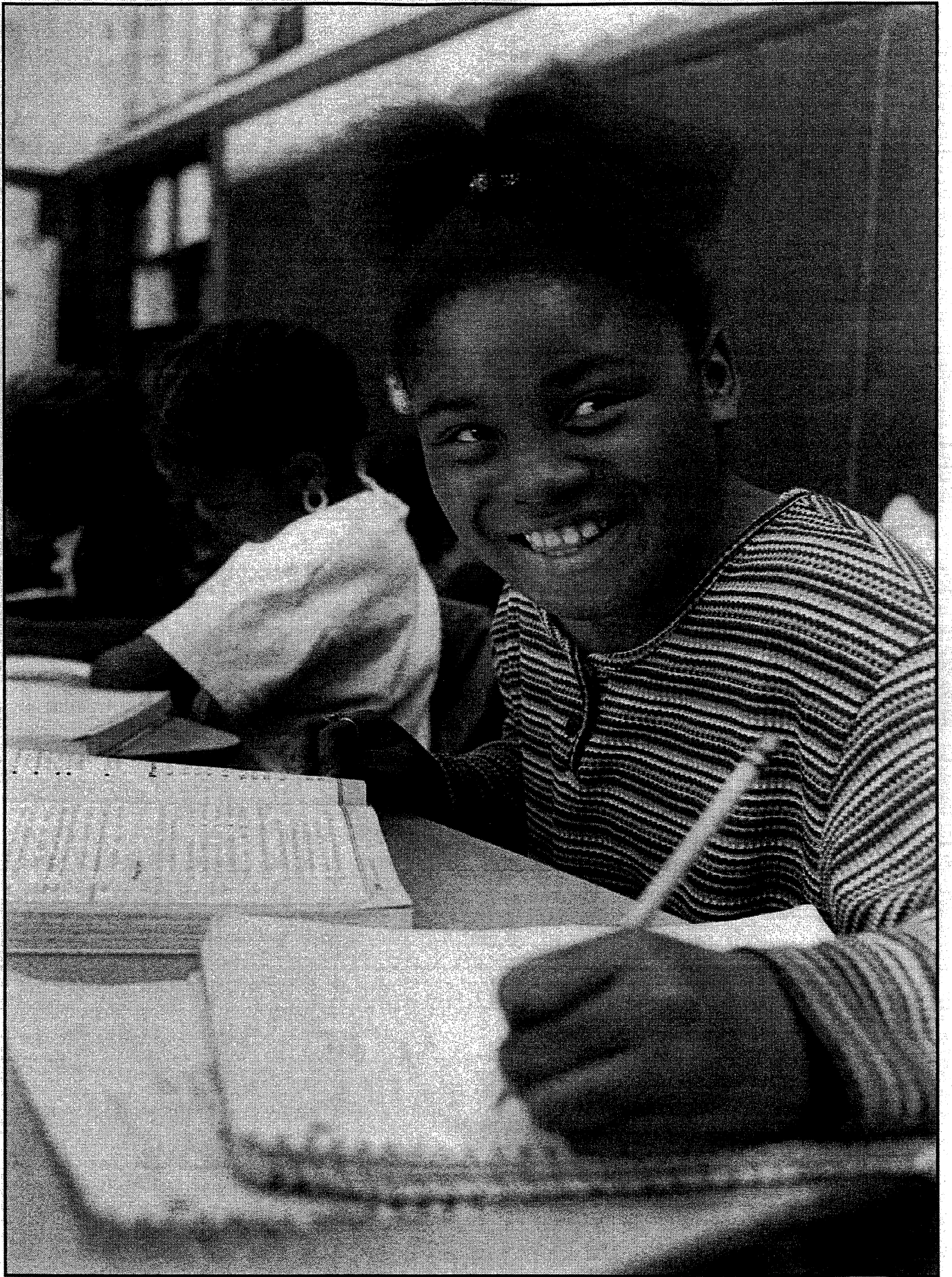
### THE FINAL REPORT

The report on the work of the community visioning process serves many of the same objectives as the celebration (i.e., acknowledging contributions to date, building momentum, and enrolling new implementers). At the same time, it is a flexible tool that can be used to inspire organizations and companies to embrace the community vision and frame parts of their own strategic planning around it. The report also serves to remind implementers and the community of their commitments and provides future efforts with something on which to build. The important thing is that it is used, not simply published, bound, and left to gather dust on the shelf.

### CONCLUSION

A primary contact on the Outreach Committee should be designated for each major task area. One press-oriented person should serve as the media contact. Another should be recruited to liaison with community residents who may have questions regarding any of the activities or strategies. Others should be made responsible for the town meetings and speakers bureau. In addition, the Outreach Committee should have strong contact with the Coordinating Committee, whose assistance it will need from time to time. It should be well organized and develop and use a plan of action to cover both regular and special needs.

Outreach is no different from any other community-based effort to the extent that one strategy alone is not enough to ensure success. A multiple—strategy approach is the only one that works consistently. A creative, highly prepared, hardworking Outreach Committee can attract positive attention and useful input to the community visioning



## DEFINING THE REALITIES OF THE COMMUNITY

Many communities begin their visioning project by determining the vision or desired future. Others look at where the community currently finds itself before identifying the desired future. Both approaches have produced quality results in visioning projects around the country. The Initiating Committee must determine which approach best fits the community.

#### UNDERSTANDING TRENDS, FORCES, AND PRESSURES

An Environmental Scan is a brief but important step in the community visioning process. It enables stakeholders to develop a shared understanding of the major events, trends, technologies, issues, and forces that affect their community and/or will do so in the future. National and global realities often have a significant impact on a community's ability to meet its challenges. It is not necessary for the group to reach true consensus on these observations, but all participants should recognize how their community relates to the world around it and how broader issues affect local choices.

The Research Committee presents its first piece of work during this phase by providing to the stakeholder group a preliminary list of key present and future trends. The factors might include:

- **the influence of population growth, age, and funding trends on the educational system**
- **the affect of in- or out-migration on housing quality and affordability**
- **new technologies, their costs, and the impact on jobs and the community's quality of life**
- **changes in funding and/or policies of national, state, and local government programs**
- **global trends regarding trade, the environment, and labor**

At an early Initiating Committee meeting, the Research Committee members with the assistance of IC, should generate a list of issues for a preliminary scan. However, this should only be considered a first step; the preliminary scan should spark further discussion of the influence of these factors on the community's current and future quality of life. The final Environmental Scan must reflect more than merely the "experts' view." Community knowledge and perceptions of these larger issues must be considered during the stakeholder process.

Following the presentation by the Research Committee, the stakeholders can discuss the issues in a large group format and then work in small groups to encourage greater participation. The small groups then report back to the larger group, discussing priority areas in greater detail. This step combines the findings of the Research Committee and community perceptions in general.

While some of the issues raised during the Environmental Scan are beyond local control, their influence must be addressed if the community is truly to move to a new level. The discussion of these regional, national, and global forces sets the stage for identification of *local* realities and trends.

#### LOOKING AT LOCAL REALITIES AND TRENDS

During the late 1980s, the state of North Dakota entered into a major evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of its economy through a series of public town hall meetings. The city of Fargo conducted an extensive assessment of the local development corporation and its previous management and leadership. As a result, the corporation's broad-based board of directors, representing labor, government, education, and business, redirected its goals and objectives based upon how Fargo compared to other major growth centers around the country.

Through this evaluation, it was quickly determined that the development agency was not focusing on "primary sector" job development. The directors realized they had to move their focus in this direction or Fargo would not realize its potential in the twenty-first century.

The evaluation generated a great deal of publicity and citizen involvement. The discussions were very candid and sometimes showed intense emotion; most important, they left no stone unturned.

The success of Fargo's primary-sector marketing strategy has already led the city to extend its growth initiative from 1997 out to the year 2000. This success gives meaning to daily problem solving, because everyone now accepts the fact that the small details add up to create the big picture. Fargo's successful internal analysis provides an excellent example of self-examination as part of an ongoing strategic plan. Successful community efforts must begin with agreement on how the community is doing today. As in the Fargo example, such an inquiry can begin with the question, "What are our greatest strengths and most significant weaknesses?"

