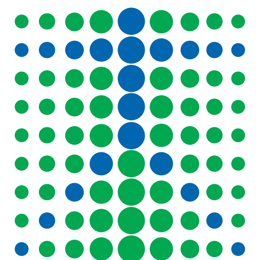
ACCOMPLISHING A PLACE-BASED PEOPLE STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION

Community Empowerment

Manual

2ND EDITION



Partners for Livable Communities (Partners)

is a non-profit leadership organization working to improve the livability of communities by promoting quality of life, economic development, and social equity. Since its founding in 1977, Partners has helped communities set a common vision for the future, discover and use new resources for community and economic development, and build public/private coalitions to further their goals.

Partners promotes livable communities through technical assistance, leadership training, workshops, charrettes, research and publications. More than 1,200 individuals and groups from local, state, national, international, public and private and media organizations make up Partners' resource network and share innovative ideas on livability and community improvement.

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Acknowledgements

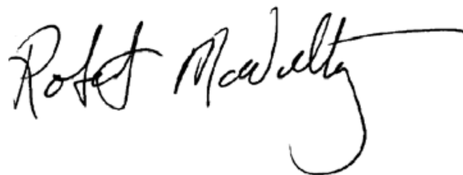
I would like to thank **Carly Grimm**, a staff member of Partners for Livable Communities (Partners) for several years who has now moved on to the University of Florida Law School, for updating and repositioning our Community Empowerment Manual.

The first edition of this manual, published in 1999 and sponsored by Bank of America and The Healy Foundation, had its genesis in 1995. As the project developed, Partners received support from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development—under the leadership of Secretary Henry Cisneros—to begin a two-year collaborative research effort analyzing comprehensive community strategies for change. The project involved eight U.S. and European communities and was featured in *Governing Magazine*.

Grimm, working with Susan Robinson, was able to take our decade-old work, reorganize it, and update it with new case studies. She has allowed us to bring out a second edition as a resource on how to truly mobilize a community that we can distribute in this country and abroad. We hope this manual will empower citizens to seek equitable and fair visions of the future and to think cooperatively and regionally on how to aggregate the resources, the talent, the wealth and the opportunities needed to compete in a new global world.

Partners, through its community assistance program, is ready to assist and serve communities as they hopefully gain wisdom through this publication and enjoy the common sense that this documents portrays.

Sincerely,



Robert McNulty
President
Partners for Livable Communities

Introduction

This community empowerment manual provides key strategies to make communities stronger, safer and better places to live and work. It is not a static document. Rather, the manual is a tool that can be used in a variety of ways as a guide to create and maintain strong, sustainable and livable communities.

A sense of place and a pride of ownership—symbolic or actual—are powerful motivations for community action. People's love of place makes them willing to act to preserve it or improve it. Parents work to improve the schools their children attend. Neighborhood groups form to keep crime off their streets. Block residents come together to transform vacant lots for such place-enhancing uses as playgrounds or community gardens. Merchants coordinate to remake their hodge-podge retail neighborhoods into destination shopping districts.

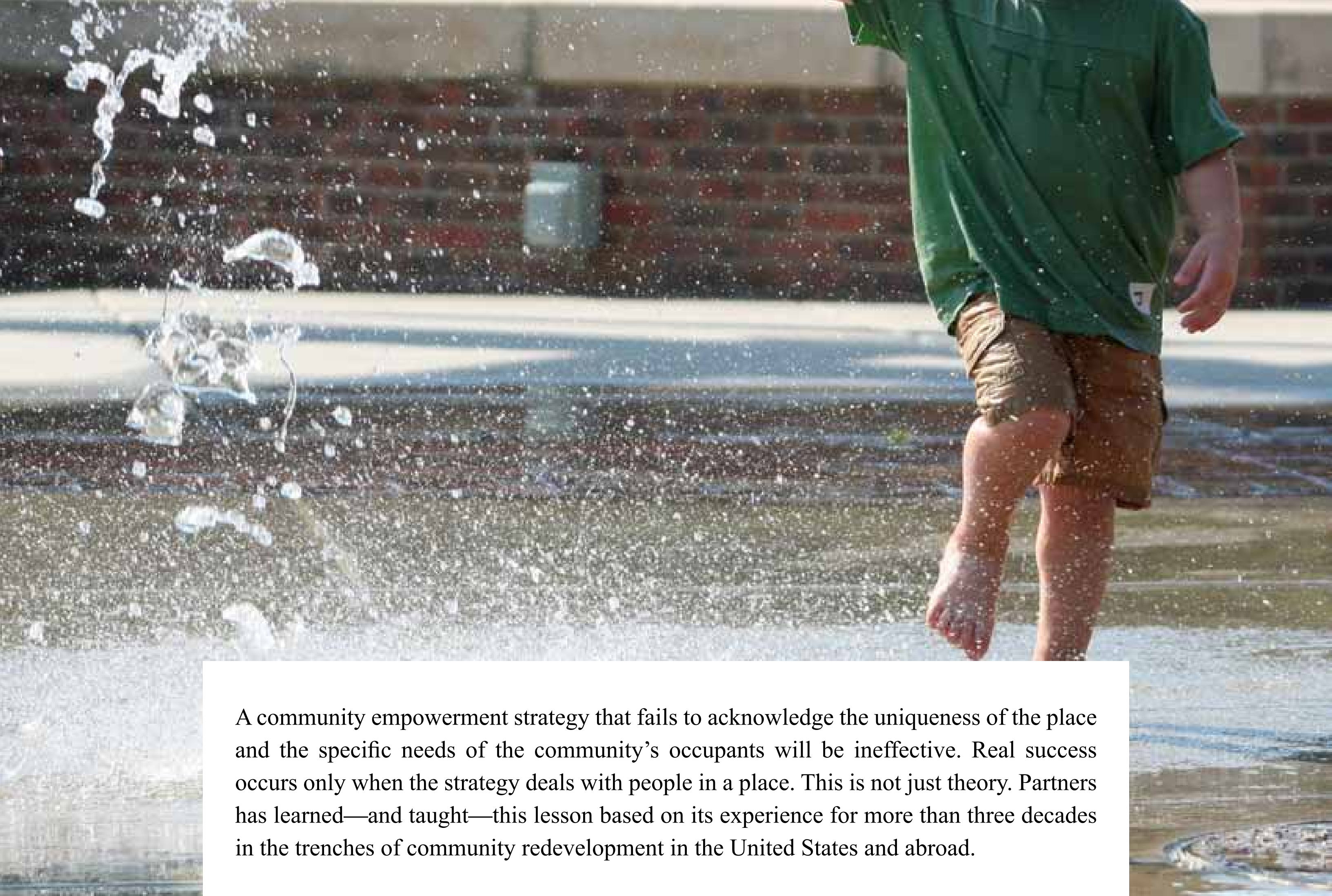
As Partners for Livable Communities (Partners) has learned from working across America, the most important element of a livable place is its people. People make communities by how they live, how they work, and how they relate to one another. Individuals should have the chance to maximize their potential, contribute to their communities, earn a living, and aspire toward a better life.