### SCANNING THE COMMUNITY

The Community Scan consists of local indicators of how well the community is doing at a variety of levels. Developed from secondary data, the profile depicts assets (those areas/programs in which the community is doing well) and challenges (those areas in which the community is struggling). In many visioning projects, the Research Committee conducts a survey asking for residents' perceptions of their community's assets and challenges. These survey findings are combined with stakeholder perceptions to assist in identifying areas of focus during the action planning phase.

The Research Committee collects community indicators from secondary sources. For instance, crime statistics can be obtained from local sheriff and police departments. Real estate, business, and other economic indicators can be collected from the local chamber of commerce. Health-related figures (teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, immunization rates, etc.) can be collected through social service and health departments. Effective research presentations have compared the latest data with baseline data from a number of consecutive years to display annual changes and illustrate local trends.

The Community Scan combines the survey results, the research data, and stakeholder perceptions into a single, powerful tool that the stakeholders can use in their own discussions and decision making. The combination allows stakeholders to base their deliberations on both information and perceptions, a scenario that is both common and healthy in visioning processes. For instance, the community may perceive that violent crime has increased, but statistics may show that the opposite is true. Such occurrences build understanding of both the issues and the perspectives that exist within the community.

In addition, the data and discussions provide the stakeholders and the community with a "likely future"—that is, the probable outcome of current trends and pressures if the community does not intervene. Stakeholders can identify areas of strength and those needing improvement by breaking into small groups and asking the following questions:

- **What is the "likely future" of the community?**
- **Which elements of that direction are good or bad?**
- **Which aspects of it do we wish to maintain, and which should be altered?**

- **What are our most important opportunities and dangerous threats?**

Once the likely future has been evaluated, new scenarios may be considered under different starting assumptions.

### **SAMPLE INDICATORS OF A COMMUNITY**

In 1992, Jacksonville, Florida conducted a quality of life project to monitor annual progress within the community. These indicators included the following:

- **Public High-School Graduation Rate**
- **Affordability of Single-Family Home**
- **Cost of 1,000 KWH of Electricity**
- **Index Crimes per 100,000 population**
- **% reporting feeling safe walking alone in their neighborhood at night**
- **Compliance in Tributary Streams with water standards for dissolved oxygen**
- **Resident Infant Deaths per 1000 live births**
- **% reporting racism to be a local problem**
- **Public library book circulation per capita**
- **Students in free/reduced lunch program**
- **Tourism/bed-tax revenues**
- **Taxable real estate value**
- **Tons per capita of solid waste**
- **People reporting having no health insurance**
- **Employment discrimination complaints filed**
- **People accurately naming two city council members**
- **% register who vote**
- **Bookings of major city facilities**
- **Average public transit ridership per 1000 population**

Jacksonville set goals for each indicator and have mechanisms in place to measure progress for each year. Included with the indicators were community action steps for achieving the target goals. For more information on Jacksonville's Quality of Life

Project or specific indicators, contact Jacksonville Community Council Incorporated at (904) 396-3052.

### **CONCLUSION**

A key factor in strategic planning is good information based on data and research available throughout the community. Information will be interpreted in different ways, therefore it is important to have sessions where facts and perceptions can be studied, analyzed and discussed. Having a common perception about how the community is currently doing will assist in developing the desired future and identifying key areas in which to focus the action planning.

There are several ways in which the Community Scan can be developed with each way requiring a different investment of time and resources. Many of these decisions can be resolved in the Initiating Committee during the early phases of the project. Whatever approach is decided on, the desired outcome of this phase of the project is to leave the stakeholders and the participants with a shared understanding of:

- **the community strengths/assets**
- **the difficult challenges the community faces**
- **the realities the community faces that are both within and outside its control**
- **the community's likely future should no interventions take place**



## CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE: ASSESSING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

## CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE—WHAT IS IT?

Scholars and practitioners of urban and community affairs are beginning to sense that associations and traditions play an integral role in the health of the communities, whatever their size. The National Civic League refers to the formal and informal processes and networks through which communities make decisions and solve problems as "civic infrastructure."

Successful communities honor and nurture their civic infrastructures. They do not look primarily to Washington for money or program guidance. Rather, leaders in America's most vital communities recognize the interdependence of business, government, nonprofit organizations, and individual citizens. In particular, these communities recognize that solving problems and seizing opportunities is not the exclusive province of government. They carry on an ongoing struggle through formal and informal processes to identify common goals and meet individual and community needs and aspirations.

## FOUR EXAMPLES

- **What once was an impossible dream became reality, when citizens of Broomfield, Colorado embarked on a collaborative visioning process that led to Broomfield becoming its own city and county, the first change on the state map in over 92 years.**
- **In an effort to give citizens input in government decision making, the city of Fort Wayne developed Community-Oriented Government where citizens take issues to one of their 227 different neighborhood organizations and work directly with city staff.**

- **Santa Maria, California, divided by racial and cultural barriers, instituted in 1997 a first-ever Peace Week designed to help erase violence and prejudice and bring Santa Maria residents together.**
- **After the closing of a major airforce base in Denver, Colorado, the city created an unprecedented economic development partnership with the neighboring jurisdiction which was most affected by the closing.**

What accounts for the different experiences of these four communities in addressing problems? In each case, the strength or weakness of the civic infrastructure, the invisible structures and processes through which the social contract is written and rewritten in communities, determined success or failure.

Early in the 1990s, Lee's Summit, Missouri, found that its longtime reputation as a quiet rural town had been replaced with a new reputation as one of the fastest-growing communities in the state. The citizens of Lee's Summit realized that this intense growth could be a potential problem; solving a problem of such magnitude was not going to be easy and would require ideas and assistance from everyone. Thus was born Lee's Summit: 21st Century. Lee's Summit: 21st Century, a cross-sector, citizen-based task force, was created when the Board of Aldermen authorized a group of citizens from various social, economic, and political strata to come together to forge a blueprint for the next century.

A major goal of the process was to keep citizens informed and involved in the decision-making process on critical issues. The critical issues that were identified included quality of life, economic

development, and public services / government.

As a result of this increased civic infrastructure, Lee's Summit has seen critical success on the issue of public safety from the vision action plan. A city staff member recalled that the community demanded that such services receive greater emphasis. In this case, the citizens were involved in partnership with the city and made the decision to put the issue on the ballot—a \$15 million tax increase to pay for increased public safety measures. Contrary to the nationwide trend, Lee's Summit voted for increased taxes to pay for a new police station and fire station and to expand personnel in both departments. The city council and the city staff feel the bond might never have gone to the ballot in the past because of citizens' lack of understanding and involvement.