Involvement of individuals is essential. Citizens must be proactive in solving problems rather than acting only in opposition to leadership and/or institutions. This requires self-sustaining, bottom-up participation.

Partners has come to see that livable communities offer an environment that supports people. Specifically, livable communities are economically viable and environmentally sustainable; they assure social equity and provide educational opportunities for all. These people-oriented elements are implemented in a variety of ways that are unique to each locale.

A Focus on People in a Place

By bringing together strategies that deal specifically with its people and strategies that deal specifically with its place, a community can forge new approaches that are rooted in the particular needs and desires of its residents and in the individual characteristics of its setting and physical attributes.



A community empowerment strategy that fails to acknowledge the uniqueness of the place and the specific needs of the community's occupants will be ineffective. Real success occurs only when the strategy deals with people in a place. This is not just theory. Partners has learned—and taught—this lesson based on its experience for more than three decades in the trenches of community redevelopment in the United States and abroad.

We have put together this primer on the elements of community empowerment to help a wide audience solve problems, overcome challenges and create the communities they envision.

This manual can empower:

- Citizens—both those currently engaged and those frustrated by lack of action
- Local government officials
- Community organizers
- Civic leaders
- Non-profits and NGOs
- Business organizations
- Social agencies
- Educational and cultural institutions

This manual offers evidence from places that have accomplished community empowerment through a variety of strategies. We distill many of the lessons common to these success stories to provide guidelines for other communities just starting on the path to livability. Community planning focused on people in place is an empowerment process that can benefit communities of any scale, from neighborhoods to districts to towns/cities to regions.

“A **sustainable society** is one that can persist over generations, one that is far-seeing enough, flexible enough, and wise enough not to undermine either its physical or its social systems of support.”

Chapter 1:

DEFINING AND ACHIEVING LIVABILITY

What is a community?

Defining the boundaries of a community can be challenging. Because this manual is designed to serve communities of many sizes, it will not strictly define these borders, but describe certain elements that are present in all communities. It is up to you to decide whether your empowerment campaign encompasses a small borough, a neighborhood, an entire city, or extends across the region.

A community consists of two major components: physical and social infrastructure.

- **Physical infrastructure:** streets, parks, buildings, and other elements that connect people to place
- **Social infrastructure:** organizations, institutions, community services, friends, family, and other elements that connect people to one another

What makes a community livable?

The notion of "livable communities" gained currency in the 1970s when Partners for Livable Communities began to work with communities determined to sharpen their economic edge, meet the needs of current residents, and attract new people and businesses. Since then, the call to make communities more livable has become a mantra among political and business leaders, smart growth advocates, and many other community stakeholders.

Although the particular livability issues that community leaders choose to focus on may vary, these interests are generally interconnected and benefit all community members. For example, efforts that enable residents to remain independent as they age—such as increased housing options and more accessible and walkable environments—are beneficial to a broad cross-section of a community's population.

Through decades of hands-on experience, research, and consultation with experts in the field, Partners has come to identify key elements that make a community livable: equity and sustainability.

EQUITY

A truly livable community is livable for all residents. Livable communities have a culture that values diversity, fairness, dignity, and equal opportunity. The components of livability must be equally available and accessible to all residents.

In a people-based place strategy, access to economic and cultural opportunities are important considerations. Equity in a community context means jobs, substantial income, decent housing, a good education, and adequate healthcare are within reach for all residents.

SUSTAINABILITY

Although sustainability has been defined in many ways, Donella Meadows (co-author of *Beyond the Limits*) sums it up well:

"A sustainable society is one that can persist over generations, one that is far-seeing enough, flexible enough, and wise enough not to undermine either its physical or its social systems of support."[1]

It is clear then, that the components of livability must be sustainable and include long-term, integrated systems that address the interdependent economic, environmental, and social concerns of a community. To help preserve and enhance livability, many communities have adopted the goal of "sustainable development" to guide their community empowerment strategies.

Sustainable communities go beyond environmental measures, addressing the full range of a community's needs such as housing, health care, education and public safety. In the context of livable communities, the term "sustainability" includes physical and social environments as well as the natural environment.