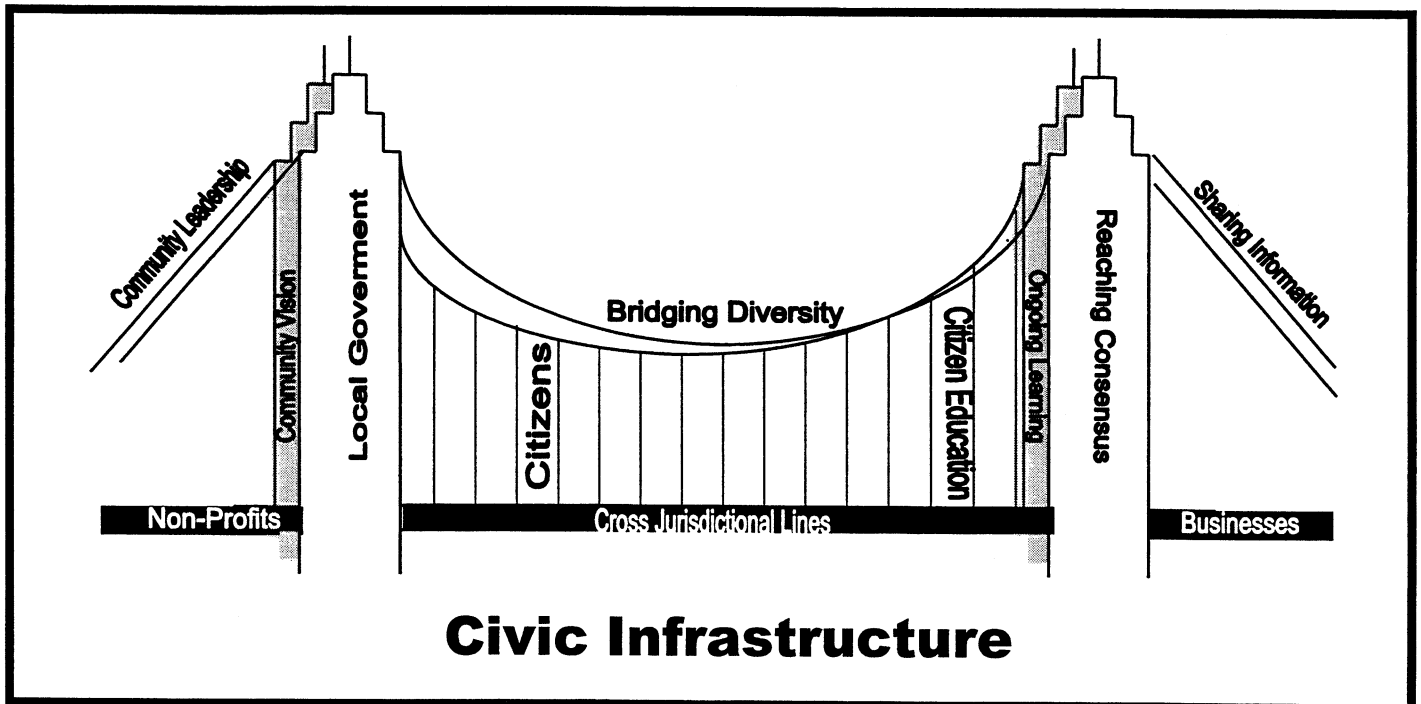
Lee's Summit council and staff support collaborative efforts 100 percent, showing great enthusiasm for what can be achieved if the proper measures are taken. One staff member explains, "When projects are citizen-based and citizen-driven, the process is

stronger because the citizens back and support the projects to a great extent." Lee's Summit is one of many examples of what a strong civic infrastructure can bring to a community.

**THE CIVIC INDEX**

The National Civic League developed the Civic Index to help communities evaluate and improve their civic infrastructure. The 12 components of the Civic Index measure the skills and processes that a community must possess to deal with its unique concerns. Whether the specific issue is a struggling school system, an air pollution problem, or a lack of adequate low-income housing, the need for effective problem-solving and leadership skills is the same.

A community must have strong leaders from all sectors who can work together with informed, involved citizens to reach consensus on strategic issues that face the community and the region around it. Committed individuals give communities the capacity to solve the problems they face. Communities must resolve to increase their capacity to address problems. Outside



consultants can make recommendations, but action is unlikely without local ownership of a strategy and an implementation plan. The Civic Index provides a framework with which communities can increase their problem-solving capacity. It provides a method and a process for first identifying strengths and weaknesses and then structuring collaborative solutions to problems. It offers an environment within which communities can undertake a self-evaluation of their civic infrastructure. Creating civic infrastructure is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a community's first step toward building its capacity to deal with critical issues.

### **INCORPORATING THE CIVIC INDEX INTO YOUR VISIONING PROJECT**

Some communities have used the Civic Index as a "stand-alone" project to enhance the community's civic infrastructure. Others have incorporated it into their visioning process. The steps taken to build the community's problem-solving capacity can easily be integrated into the action plans developed during the visioning process, particularly in areas where networks and communication mechanisms are identified as need areas from the Civic Index. These must be in place before longer-term action steps can be implemented.

The Civic Index's results are greatly enhanced when a large, diverse group such as the stakeholder group uses the Civic Index. Perceptions of the 12 components will vary among group members, and the discussion provides a great opportunity to build understanding and trust—the key ingredients of civic infrastructure.

Discussion of the components takes place both in small groups (to ensure participation) and in large groups (to enhance the small group findings). Once the 12 component areas have been assessed collectively, it is

important to focus on each component individually. Stakeholders then develop benchmarks that indicate progress toward the desired level. The benchmarks, with steps to reach them, are incorporated into the action plan during a later phase.

### **CIVIC INDEX COMPONENTS**

Stakeholders assess the community's current performance in each of the 12 areas listed below and consider how that performance affects the profile of the community. The proposed methods to enhance the community's civic infrastructure will be integrated into the action plans later in the process.

### **WHAT IS OUR DESIRED FUTURE?**

Communities that deal successfully with the challenges they face have a clear sense of their past and also have developed a shared picture of where they want to go.

- **Is there a shared sense among residents of what they want the community to become?**
- **Has the community completed a strategic plan to implement a community-wide vision?**
- **If a community vision exists, how is the vision being used?**
- **What are some examples of the community's positive self-image?**
- **What makes the community special and unique from other locales?**

### **HOW ARE WE FULFILLING OUR ROLES IN COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE?**

In successful communities today government is no longer the sole owner of the public agenda. Instead, citizens, businesses, non-profit organizations and government jointly hold the public interest.



**NEW ROLES FOR CITIZENS**

The role for today's and tomorrow's citizens means individuals must be willing to take responsibility for their community by stepping forward to share the burden of difficult decision-making and challenging problem-solving.

- What are some good examples of citizen participation in your community?
- What is the current nature of citizen participation? Is it confrontational or collaborative?
- Are there strong neighborhood and civic organizations? How so?
- Are citizens actively involved in major community projects? Why or why not?
- What opportunities exist for participation in community decision-making? Are these opportunities the same for all people? If not, why not?
- Do citizens volunteer to serve on local boards and commissions? If so, do these citizens represent the diversity of the community? Why or why not?
- Is it difficult to find people to run for public office? Why or why not?

**NEW ROLES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

One of the most powerful roles emerging for local government is that of the convener. By bringing together different sectors of a community for collaborative decision-making and joint action, local government creates a greater sense of legitimacy and ownership for the solutions developed.

- Does the government and community share a common vision?
- How often does the government share community problem solving with private and non-profit organizations?
- Does the government share decision-making with the average citizen?

- Does the government listen to the community?
- Does the government provide services equitably to all people in the community?

**NEW ROLES FOR NON-PROFITS**

Today's role for non-profits continues to be one of service deliverer and change agent, but cutbacks in funding are compelling non-profits to partner with each other, local government and the private sector in order to meet increasing demand.

- What are the issues in your community that require collaboration among non-profits? What collaborative efforts exist among non-profits on these issues?
- How do non-profits collaborate when resources are at stake?
- How do non-profits collaborate with government, citizens and businesses?
- Are non-profits including their clientele in decision-making?
- How do non-profits know they're effective in the community?

**NEW ROLES FOR BUSINESSES**

The role of the private sector in a community's civic infrastructure is fundamental, yet often overlooked. Businesses must be willing to create cross-sector partnerships with government, non-profits and the community.

- How does the chamber participate in the community? What other things might the Chamber do?
- To what extent do businesses play a philanthropic role in the community?
- To what extent do businesses work with local non-profits and schools?
- To what extent is corporate leadership a part of broad community improvement efforts? What about small business leaders?

- **How well do businesses collaborate with government and non-profits?**
- **Do businesses regularly encourage volunteerism among their employees?**
- **How do large and small businesses participate in and involve the community in different ways? How can this improve?**

**HOW DO WE WORK TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY?**

Successful communities understand that: 1) they are and will become increasingly diverse; 2) citizens demand a role in the decisions that affect their lives; 3) information is readily available through a variety of means; and 4) complex issues regularly cross regional boundaries.

**BRIDGING DIVERSITY**

Positive inter-group relations happens when groups of people (identified by race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, income level, interest, etc.) are able to acknowledge differences while still being able to work toward common goals.

- **What types of diversity exist within the community?**
- **How does the community view diversity? With distress, tolerance, or does it embrace diversity? On what do you base your assessment?**
- **How does the community promote communication among diverse populations?**
- **Do diverse groups cooperate in resolving conflicts before they escalate into major problems?**
- **How are all diverse groups involved and included into community-wide problem solving?**
- **Are non-U.S. citizens involved in community activities?**
- **Do schools have programs that deal with increasing community diversity?**

- **How does the community respond to discrimination, racism and racist acts?**

**REACHING CONSENSUS**

NCL defines consensus as being able to live with a decision to the point of supporting, and not blocking, its implementation. The process of consensus building across viewpoints and interests is a skill that sets successful communities apart from those that struggle.