Ten Components of Livability

For three decades in the United States and abroad Partners has worked toward the goal of livability for all. Through this experience, Partners has created a definition of a livable community based on 10 components.

1. **Housing**: high quality, diverse and affordable housing options are available to all residents.

2. **Transportation & Mobility**: diverse, accessible and affordable transportation options allow all people to be mobile.

3. **Community Design**: history, diversity, sense of place, accessibility and vibrancy are expressed through high-quality urban design and historic preservation.

4. **Health, Wellness, & Recreation**: residents have access to active and passive recreational pursuits, health of both mind and body are addressed, and healthy lifestyles are fostered.

5. **Public Safety**: efforts are made to create safe environments for all residents.

6. **Workforce Development**: resources are extended to encourage an inclusive, competitive and satisfied workforce.

7. **Lifelong Learning**: high-quality learning environments are promoted, along with opportunities for continued education for all age groups.

8. **Arts & Culture**: ample and diverse arts and cultural resources are available to all residents.

9. **Civic Engagement & Volunteerism**: engaged, well-informed citizens influence government processes and take pride and active interest in issues affecting their community.

10. **Local Leadership**: visionary and entrepreneurial team-based leadership invites public participation across all spectrums and works creatively to accomplish livability goals.

1.1 Eight Challenges as Opportunities for Greater Livability

At some point, every community is faced with issues such as a declining economy, meeting the needs of aging adults, and providing resources to underserved populations. Especially in hard economic times it may be difficult to organize the necessary social capital and other resources needed to solve these problems. Though these are undoubtedly great challenges, they are also great opportunities to improve livability for all residents. These challenges may differ from neighborhood to neighborhood, but a strong community empowerment campaign can address issues across the spectrum.

1. Meeting the Needs of Underserved Populations

Underserved populations in your community may include recent immigrants, low-income residents, single parents, cultural minorities and youth. Many of these populations are in need of services that are not readily available to them. Perhaps they need guidance regarding how to apply for services, or information on which services they qualify for. Affordable housing, welfare, healthcare, and quality education: equitable access to these and other resources is necessary to ensure livability for all in your area.

With the right tools, the relationship between disadvantaged populations and their surrounding community can be one of reciprocation. When basic needs and quality of life standards are met, many social problems such as crime, teen pregnancy, and homelessness can be reduced, while residents are able to contribute to their community in more meaningful ways. For example, providing accessible, quality education to residents, young and old, is an investment in local social capital. Small loans can help entrepreneurial citizens start businesses and contribute to the local economic base. Stable, affordable housing allows recent immigrants to establish new roots, enliven local cultural exchange, and participate in the labor market.

Teen Arts, Sports & Cultural Opportunities

Teen Arts, Sports & Cultural Opportunities (TASCO) offers youth development opportunities and activities for teenagers in grades 6-12 in St. Petersburg, Florida. TASCO is run by the St. Petersburg Recreation Department and is an award-winning national model for positive activity programs for teens—an at-risk age group. In contrast to other youth programs in other areas, the TASCO program takes innovative steps to allow teens to plan and coordinate their own activities. TASCO's programming includes athletic activities, educational and job skills opportunities, and special events.

One of the most notable programs run by TASCO is the *Impressions Teen Magazine*, a multicultural quarterly written and produced completely by teens that is distributed to 120,000 middle and high school students countywide. *Impressions* allows youth to develop journalism and graphic design skills, and provides an outlet for self-expression. TASCO also offers a website design course through collaboration with 4H, a digital audio production class through the St. Petersburg Police Department Front Porch Initiative Grant. TASCO receives additional support from the Junior Leader program, which provides youth with the opportunity to gain hands-on work experience under the direct supervision of recreation personnel. TASCO is funded jointly by the city and the Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County.

The Algonkian Regional Park

Algonkian Regional Park sits adjacent to the scenic Potomac River in Fairfax County, Virginia, and boasts an impressive array of activities including golfing, swimming and fishing. Employees at Algonkian were disoriented several years ago when hundreds of Iranian families attended the park beyond capacity. Toilets overflowed and cars were parked on the grass. The Iranian visitors thought they were being discriminated against when the park manager tried to disperse the crowd. Acting quickly, the managers and rangers shut down the park to cars and turned to their computers to find that Sizdeh Bedar—a popular Iranian celebration in which it is unlucky to stay indoors—happened to be that day.

With rising immigration and an increasingly multicultural society, cultural clashes in parks, other green spaces, and recreation centers are becoming more common. After their first encounter with the Sizdeh Bedar celebration, Algonkian Regional Park officials began to adapt: footing a $5,000 bill to hire extra staff and security for traffic management, and to rent 20 extra portable toilets. Additionally, park authorities have hired multilingual rangers, and have begun offering multicultural menus at food stands, organizing cultural nights, and providing outreach to make sure that the park's accessibility is known. By adapting to changing demographics, park authorities have made Algonkian more accessible to all members of their communities despite cultural or language barriers. Park managers and employees, as well as its users, are increasingly recognizing diversity as an asset in building bridges between the multicultural community.

2. Serving an Aging Population

Americans are enjoying longer and healthier lives. Today there are more than 35 million Americans age 65 and over—a tenfold increase in the population since 1900. Over the next 25 years, that number will double, and one in every five Americans will be age 65 or above. Tremendous advances in health care, economic security, and the delivery of supportive services have profoundly altered the experience of aging for the better.

These dramatic improvements for older Americans and their communities have created both new opportunities and new challenges. Older Americans are generally healthier, wealthier, and better educated than their age cohorts of previous generations. Communities that can capitalize on the diverse assets of older adults may find ways to stabilize the costs of governing and providing services, create new opportunities for economic growth, and provide a better quality of life for residents of all ages. At the same time, the aging population will require continued innovations in areas traditionally associated with aging, such as health care and supportive services.