- **Are approaches to problem solving proactive or reactive? How so?**
- **Are there leaders in the community who are willing to set aside their own interests to help build consensus?**
- **Do citizens, government, non-profits and businesses work together to set common goals?**
- **Do leaders convene citizens to neutral forums where all opinions can be shared?**
- **Are there neutral forums and processes here all opinions are heard?**

**SHARING INFORMATION**

Shared information and a “safe space” for dialogue greatly enhance a community’s ability to work toward cooperation and consensus, make balanced judgements, and head off disputes.

- **How informed is the community of the plans and goals of its governing body?**
- **Where does the community get information about public issues? Do schools, libraries and the government all provide public information?**
- **Do community leaders have regular opportunities to share ideas?**
- **Does the media play an active and supportive role in the community?**
- **Does the way the media frames the issues make it easier or more difficult for communities to solve its problems?**

- **Are issues in the media framed around conflicts or solutions? Are all sides presented?**
- **Do citizens have the information they need to make good decisions?**
- **Do all community members have access to current information technology?**

**HOW DO WE CROSS JURISDICTIONAL LINES?**

Issues such as economic development, transportation, growth management, environmental protection and recreation move beyond the boundaries of singular jurisdictions. Thus successful jurisdictions are working with neighboring municipalities in order to be effective in today's world.

- **What issues should be addressed regionally? What collaborative efforts exist among communities in the region on these issues?**
- **How do local governments work together on regional issues?**
- **To what extent do institutions across the region collaborate with one another?**
- **Are services provided regionally?**
- **Is there a regional governance structure in place?**

**HOW ARE WE STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITY'S ABILITY TO SOLVE PROBLEMS?**

All communities face the challenge of building and sustaining efforts. Key to building capacity is developing skills in individuals throughout the entire community, continually building networks by linking and convening people and organizations, and nurturing those relationships on an ongoing basis.

**EDUCATING CITIZENS**

Strong citizen education must teach residents both what they can do to make a

difference and how to apply their learning through actual participation in the community.

- **Are there cradle to grave opportunities to learn about citizenship?**
- **Are there opportunities for all community members to learn about citizenship?**
- **Do a wide variety of organizations and institutions provide citizen education opportunities?**
- **Do citizen education programs develop the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in community governance?**
- **How are traditional power leaders supporting citizen education?**

**BUILDING LEADERSHIP**

Today's complex times reveal that in order for communities to work more effectively, quality leadership must come from all parts of the community. These leaders must reflect the diversity of the community, as well as possess the skill of convening different interests to share in decision-making.

- **What qualities do you want your community leaders to have? What kind do you currently have?**
- **Are there leadership development opportunities for both formal (elected officials) and informal neighborhood leaders?**
- **Are current community leaders willing to adapt and modify the way they lead as times change?**
- **What kinds of leadership exist? Collaborative? Confrontational?**

**ONGOING LEARNING**

Many communities conducting initiatives experience varying degrees of success. Participants in more successful efforts have taken the time to learn from past experiences

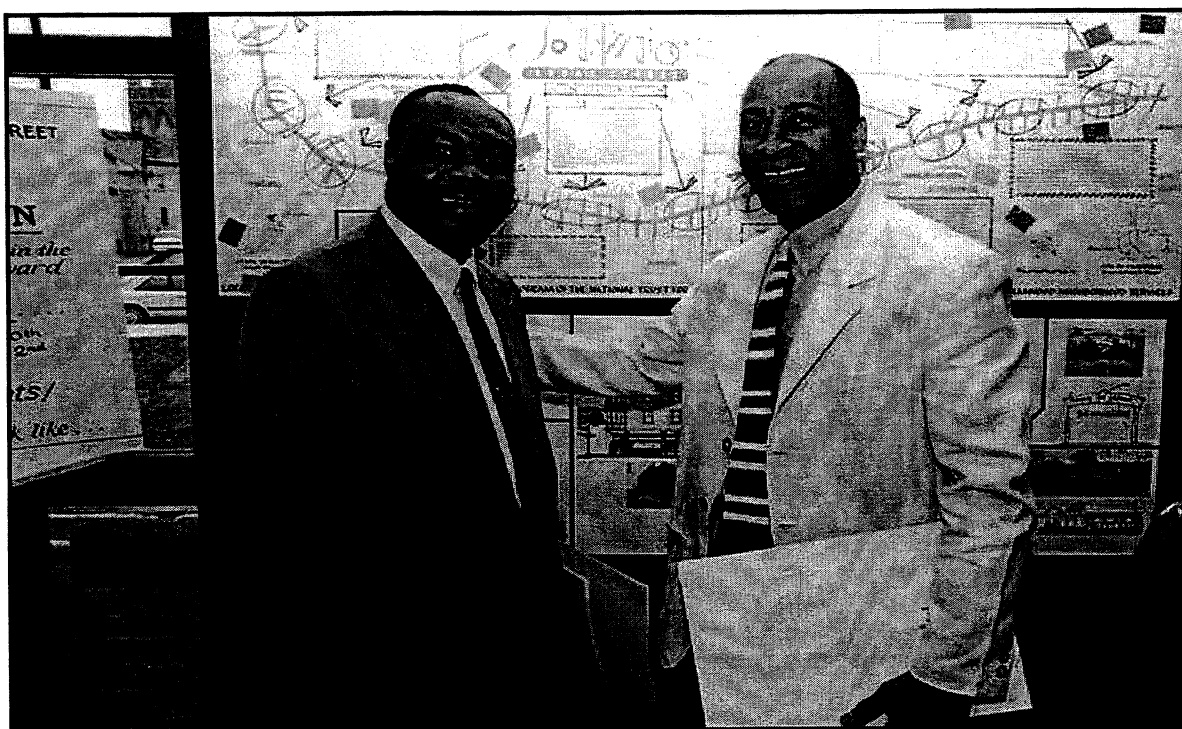
and have incorporated that learning into subsequent efforts.

- How is the learning generated from community projects and processes used to enhance future efforts?
- When conflict is managed or overcome successfully, how is that learning documented and incorporated into other settings?
- How can the community incorporate the learning of successful efforts into current and future efforts?
- Whether community efforts succeed or not, do participants ask what they learned to help them with the next stage of work?
- Are neighborhood and community histories documented?
- Does the community see its work as an ongoing endeavor or as “one-shot” effort?

### CONCLUSION

Communities need to look at all 12 components of the Civic Index. Focusing on only one or two will not improve a community's problem-solving capacity because of the complexity and how each of the components interrelated. Moreover, the activities implied by each component are different from the traditional ways of thinking and conducting business. For instance, encouraging citizen participation does not mean holding public hearings after the substantive plans already have been adopted. For citizen participation to be effective, it must be much more aggressive, inclusive, and ongoing.

For communities to fundamentally change the way they deal with the challenges they face, stakeholders must engage in new conversations. A comprehensive look at civic infrastructure is a fine point of embarkation—both for that conversation and for a reframing of the social contract.



### A VISION IS A "STRETCH"

In spring 1961, President John F. Kennedy, seeking increased funding for space exploration, described a most ambitious vision: to land a man on the moon before the end of the decade and return him safely to Earth. At the time, the United States only launched an astronaut into "sub-orbital" space, let alone going to the moon. The vision, in the midst of the space race, was inspiring and motivating. The country vowed to move ahead on the vision and the ambitious timeline. Achieving the vision had its costs. In 1967, three Apollo 1 astronauts perished during a launch practice session because, some say, the timeline was too demanding. Staff within the space program learned from the tragedy, changed their approach and continued working toward Kennedy's goal. On July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin walked on the moon and returned safely to Earth with fellow astronaut Michael Collins. Kennedy's clear vision with specific outcomes, the timing of the space race, the program's ability to bounce back from loss, the enthusiastic commitment of the masses, and a number of other variables produced a technological achievement for the ages.

On a summer day in 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed the masses at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. His "I Have A Dream" speech stirs as many souls today as it did on that memorable afternoon. Communities continue to struggle toward the future he described for all of the country's children and people.