Take a page from their book:

The Senior Artists Network (SAN)

Chicago's Senior Artists Network (SAN) was established in 1988 to promote and showcase the work of older artists. Through partnerships with several public and private organizations in the Chicago area and through the support of state and national funders, SAN continues to grow and serve more and more older artists in the community. The organization regularly puts on exhibits that showcase the work of various artists at venues throughout the city, and they also help digitize and display the work of more than a dozen artists on their website.

SAN's flagship event is their annual juried art exhibition, Later Impressions, which is now in its 20th year. The theme of the exhibition, held each year at the downtown Chicago Cultural Center, is "Art is Ageless" and features paintings, prints, fabric art, sculpture and photography from local artists.

ReServe

Older residents bring knowledge, skills, and experience that can benefit communities. ReServe is a job placement program in New York City that finds nonprofit or city government work for adults age 55 and older. Though relatively new, the program has been recognized as a national model, winning a "BreakThrough" Award from Civic Ventures in 2007. ReServe asks older adults to submit résumés and to specify their interest areas so that they may be fitted with the best work for them. All ReServists are paid $10 per hour and work approximately 15 hours each week.

Between 2005 and 2007 in its first two years of operation, the program successfully placed about 275 individuals with nearly 110 nonprofits. ReServists hold a variety of jobs including social workers, attorneys, health care professionals, marketing specialists and many others. Recently, ReServe joined forces with AARP to place experienced older adult workers in jobs with various New York City agencies.

ReServe is doing a lot to change the perception of older adults in New York City. Executive Director Claire Haaga Altman said that when the program began, it took a lot of outreach and convincing to get nonprofits to see the benefits that older, experienced workers can bring to the table. But now, Altman said, nonprofits are the ones calling ReServe and asking for more workers.

The Intergeneration Orchestra of Omaha

The Intergeneration Orchestra of Omaha brings together younger and older performing artists through the universal language of music. Their concert season runs from September through April, with a schedule of 10 to 15 concerts each year. The orchestra is presently comprised of sixty musicians ranging in age from 12 to 85 years. Musicians may audition if they are over 50 years of age or under 25 years of age. The Orchestra is sponsored by the Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging, which contributes a variety of in-kind services to assist with the administration of the program. It is funded through grants, donations, memberships, fundraisers and performance fees.

3. Stimulating a Declining Local Economy

Though some are more resilient than others, no community is immune to the effects of a declining economy. Unemployment, home foreclosures, bankruptcy, and the slashing of community services are just a few of the negative impacts experienced in cities across the nation during hard economic times.

In order to maintain a strong local economy or to spur a stagnant market, communities need to ensure they are attractive as places to live and work, magnets for visitors and tourists, capable of regenerating their income base, and equipped to seize new economic opportunities. This is no small feat and communities are taking on diverse initiatives to achieve these goals including:

- **Developing 24-hour downtowns**: Downtown strategies that invest only in office space forgo great opportunities presented by other types of economic activity such as residential buildings, restaurants and shops. Residents should be able to live, work and play downtown.

- **Accenting amenities**: Showcase your natural and man-made attractions. Many communities have been successful in capitalizing on their surroundings. In Portland, Maine, for example, trendy shops have been blended with cruise ships, international ferry services, cargo piers and a fishing fleet. Arts and cultural amenities are also a lucrative—if often overlooked—resource, generating nearly $166.2 billion each year to the U.S. economy.[2]

- **Creating destinations and attracting new investments**: By encouraging the development of active and diverse downtowns and showcasing amenities, communities are able to draw new businesses and brain power. Modern companies are less influenced by the proximity to raw materials and are instead responsive to the lifestyle desires of their employees. The young, creative workforce is continually migrating to areas with lively centers and cultural attractions.

- **Upgrading old economy enterprises**: Technology can be incorporated into an existing industry to increase its productivity and strengthen its competitiveness.

- **Capitalizing on clusters**: It’s not just by chance that high-tech industries sprung up near one another to form Silicon Valley or the Research Triangle. There is great value in close proximity, namely that of increased collaboration and establishing a local hiring base with relevant skills. This principle applies to fields beyond that of technology and many communities are capitalizing on this fact by encouraging industry clusters.

- **Nurturing networks and collaborations**: Connections between businesses or even separate industries can often help improve efficiency and therefore profits. Many communities encourage unique collaborations such as those between educational institutions and businesses. Nonprofits need pro bono legal services from law students; research and technology companies can benefit from student contributions. Regional collaborations may also help strengthen local economies.

- **Investing in human capital**: A skilled labor force has long been recognized as one of the most important factors when businesses decide where to locate or expand. Residents should have access to job skill training or other higher-level education.

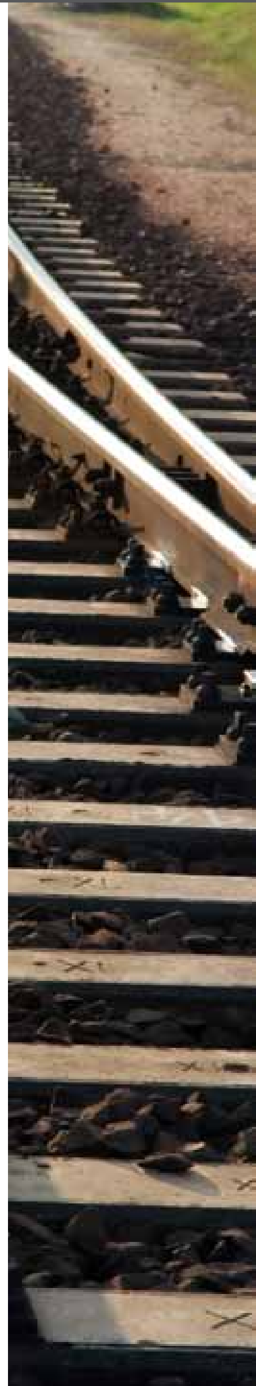
Take a page from their book:

The Metropolitan College/UPS Program

Louisville, Kentucky, has been nationally recognized for its creative solution to a problem plaguing most major cities—a lack of trained workers. In response to the United Parcel Service's (UPS) need for talented and trained workers, and to prevent UPS from relocating in a different community, the City of Louisville created the Metropolitan College. This public-private partnership was created in conjunction with UPS, the University of Louisville, Jefferson Community College and Jefferson Technical College. In exchange for working 15-20 hours a week during the late shift (9 p.m. to 4 a.m.), UPS pays college tuition for any employee attending one of the three participating institutions. Students can attend any of the three participating colleges and pursue a two- or four-year degree in one of 23 programs. Evening classes are available and a special hours dorm was created to accommodate the student's unconventional working schedules.

Anyone interested in attending one of the three colleges may do so with large financial subsidies, including free tuition for in-state students, book allowances, a housing stipend, and bonuses. Metropolitan College also offers a student loan program, in which UPS pays all or part of the loan depending on the length of time a student works at UPS. Program alumni receive competitive wages along with the opportunity for annual wage increases, health benefits, paid vacation and holidays, 401K savings plans, and stock ownership.

4. Deteriorating Physical Infrastructure



Many are familiar with the Broken Windows Theory—a string of small, petty crimes or physical conditions such as graffiti or broken windows will lead to bigger, more serious community problems. Deteriorating infrastructure can certainly become more than just an eye sore; it not only detracts from local quality of life and sense of place, but is a real threat to new investment, strongly deterring developers and new businesses.

Whether an area in your community needs a fresh coat of paint or complete rehabilitation, it presents an opportunity to begin a small- or large-scale community visioning process. Cleaning up an old industrial building, for example, could serve as a catalyst for a city beautification campaign or an artist housing program.

Take a page from their book:

Roanoke's McGuire Building

The McGuire Building was constructed in downtown Roanoke, Virginia, during the 1910s to house W.E. McGuire's Farmer's Supply Company. After the company closed 30 years later, the building experienced high rates of turnover in commercial occupancy. By the mid 1970s, the partially unused building was trapped in the center of a dilapidated downtown filled with vacant buildings and plagued by a deteriorating economic base.

Much like the downtown, Roanoke's arts and educational institutions found themselves in disarray. The Art Museum was located in an inaccessible residential area; the Science Museum in an abandoned schoolhouse prone to flooding; and the Arts Council in a series of buildings inconveniently spread across the region. Local philanthropists Betty Car Muse and George Cartledge thought cultural institutions like these would enhance one another by sharing patronage if they were housed together. The idea for a Roanoke arts and education center became the centerpiece to Design '79, a public forum developing comprehensive revitalization plans for the downtown. The McGuire Building, renamed "Center in the Square," became a hub for arts and education and a downtown anchor. It housed the Western Virginia museums for art, science, and history along with the Historical Society, Hopkins Planetarium, Mill Mountain Theater, and the Arts Council of the Blue Ridge.

Center in the Square opened in December 1983 and was met with instant success; more people visited the facility during its first weekend alone than visited the five independent organizations combined during the previous year. Center in the Square now enjoys 400,000 annual visitors, and has an estimated annual economic impact of $19 million dollars. The impact that Center in the Square has had on downtown Roanoke is even more astonishing. Since it opened, there has been $850 million dollars in investment in the immediate area of the facility, including the construction of a hotel and conference center. Center in the Square recently began another round of extensive renovations to be completed in 2012, which will ensure that Roanoke remains a vibrant cultural and economic center for years to come.

5. Endangered Arts and Cultural Resources

As a community's economic health deteriorates, civic leaders often find themselves forced to make difficult funding decisions due to drastic budget cuts. Since community needs do not disappear in times of economic instability and hardship, these leaders must utilize creative solutions to fulfill these needs, such as capitalizing on existing resources.

Arts and cultural resources have proven time and time again to positively affect our communities through:

- Job creation
- Stabilization and revitalization of distressed neighborhoods
- Improving outcomes for at-risk youth
- Improving neighborhood design and sense of place
- Promoting racial understanding

The resources needed to achieve these outcomes are already present in most communities. Unfortunately, arts and cultural amenities are often considered a luxury rather than vital tools for reaching broader community goals, and they are often the first programs to be cut during budget restructuring. Cultural resources must be seen, rather, as a part of economic and social agendas in order to reach their full potential, particularly in troubled times.

As noted earlier in this chapter, arts and culture contribute $166.2 billion to the U.S. economy every year, generating 5.7 million full-time equivalent jobs, $104.2 billion in household income, $7.9 billion in local government tax revenues, $9.1 billion in state government tax revenues, and $12.6 billion in federal income tax revenues.[3] In addition to their potential as economic powerhouses, arts and cultural resources are fundamental elements for community vitality and pride.

Take a page from their book:

Culture Builds Florida

Spurred by Governor Bush's State of the State Address in 2002, that encouraged a focus on economic diversification, education and literacy, and stronger families, the Florida Arts Council and Department of State decided to utilize Florida's cultural assets for a complementary strategy that would place arts and culture in a prime role of addressing those top priorities. In 2003, they teamed with Partners for Livable Communities (Partners) to begin a year-long visioning process. This endeavor, known as "Culture Builds Florida," developed an unprecedented ten-year cultural plan for the state of Florida.