Each of these cases is an excellent example of a vision. Exciting and inspirational, yet far enough of a "stretch" that people are left

wondering how it can be reached. They inspire people to help make it happen despite the incredible challenge and uncertain prospects for success.

### PICTURE A FUTURE YOU DESIRE

A community vision is an expression of possibility, an ideal future state that the community hopes to attain. The entire community must share such a vision so that it is truly owned in the inclusive sense.

The vision provides the basis from which the community determines priorities and establishes targets for performance. It sets the stage for what is desired in the broadest sense, where the community wants to go as a whole. It serves as a foundation underlying goals, plans, and policies that can direct future action by the various sectors. Only after a clear vision is established is it feasible to effectively begin the difficult work of outlining and developing a clear plan of action. A vision can be communicated through a statement, a series of descriptions, or even a graphic depiction of how the community would look in the target year. Communities have used a number of methods and media to create and express their visions, their desired futures.

### INGREDIENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY VISION

The following ingredients are crucial to generating an exciting community vision:

#### A HEFTY DOSE OF POSITIVE THINKING

In developing a community vision, it is important not to be constrained by either political or economic realities. This is

challenging for many people who think negatively to focus their energy on how things *can* rather than why things *can't*, happen. People who've been through successful visioning projects have challenged themselves to move beyond the constraints and to dream about what their ideal community would be like. In developing the action plans, they focus their thinking on what must happen to ensure that the vision becomes a reality. It is always better to aim too high than too low.

The positive thinking will be reflected in the vision statement itself. The statement should be entirely in positive terms and in the present tense—as if it were a current statement of fact. The vision and its components should be stated in clear, easily understood language that anyone in the community can understand.

The vision statement must be reached by consensus and encourage the commitment of diverse community members. It is the vision that will drive the entire planning process—every action plan will be designed such that, when implemented, it will help bring about the desired future.

### **STRONG VISUAL DESCRIPTIONS**

In the visioning process itself, stakeholders can literally ask and answer such questions as:

- **What words do you want your grandchildren to use to describe the health of the community?**
- **If the very best quality of life existed in the community, what would be happening?**
- **What common values exist across all perspectives and interests within the community and how do they manifest themselves?**

- **How are people interacting with one another in this desired future? How are decisions being made?**
- **What is unique to our community that no other community has and what does it look like 20 years from now?**

### **A LONG TIME FRAME**

The stakeholders select the time frame of the vision project. It is probably more useful to set a vision for a point at least 10 years in the future. Though we would like to be able to achieve a desired future in the short term, the reality is that many changes will take a great deal of time to bring about. An effective vision typically addresses a period stretching 15 to 25 years into the future.

### **EXAMPLE**

In 1999, Winter Haven, Florida, went through a visioning process called Our Future By Design: A Greater Winter Haven Community. After much deliberation, debate, and hard work, the stakeholders came to consensus on the following vision statement:

*Winter Haven is a community of beauty, quality, and harmony. We embrace our cultural, ethnic, racial and religious diversity. We nurture and promote healthy families. Our citizens participate and cooperate for the greater good of the community. We encourage a friendly, small-town spirit while nurturing the evolution of our community.*

*We live in a community with a unique lake-centered environment that is continually enhanced and preserved in a manner that ensures healthy ecosystems. Our citizens use and*

*appreciate our water resources responsibly.*

*We have nationally recognized schools, libraries and institutions of higher learning setting the pace as models of innovation. These facilities feature the resources and technology to give everyone in our community the knowledge, the skills, and the character to thrive.*

*We have an exceptional, accessible health-care system that promotes the public health and well being of all citizens. There are a rich variety of social, cultural, and recreational activities for citizens of all ages. We promote a crime-free and drug-free environment.*

*We have a thriving, sustainable, diverse economic engine, the nucleus of which is a vibrant, historic downtown. Our local businesses promote economic opportunity for all citizens and attract people from around the country to our distinctive lake-centered environment. We have an infrastructure that capitalizes on our strategic geographic location and encourages visitors to our community. We enjoy convenient access to areas around Winter Haven as well as to other major cities, attractions, and cultural opportunities. The community's government entities and public officials foster a spirit of high cooperation; each understands stewardship of the public trust requires consideration and actions*

*that transcend traditional political boundaries.*

*Winter Haven is the pride of its citizens and the envy of visitors. It is a community that many of our children plan to make their home.*

This vision statement has all of the important ingredients necessary for a quality statement. These ingredients include:

- **Positive, present tense language;**
- **Qualities that provide the reader with a feeling for the region's uniqueness;**
- **Inclusiveness of the region's diverse population;**
- **A depiction of the highest standards of excellence and achievement;**
- **A focus on people and quality of life;**
- **Addresses a time period 15 to 20 years in the future;**
- **Language that is easily understood by all.**

Like most communities, developing this vision statement was a challenging exercise for Winter Haven. Over 120 stakeholders of diverse perspectives and backgrounds, participated in the development and editing of the statement. The consensus reached on the statement provided the stakeholders with an exciting vision which drove the remainder of the planning process.

#### **HOW TO CREATE A COMMUNITY VISION**

There are many ways to conduct a visioning process. The following model can assist the stakeholder group in developing an effective community vision. The facilitator and Initiating Committee will develop the specific visioning process that best enables your community to meet its needs and desires.

Judging from successful visioning projects, it is most effective to start the process in a large group format, with all stakeholders informally brainstorming about what they feel should be included in the community vision. All participants' remarks should be captured on a flip chart and saved as a "group memory"; such a record can be useful in all phases of the visioning process. The brainstorming brings ideas to the table and accustoms the stakeholders to the process and methods of generating a vision statement.

After the group is warmed up through the brainstorming exercise and the ideas are flowing, the stakeholders should break into small working groups of 7 to 10 people. In the small groups, members typically discuss ideas and write them down. Some communities have found that group illustrations are more expressive and creative and can be exceptionally effective in inspiring specific statements.

After developing their ideas, the small groups can present their vision themes to the larger group. Later, during the statement drafting sessions, the various small groups' ideas can be integrated and assembled into a workable statement.

It can also be effective to have the small groups pair and merge, doubling their size. For instance, if there are eight original groups, they can merge into four, and later into two, etc., reaching consensus on their ideas as they go.

#### **DEVELOPING THE VISION STATEMENT**

The process of refining the vision statement and its component points can be lengthy and arduous. There is no shortcut to working through the process as a group. Though

groups often get caught up in "wordsmithing" the statement, it is more important to get agreement on the themes of the vision. The stakeholders may have to be reminded that the vision is the "end state," the final result. They will determine the specifics of how the vision will be reached later in the process, during the action planning phase.

The time required to generate a clear vision statement that expresses explicit themes can vary widely from one community to the next. It is unlikely that a broad group of citizens would complete the process in fewer than 8 hours of working time, but they should not require more than 15. One effective format is a weekend visioning retreat. Typically, however, stakeholders work on vision statements over two nonconsecutive evenings.

Through the visioning process, people draw heavily on the values that are important to them. The process translates these individual and collective values into a set of important issues that the community wants to address. With a clear vision statement articulated and the component points serving as a beacon for the future, the stakeholders can shift to determining their priorities.

#### **SELECTING AND EVALUATING KEY PERFORMANCE AREAS**

By this point in the process, the stakeholders will have discussed and reached consensus on where their community is today, where it is likely heading, and where they would like it to go. The next step in this results-oriented process is to decide how the community can get from where it is today to where stakeholders want it to be in the future. This step involves the selection and development of Key Performance Areas (KPA's).



KPAs are highly leveraged priority areas for which specific actions will be developed to redirect the future of the community. Implementation of the strategies developed for the KPAs will bend the trend from the likely future (as determined by the community profile) toward the desired future (as articulated by the stakeholder group).

Successful community visioning projects have prioritized their visions into four or five KPAs. They reasoned that only some issues are of high-level priority; moreover, not everything can be done at once. Choices must be made. Secondary priorities can be tackled later. The KPAs can be broken down in a variety of different ways—by sector (e.g., business), by issue area (e.g., homelessness), or by project (e.g., community center).