The Culture Builds Florida process included "stakeholder" gatherings in Jacksonville, Tampa, and Miami with business entrepreneurs, architects, planners and developers, artists, politicians, educators, arts council members, realtors, health care providers, and interested citizens. The purpose of these gatherings was to share ideas, innovations, successes, and examples of positive impacts of arts and culture. These meetings resulted in a number of suggestions from all sectors on how to maximize Florida's cultural assets. Following the initial meetings, another larger meeting was held in Orlando with Florida's cultural organizations to review and prioritize suggestions. The resulting recommendations provided a foundation for developing leadership opportunities to advance these priorities.

The stakeholders' priorities included: creating partnerships to build sustainable economic and civic infrastructures for culture and the arts; engaging with state government leaders to promote the role of arts and culture in every aspect of public life (education, health, elder affairs, tourism, transportation, etc.); and joining with planners and developers to inject arts and culture into local and regional planning. These priorities were incorporated into the broader goals of developing leadership and organizations that will effectively weave the arts and culture into established statewide priorities dedicated to economic diversification, improving education and wellness, and strengthening families.

The Florida Arts Council's Strategic Planning Task Force clarified and ordered the stakeholders' recommendations that emerged from the visioning sessions. Four key issues provided an organizing structure for their final, prioritized recommendations to use arts and culture to: strengthen the economy; promote learning and wellness; build leadership; and advance design and development.

1. STRENGTHENING THE ECONOMY

- Becoming a national and global competitor in business, trade, and entrepreneurship
- Creating a well-educated workforce
- Promoting economic opportunities for Floridians
- Supporting the enhanced quality of life as a key infrastructure of communities

2. PROMOTING LEARNING AND WELLNESS

- Bolstering lifelong learning for all ages through quality education and innovative programs
- Promoting physical and mental health
- Developing communities that accommodate diverse populations

3. BUILDING LEADERSHIP

- Unifying the message of arts and culture
- Broadening the constituency base

4. ADVANCING DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

- Advancing sustainability and beauty by using smart growth principles
- Promoting public art and placemaking

The report produced at the end of the process became the new strategic plan for the Florida Arts Council. Following its release, 19 cultural endowments were funded during the next legislative session—the highest number ever funded in one session. A number of local arts councils started initiatives around issues presented in the report and used it as an advocacy tool. The Florida Arts Council became a direct partner with VISIT Florida, and Florida First Lady Columba Bush started an agenda to support student programs in the cultural arts.

Today, Partners for Livable Communities is partnering with The Florida League of Cities to provide Culture Builds Florida Communities workshops throughout the state of Florida to municipal leaders, arts groups, and diverse residents, to help spur the imagination of attendees regarding what can be done to use existing cultural resources in their *own* communities. During the workshops, participants were able to ask questions and share their own experiences ranging from challenges they have faced, to accomplishments that have brought great pride to their communities. The open and participatory format of the workshops allowed for a rich exchange of ideas, and participants often provided each other with solutions to obstacles they faced.

Together with the Honorable Glenda Hood, the 31st Mayor of Orlando, Partners' President Bob McNulty delivered five workshops to over 100 participants in Florida communities: Fort Walton Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Fort Meyers, Tampa, and Daytona Beach. Participants learned that the arts act as both economic catalysts and agents for lasting change, and can be especially valuable in hard economic times. Nonprofit arts organizations, commercial arts presenters, and artists contribute to quality of life by animating public spaces, creating cultural connections, and enhancing neighborhood or city-wide economic, social, and physical development.

6. Disasters and other Big Changes

Planning for recovery from a disaster presents a unique opportunity for community empowerment. Though a destructive hurricane or forest fire is always unfortunate, and often tragic, its occurrence can spark "triggered goal setting" within communities, forcing cooperation that might not normally occur. An unexpected event can work wonders in its ability to galvanize public attention, focus debate, and get people to work together to establish priorities. It often takes a crisis to end the numbing effects of business as usual.

Less threatening than a natural disaster, other changes such as the closing of a military base can trigger a goal-setting process in search of a win-win solution. Rapid growth, when it threatens to destroy an historic townscape, a well-loved public space, or fragile environmental amenities, can be the catalyst for planning initiatives. For example, in three Sunbelt communities—Las Cruces, New Mexico, San Diego, California, and Sarasota, Florida—urban and suburban growth was identified as a threat to paradise; this forced people of good will but differing priorities to come together to create a vision for their collective future and agree on plans and present-day sacrifices to achieve it.

Take a page from their book:

New Orleans Video Voices

New Orleans Video Voices is a community-based research project that allows local citizens to create personalized media art to push for solutions to community health challenges posed in post-Katrina New Orleans. In the months and years after the devastating hurricane, with health care facilities still inadequate, many of the most seriously affected residents were finding it difficult to have their voices heard among policymakers or elected officials. Amid such circumstances, Reverend Larry Campbell opened a clinic in his church to serve the population of the battered Central City neighborhood in the days after the disaster, and forged partnerships to create a community voice for health.

Rev. Campbell reached out to area nonprofits, researchers, private partners, and the government in an effort to improve the community's access to vital health care services. In 2007, the group partnered with Caricia Catalani and Anthony Veneziale, two participatory media art pioneers, to launch a filmmaking-advocacy-research initiative.

The filmmakers provided camera equipment and training so that residents could document their account of the health issues facing the community. Through film, they told their own personal histories, shared the challenges that they face, and offered their solutions for the future. The projects did not only provide a window for those from outside of the city, but also brought together New Orleanians from all walks of life and had the added effect of creating a dialogue among community members.