#### AN OKLAHOMA EXAMPLE

Central Oklahoma 2020 sought to achieve regional progress by having all communities, neighborhoods, and individuals come together to take responsibility for their collective future. A group of 90 citizens agreed to serve as stakeholders, and together they created a vision. These individuals understood that while a vision helps establish a picture of the ideal future, to be effective it must be joined with a clear understanding of current realities.

While keeping their vision and such trends as poverty, dropout rates, and the decline of middle class in mind, Central Oklahoma 2020 participants identified five key performance areas: economic development and jobs; education; environment and infrastructure; family; and regional governance. Then the participants became more specific, outlining 12 action areas to improve the quality of life for the people in their region.

## THE KEY PERFORMANCE AREA PROCESS

### FORMING TASK FORCES

Successful visioning projects have formed task forces, either by assigning interested stakeholders or by choosing members at random from the stakeholder group. Either way, additional expertise and perspectives are usually added to help balance the group and develop comprehensive plans. Task forces vary in size from as few as 15 people to as many as 50. Each KPA task force should:

- **assign a convener who is responsible for convening the sessions, keeping the group on task and focused, and reporting the updates back to the large stakeholder group**
- **assign a facilitator to run the meetings (s/he may or may not be the convener) and a recorder to keep minutes and write up the work in a presentable format**
- **plan a number of meeting sessions (how many depends on the timeline) around the large stakeholder meetings**

For each Key Performance Area, the task force and the stakeholder group as a whole will complete the following tasks.

### RECRUITING OUTSIDE EXPERTISE

One of the task force's first assignments is to look at the group's composition and ask, "What interests and expertise are missing from our group?" The task force members should generate a list of people who can fill in the gaps and recruit those individuals to participate. Just as balance was important in filling out the large stakeholder group, the same consideration must be given to the smaller task force groups. Although presentations to the larger stakeholder group

will often "safeguard" any domination within the task forces by individuals with special interests, developing the plan with diverse perspectives always enhances the plan's credibility and likelihood of implementation.

#### **EVALUATING THE COMMUNITY'S CURRENT PERFORMANCE WITHIN THE KPA**

Task forces will assess the community's current performance in each priority area using the work of the Research Committee, surveys, and past discussions in the stakeholder group. This is also the time to integrate the findings of the Civic Index, if utilized in the visioning process. Much of the work from this stage will provide the rationale for proposals to address this key area. It will also help members identify what benefits they want to result from implementation of the action plans. These benefits should be developed into a "mini-vision" that will drive the action planning in this specific KPA.

#### **DEVELOPING GOALS**

Task forces will develop specific goals to reach the desired future for each KPA. There may be numerous goals and objectives within a specific KPA. For instance, for a KPA of economic development, the goals may be:

- **starting an incubation program for small business development**
- **attracting new corporations to headquarter in the community**
- **retaining and enhancing current businesses based in the community**
- **building and retaining the skills of the labor force in the community through mentorships and scholarships**

It will be up to the task force to prioritize the goals and make recommendations on which ones should receive the greatest emphasis.

#### **SPECIFYING "WHO WILL DO WHAT BY WHEN AND HOW"**

Task forces must delineate specific action steps, identifying what resources will be required, where they will come from, what the time frame for action is, and who will be responsible for ensuring that implementation occurs. It is during this step that the specific benchmarks and actions of the Civic Index will be integrated into the appropriate KPAs to build community capacity.

By now the vision has been translated into practical and attainable outcomes to be achieved through specific tasks and actions. This step crystallizes the vision into a tangible program.

#### **REPORTING BACK TO THE STAKEHOLDER GROUP AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK**

As the KPA task forces proceed through the plan development, they will periodically meet with the larger stakeholder group to share their findings and coordinate overlapping efforts as appropriate. When reporting back to the large group, each task force should hand out written summaries of the work done to date, with highlights transferred to overhead transparencies for viewing by the group. The task forces should incorporate feedback from the stakeholder group into their planning to ensure agreement on the direction being taken.

Although many of the action plans developed will require financial and other resources, sometimes in significant amounts,

communities can take certain actions to increase cooperation or shift to approaches that require little or no financial resource outlay.

## **CONCLUSION**

As the whole stakeholder group reaches consensus on the work of each KPA task force, the high-priority projects must be identified and a rough consensus reached on their inclusion into the final action plan. If successful to this point, the stakeholders will have reached a general agreement on the individual goals, objectives, action plans, implementers, resource needs, and time frames identified by the task forces.



Once the Key Performance Area evaluations have been completed, it is necessary to integrate all of the goals and recommendations into a final action agenda with a formalized implementation strategy. Certain goals and action steps will be complementary and will need to be combined in some way to create a coherent overall strategy. The stakeholder group should publish a report on its community visioning process and final action plan, but it is essential that the work not stop here. Too many visioning projects end with a report that eventually gathers dust on the shelf. The community visioning process is designed to produce action and results. Reports do not, in and of themselves, assure any action.

### **BUILDING A FINAL CONSENSUS**

Consensus on the final action plan is the final—and occasionally most difficult—phase of the community visioning process, the phase in which previous agreements are tested and a final community consensus is reached. The stakeholders meet in large and small groups to confirm the soundness of their goals and plans and the projected results of their implementation strategies. Some action plans may require initiation of new projects. Others may involve support for existing efforts. Some may entail the termination of an existing activity.

Because the actions will be varied in nature, it is essential that the entire community and its diverse sectors are behind them. Some action plans may embrace policy initiatives or changes; some may involve significant financial investment; and others might simply pose new approaches to current practices. All

may involve the development of new cross-sectoral partnerships.

As the visioning action plans and implementation strategy are finalized, the stakeholders must specify who will take responsibility for what. Some issues will clearly fall within the purview of a specific government agency or nonprofit service provider. Other action steps might not immediately suggest a "champion," and the group will have to engage some entity to take the lead. Though an accountable organization or group of organizations may not initially be found for every action step, this is an essential part of the process that cannot be left incomplete. It may be necessary to assign a group of entities to locate a champion for a specific action area. The general rule is — there will be no action without an implementer.

As the formal planning steps of the process draw to a close, stewardship of implementation becomes the responsibility of the stakeholder group and the community as a whole. If the process has been effective at developing a sense of ownership and true consensus, it will be possible to hold the whole community and all its citizens and organizations accountable to their commitments. This point highlights the importance of the community outreach process (described in detail in Chapter 7) and the two-way flow of information throughout the project. The investment of time and resources made earlier to ensure full community representation and participation comes to fruition here.

### TRUE CONSENSUS AND ROUGH CONSENSUS

At the end of this phase, the stakeholders should have reached consensus on the content of each KPA. Sometimes a full consensus cannot be reached. If a large number of stakeholders cannot live with the plan, then the group must take the time to discuss the reasoning of the disagreeing viewpoint and look at ways to fine-tune the approach so all participants can live with the final plan. If one or two people continue to dissent after all discussion and alternatives have been addressed, it is important to move ahead, while making sure the differing viewpoint is noted and placed in the final report.

### THE COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

Celebration is an essential part of a community-based visioning project. There should be a celebration to acknowledge the commitment of individuals involved in the planning phase of the initiative and the results they achieved. Such an event brings citizens together around shared values and aspirations and nurtures the seeds of change in building a better community.

The city of Lindsay, California, held a celebration that residents are sure to remember for years to come. At the conclusion of its long-term visioning process, the community held a grand festival at the city park and community center, attracting approximately 1,500 people. Featured events included a games arcade for kids; live entertainment on the main stage led by Mariachi Infantil Alma de Mexico; a winding parade through the park; a canine fashion show; a decorated bicycle contest; a "kiss-the-pig" contest in which nearly two dozen of the city's leading citizens gave Blossom, a pot-

bellied pig, a big smack on the lips; drawings for a television and a blimp ride for two; and a food booth serving burritos, corn on the cob, strawberry shortcake, and watermelon. The celebration was a great success, allowing the citizens of Lindsay to take pride in their accomplishments and enjoy the fruits of their labor.

The celebration should acknowledge the planning work of the stakeholders and various contributors, announce the action plan, and—most important—be seen as the commencement of the implementation phase of the project.

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLANS

In the community visioning effort, we recommend a minimum of two years following completion of the planning process for intensive focus on project implementation. For many communities, this will be a multi-decade effort.

### SHIFTING FROM PLANNING TO IMPLEMENTATION

Successful implementation processes have the following ingredients:

- **The establishment of implementation structure such as a committee with staff that oversees and ensures that a variety of areas (that follow this bullet) are addressed**
- **Clarity of goals/desired result across the implementation committee and implementers**
- **Criteria (established by the stakeholders or Implementation Committee) that will be used to prioritize projects**

- **Prioritized projects based on the applied criteria**
- **Implementers/champions for each project**
- **Identification of barriers to implementation and steps to overcome them**
- **An overall timeline based on the prioritized goals, barriers, and resources**
- **Coordination of all efforts being implemented from the action plan**
- **Ongoing community outreach of successes and ideas**

Community and outside resources will be needed to implement the action plan. The Initiating Committee should have laid the groundwork for this resource-development process, but more work will likely remain. The implementers named in the action plan will need to champion these efforts. Resource development will be most effective if it begins immediately, capitalizing on the momentum from the publishing of the report and the community celebration.

### **CHOOSING OR ESTABLISHING AN IMPLEMENTATION ENTITY**

Implementation efforts should follow the plans created during the planning process. Lead implementers must confirm the commitments already agreed upon and begin their work, drawing on the momentum created by the celebration and publication of the final report to facilitate rapid progress.

From the kickoff until this point, the Coordinating Committee has provided process management for the community effort. Some of its members will be ready to leave the committee, and others will be ready

to serve in a more active manner. This process should leave current participants with a strong sense of accomplishment and invite the participation of others. The Coordinating Committee may retain its original form and become an Implementation Committee, or it may choose to change its structure as well as its membership.

Typically, retaining the cross-sector, broad-based citizen form is the most successful approach, as it avoids controversy and keeps the focus on community-wide participation. Some communities choose to create a separate nonprofit organization to serve the ongoing effort. The Coordinating Committee might also be embraced by an existing entity deemed neutral and inclusive, although this can be risky if the organization attempts to hoard the effort or takes actions that dampen community-wide ownership in implementation.

### **MONITORING AND TRACKING**

There are three primary areas where active, ongoing monitoring and tracking are required:

- **ensuring follow-through on the implementation of action plans and policy recommendations**
- **providing ongoing support for implementers**
- **measuring changes in the community quality-of-life indicators developed earlier, in the Community Scan effort**

During the first two years, the Implementation Committee or other implementation entity should consider providing updates at least quarterly to the community on project and policy actions. In

subsequent years such updates can be made annually.

### **CONCLUSION**

In closing, it should be stated that the community visioning and implementation process described in this handbook is an overview of a model. This model has been successfully used and tested in different forms in many communities around the nation in recent years. Each community should work closely with experienced facilitators to adapt the model presented here. Use it as a guide to the design of its local process; customize it to match specific needs, priority areas, and available resources.



## RENEWING YOUR COMMUNITY

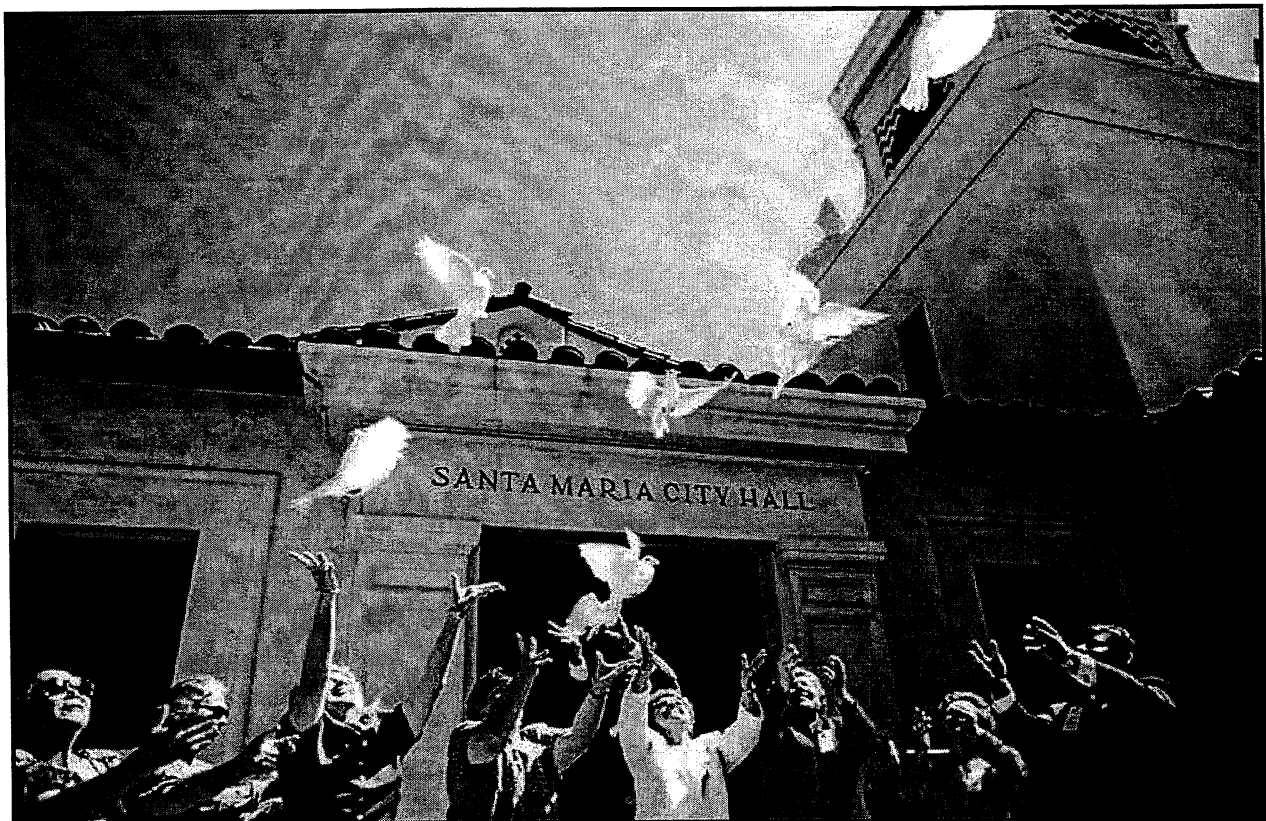
*By John W. Gardner*

The urban riots of the late 1960s were among the worst in U.S. history. However, they produced, among other things, a balanced concern for the problems afflicting our cities. Leaders at every level turned their attention to the matter. Government agencies launched programs. Foundations funded urban projects. Press coverage was intense.

The wave of interest had some good consequences. Americans learned a great deal about the problems of the cities. A generation of young people, men and women who would later play significant leadership roles, had their first exposure to the urban scene. Serious (but often unsuccessful) efforts were made to arrive at solutions. Eventually the riots stopped, and the wave of interest that began with the Watts uprising in 1965 died in the early 1970s.

The American public has a short attention span. There followed long, dry years in which urban problems appeared to have dropped off the national priority list.

But at the community level, people hadn't forgotten. An organization called Goals for Dallas formed in the 1960s and continued operating through the 1980s. The group has received credit for spurring construction of the city's international airport, aiding the growth of high-tech manufacturing, and fueling investment in higher education. San Antonio's Target "90," founded in the early 1980s, accomplished one of its chief goals: the use of arts, culture, and tourism to stimulate the local economy and quality of life. In Tennessee, Chattanooga Venture undertook Vision 2000 in 1984. It was so successful that when a public survey was done in 1992, the people overwhelmingly said, "Let's do it again." Thus, ReVision 2000 created an entirely new set of goals for the community.



## EPILOGUE - RENEWING YOUR COMMUNITY

In 1988 Phoenix Mayor Terry Goddard set in motion the chain of events that led to the creation of the Phoenix Futures Forum. Another urban renewal organization launched in 1988, the Greater Louisville Economic Development Partnership, has been a catalyst not only in creating new jobs but more importantly in retaining and increasing minority development.

The list of successes is endless. Many efforts, unfortunately, lead only to frustration. Today's communities must push ahead despite the obstacles to design and implement successful programs. And they are doing it.