Today, neighborhoods such as the Central City in New Orleans continue to face serious health issues of all varieties. Mental health problems and suicides have increased dramatically, and health care infrastructure is still lacking. Yet amid such trying circumstances, New Orleans Video Voices has created a therapeutic and creative outlet for community members to create change for themselves and for their community.

7. Addressing Health and Wellness

A major part of community sustainability is the health and overall wellness of its residents on both an individual and communal scale. A glance at any health page in a newspaper will show alarming statistics about Americans' lack of understanding and attention to the health of their minds and bodies. According to the CDC, approximately one third of US adults and over twelve million children are obese,[4] and as Kenneth L. Gladish, Ph D., National Director of YMCA, puts it, "America has unwittingly created an unhealthy society for our children. Lasting change that truly addresses the declining health of our nation needs to be led on the community level."[5] Without serious measures, communities are threatened by all manner of potentially degrading health-related problems. If nothing is done, today's children could be the first generation to date to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents.

Though obesity and resulting health conditions are growing problems in need of attention, communities must not lose sight of all aspects of health and wellness. By understanding the different kinds of wellness, a community is more capable of addressing them comprehensively. Wellness can include:

- **Physical Wellness**: consistent care of the body through exercising, maintaining a balanced diet, and receiving regular medical exams.

- **Mental/Emotional Wellness**: awareness of the connection between mind and body, understanding of one's own emotions, and a high level of self-respect.

- **Intellectual Wellness**: stimulation of the brain through continued education, lifelong pursuit of knowledge, daily reading, and questioning of facts and beliefs.

- **Lifestyle Wellness**: maintaining a balanced lifestyle with participation in a variety of activities.

- **Social/Relational Wellness**: healthy relationships between individuals and families as well as between the community and the environment.

Individual institutions that explore how they can contribute to the different spheres of wellness and how to increase the overall wellness of the population can have a large impact on individual lives and the future of the community as a whole.

Take a page from their book:

Heart of Corona Initiative

During the 1980s, the Corona neighborhood of Queens could be characterized as almost entirely Italian-American. Since that point, the demographics of the neighborhood have morphed, with Hispanics comprising 60 percent of the population, and large communities of African-Americans, Asian-Americans and some remaining Italian immigrants making up the remaining 40 percent. The neighborhood has low educational attainment, and the median income is significantly lower than that of Queens as a whole. Facing issues surrounding literacy, health, neighborhood appearance, and lack of identity, the Queens Museum of Art (QMA) began the Heart of Corona Initiative, so that they could spark change in their community that was once home to the Worlds Fair and the United Nations.

The Heart of Corona Initiative is a multifaceted collaboration of 43 community-based organizations that is engaging in rapid community development through leveraging the area's arts and cultural assets. One focus area of the initiative is to improve health and wellness in the Corona neighborhood. With a high immigrant population and a general lack of resources, many people suffer from preventable health problems and lack health insurance.

To combat the health-related problems of the community, the QMA Heart of Corona Initiative organized several "Corona Cares Day" street festivals in 2007 where QMA and their partners gave health screenings to nearly 1,400 people and registered more than 1,300 previously unregistered people for free or low-cost health insurance. The Initiative also produced the "Healthy Taste of Corona" cookbook. The full-color, bi-lingual, 150-page cookbook features recipes submitted by local residents and altered by nutritionists to ensure balanced dishes.

8. Tackling Regional Issues

In recent decades, researchers and policy makers have increasingly turned to regional coordination to address a host of economic, social, and environmental issues. Business interests are increasingly aware of their interdependence, and that investment in a particular community will have benefits for the larger region. Environmentalists have come to understand that ecosystems operate on a regional or "landscape" level, and require regional management. Social activists have recognized that equity issues are best addressed at the regional scale, where wealthy and poor communities can begin to recognize what they have in common, and can pursue initiatives that promote the common good. In short, regionalism is a tool for bringing political or economic resources together to solve problems or capitalize on opportunities that cannot be handled within neighborhoods, towns, or cities. Local communities within regions rise or fall together, and the fact that community's health is inextricably related to events that take place outside its borders is undeniable in urban centers in the United States and throughout the world.

Hurdles to livability that localities face solved only on a regional scale include:

- Unmanaged growth (sprawl)
- Lack of affordable housing
- Uncoordinated transportation systems
- Disparities in tax bases
- Duplication or other inefficiencies in government services
- Imbalance between jobs and available housing
- Environmental degradation
- Concentrations of poverty.

Regional approaches allow initiatives to involve more stakeholders, garner greater political and economic support, and take on more ambitious projects. Moreover, approaching development on a regional scale allows planners to create infrastructure that supports economic growth, cultural vitality, and environmental stability. Although regional approaches to development require coordination of disparate groups and inherently require more resources to address large-scale issues, they often reap greater rewards than efforts targeted at specific communities, and are necessary to deal with many of the challenges faced by American communities in the 21st century. See section 3.1 for more background on regional problem solving, and helpful strategies for promoting coordination in your region.

Take a page from their book:

Detroit's Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength

Many of the best examples of regional action from around the nation have emerged as a result of leadership by the nonprofit sector, private businesses and other "non-traditional" areas of civic involvement. It is often possible for leaders in these arenas to readily understand the regional connections required for effective action. Detroit's Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES) is a faith-based organization incorporated in 1997 to coordinate the efforts of congregations across Detroit and its surrounding suburbs to address common issues. Its membership now includes two hospitals, one university, and 53 churches representing six different denominations.