Today the wave of innovation covers virtually every field of social problem solving, from prenatal care to job training, from parental education to dropout prevention, from affordable housing to community-oriented policing. These grassroots movements could not have achieved the momentum they have without the sometimes painful lessons of the 1960s and the experimentation of the 1970s and 1980s.

However, the list of ailments afflicting the city today omits the chief problem; the inability to think or act as a community. In seeking to solve its problems, the city finds itself hopelessly fragmented. Even the municipal agencies of government may be out of touch with one another. Corporations, unions, neighborhood leaders, environmentalists, and others have conflicting goals. The city flounders.

The groups in conflict are often quite unused to rational dialogue. All too often they don't know or understand one another, cannot communicate effectively, and have sharply differing views of reality.

These barriers to communication can be overcome. We can get beyond confrontation as a mode of interaction. People of very different backgrounds and interests can learn to listen and understand; they can get past stereotypes and conduct a civil interchange with the human being across the table. Diverse groups can set aside adversarial posturing and be candid and explicit about their respective interests.

When that happens, the various parties to the conversation inevitably find that they do indeed have shared goals—no one wants their kids shot in the street, everyone wants decent schools, and so forth. Obviously they won't agree on everything, and it will take patience, goodwill, and mutual trust to arrive at shared objectives—the things all groups want very much and can only achieve by collaborating.

As a by-product of such conversation, the diverse participants discover that they share not only some common goals but also some common values—and it is useful for them to talk explicitly about those values.

Every community in America, urban or rural, could benefit by carrying through a process of self-assessment leading to action. Citizens can ask themselves what kind of community they want their city to be in, let us say, the year 2015. Then they can identify what problems must be solved, and in what order of priority, in order to create such a community. We have enough successful examples of self-assessment that we have been able in this publication to suggest appropriate steps.

If such a movement were to sweep the country, it would have a powerful, energizing effect on local governments. It would heighten the civic consciousness of citizens everywhere. And, in a time when

## EPILOGUE - RENEWING YOUR COMMUNITY

local initiative is certain to be increasingly important, it would prepare a new generation of leaders to see us through the next century and the next millennium.

### A RESURGENCE OF SPIRIT

How can communities be awakened to a new sense of purpose, a new vision and a new resolve?

A movement to wake up America's communities cannot depend on one powerful, charismatic leader to rouse the masses. Such a movement requires leaders dispersed through all segments and all levels of society and an even greater number of vital and responsible citizens who don't necessarily think of themselves as "leaders" but are in fact sharing leadership tasks. Local effort and local responsibility are crucial.

Periodically throughout U.S. history "the folks out there," far from power but close to the good earth, have shown a capacity to move the nation. This is such a time. The next America will be forged "out there" in America's communities.

All segments of the society must be involved—all religious and ethnic groups, the professions, government, the nonprofit world, business, labor, education, and so on. Everyone must help. And in the same spirit, the benefits must be widely shared. No one can be left out.

Whether you are an Asian immigrant seeking citizenship, a Hispanic pursuing upward mobility, an African American fighting for racial justice, a descendant of earlier immigrant groups (including Mayflower passengers), or a native American whose ancestors arrived before recorded history, you have a stake in the well-being of this society. Our tradition has

been one of continuous renewal by streams of newcomers.

If we are to accomplish the difficult tasks before us today, there will have to be an extraordinary resurgence of spirit on the part of individual communities, a fierce commitment to the common good, a willingness to sacrifice. If we don't have it in us to respond, social disintegration awaits. We must celebrate our obligations to one or another and to the society that guards our freedom. We must make responsibility our watchword. We must redefine patriots as men and women who tackle the problems, resolve the conflicts, and renew the values of their communities.

Obviously, we face problems on a much broader stage—the world stage. But individuals who represent countries overseas know that social disintegration at home undermines one's capacity for leadership abroad. If the spirit is faltering, the hand cannot be steady.

The present challenge is smaller in scale than the fierce demands of World War II but conceivably more dangerous. External enemies are more readily responded to. Most civilizations die from within, conquered by traitors within the heart—loss of belief, corruption, erosion of control, and disintegration of shared purposes.

I believe that individual communities will welcome a new burst of commitment. The old spirit is still there—buried, perhaps, but waiting for a wake-up call to lift us out of our sourness and self-doubt.

We have it in us to create communities committed to deeply held values, shared purposes, economic vitality, self-renewal, and the release of human possibilities; communities that have mastered within their own boundaries the secret of wholeness,

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incorporating diversity and helping others accommodate it as well.

Nothing good can issue from the negativism of the general public today—nothing. I don't believe that individuals even like themselves in that frame of mind. We are a positive-minded people. We always have been. We're sick and tired of being sick and tired. Let's return the style and spirit that suit us best.

Let's tell people that there is hope. Let's tell them there's a role for everyone. We can save the family and the children. We know how. We can demand and get accountable government. We can counter the mean-spirited divisiveness that undermines positive action. We can generate shared values. We can release human talent and energy and renew our institutions.

Now is the time to reach within ourselves, each to his or her deepest reservoirs of faith and hope. Let's say to everyone who will listen:

"Lend a hand—out of concern for your community, out of love for our dear country, out of the depths of whatever faith you hold. Lend a hand."

As a people we are capable of laxity and self-indulgence. We are also capable of greatness. We have tremendous resources of strength and spirit—but we need to strike a spark to release that spirit. The time has come

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# ABOUT THE NATIONAL CIVIC LEAGUE

STRENGTHENING CITIZEN DEMOCRACY BY TRANSFORMING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

## AMERICA'S CHALLENGE

As our country prepares to enter a new and more complex century, we Americans are convinced that citizens need to act in partnership with each other and our government in order to have more control over our common future. Yet, many citizens are deeply frustrated because they often find their democratic institutions unresponsive to this need. They see political systems undermined by entrenched power, money and special interests.

## NCL'S VISION

The **National Civic League**, the United States' oldest organization advocating for the issues of community democracy, envisions a country where citizens are actively engaged in the process of self-governance and work in partnership with the public, private and non-profit sectors of society, and where citizens are creating active civic culture reflective of the diversity of community voices.

## NCL'S STRATEGIES

- NCL assists communities engaged in civic renewal by strengthening their capacity for collaborative problem solving. Through **Community Services** and the **Partnership for Community Problem Solving**, NCL is providing technical assistance, training and diagnostic tools for citizens to assess the civic health of their community. Technical assistance includes strategic planning, visioning, and facilitation. Tools include the *Civic Index-Measuring Your Community's Civic Health*, the *Community Collaborative Wellness Tool*, and *Building Civic Capital*.
- NCL aligns communities involved in civic renewal in order for them to learn from and support each other. The **106<sup>th</sup> National Conference on Governance** will be held in November 2000, to explore youth, civic engagement and technology. NCL's **Alliance for National Renewal** supports more than 300 national and local partners as they promote cross-sector collaboration. NCL's web page, publications and products provide resources and research spotlighting cutting-edge innovation and trends. NCL works with federal and state agencies, as well as foundations, to convene multi-site community building initiatives.
- NCL fosters innovation in community building and political reform by identifying best practices and conducting applied research. NCL's **New Politics Program** is documenting reform happening at the local level and assisting grassroots leaders with information and convenings. NCL is exploring the means to overcome voter anger, impediments to voter participation and disincentives to voting. NCL advocates re-examining the entire political system and considering all serious reform.
- NCL assists state and local government to increase their effectiveness by developing responsive partnerships with citizens. Through training, technical assistance, historically important publications, such as the *Model City Charter*, the *Model County Charter*, the *National Civic Review*, and newer publications-

the *Civic Index* and the *Civic Capital Assessment Tool*-NCL is helping government work better with citizens and other sectors.

- NCL recognizes and celebrates communities that cooperatively tackle challenges, bring together diverse voices, and achieve results. The All-

**America City Award**, now in its 51<sup>st</sup> year, annually recognizes 10 communities for their cross sector collaboration and achievements. To apply, see the application on NCL's website, or call to request an application. Stories of finalists and All-America Cities are also available via the website

## JOIN THE NATIONAL CIVIC LEAGUE

Access a broad network of community, business, non-profit and government leaders committed to strong communities through citizen democracy. Use the website to join, or call for a membership form.

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