MOSES has opened up a dialogue between congregations in Detroit and the suburbs, helping those congregations see that they share many problems, including low attendance, fiscal decline, and the loss of the "church community." Having recognized the interdependence of the city and its surrounding suburbs, MOSES has become a champion of regional solutions to community problems. The organization has been noted for the construction and rehabilitation of more than 60 low-income housing units, leading efforts to create Detroit Area Regional Transit Authority (DARTA), and bringing in millions of anti-drug dollars by getting Detroit classified as a High Intensity Drug-Trafficking Area. Other issues championed by MOSES include access to healthy food, repurposing blighted vacant land, and equity in health care. By addressing regional issues, and gaining a broad base of support from across the region, MOSES has been able to improve the lives of thousands in Detroit and its suburbs.

1.2 Essential Elements for a Successful Community Empowerment Campaign

Although outside resources are available to help guide communities through visioning and empowerment processes, the willpower to begin and follow through with such an effort must come from within the community. Outside consultants can be a vital part of community empowerment campaigns, but are by no means an adequate replacement for grassroots participation and drive. Once an initial commitment is made, the four essential elements of any successful community empowerment campaign include leadership, participation and collaboration, vision, and action.

Leadership

No community can become a more livable place without leadership. How the leadership for community empowerment is structured is of crucial importance and it must rely on community representatives who can be succeeded. Reliance on individual personalities who may be irreplaceable is a short-sighted approach. The leadership must be institutionalized so that its long-term continuity is assured and it must be valued and rewarded by the community. Do not despair if leadership resources and skills appear to be negligible. As a community empowerment effort gets underway it has a spin-off effect in terms of leadership resources. That is, it makes long-term community leaders out of, for example, planning committee participants, neighborhood organizers, and the board members of community development organizations.

Participation and Collaboration

Community building—not unlike governance in general—currently operates in an arena full of special interests. People with single-issue agendas such as environmental preservation, commercial development, housing development, mental health, crime reduction, or any of a thousand other possible agendas are competing for attention (and funding). Each agenda may have worthwhile goals, but the narrow focus of these special interests leads to unproductive competition among them and makes community goal setting difficult.

Community empowerment needs to consider the community as a system with a long list of parts—jobs, income, education and training, childcare, health, housing, and so forth—that need to function together. Each problem within a community affects the whole of community life and, likewise, so does each attempt at a solution to a specific problem such as crime or lack of housing. Special interests must recognize the interconnectedness of their agendas and collaborate when possible.

No matter the agenda, the intended beneficiaries of community planning and action must be involved in the planning process. They will not be helped if excluded; forcing solutions on them will ultimately not solve any problems. Collaboration and participation on the community level, however, is a big challenge.

Vision

An effective strategy for a community requires a vision of what the community would like to be in the future. Why a vision? "[Vision] reaches beyond the thing that is, into the conception of what can be. Imagination gives you the picture. Vision gives you the impulse to make the picture your own."[6] A workable vision must emerge from a participatory process, engage the community residents' imaginations and lend itself to implementation through short-term milestones that the community can reasonably attain.

Action

The best community vision is worthless if left to collect dust on a shelf. The final and perhaps most challenging stage of any community empowerment campaign is putting those leaders, collaborators, and visions to work! As noted above and addressed in the following chapters, community visions must set out realistic goals and short-term milestones. Rather than making the inauguration of a new city-wide transportation system the only goal, allow for milestones—such as the formation of a committee, its first meeting, and a community survey—to be checked off the to-do list. If community residents are able to celebrate small accomplishments more often and see progress, it is significantly easier to maintain momentum.

“The **followers do not submit** to the person of the leader. They join him or her in pursuit of the goal.”

Chapter 2:

LEADERSHIP

There was a time when the responsibility for the maintenance and growth of cities was more or less formally established. Government took care of the infrastructure and delivered public services, business took care of commercial activity, and nonprofit and charitable organizations took care of supporting the arts, establishing certain civic amenities like parks or libraries, and providing assistance to the city's needy. If something needed fixing or doing, people with influence—politicians, officers of the city's leading corporations, members of civic associations or charitable organizations—often assumed responsibility according to this division of labor and stepped up to lead the effort.

Today, the roles of government, business, and philanthropy are not as sharply defined. Government agencies support the arts and provide incentives to businesses. Corporations compete with government agencies to provide infrastructure and public services as basic as schools, low-income housing, and prisons. Charitable organizations offer social services that fiscally pressed cities have trouble providing. A proliferating army of advocacy and interest groups keeps watch on the activities of government agencies and corporations. The blurring of these traditional boundaries between actors on the city stage makes it difficult to determine who is responsible for what and can often lead to a "leadership vacuum" where no one steps forward to solve pressing local issues.

Any effort to make a community more livable requires strong, diverse leadership. Whether a locality is addressing the needs of an aging population, providing resources for immigrants, improving local health and wellness, or redesigning public spaces, leaders must be drawn from many different parts of the community. Incorporating residents from various interests and locations within the area ensures that a larger portion of the community is represented. As vital infrastructure to any community endeavor, leadership must also be renewed and nurtured. It is an essential factor of civic capacity that allows the community to take bold new actions and can buttress the community in times of stress.

Leadership in Your Community

Community empowerment and renewal are long-term propositions that require leadership over a long period of time. Partners' experience has led the organization to some important conclusions regarding leadership in successful community renewal. Whatever the situation, whatever the place, whatever the time, communities in which leadership is collective, issue based, institutionalized, and continuously renewed are positioned to conceptualize and carry out empowerment programs successfully.

Community leadership should be:

- Collective
- Issue-based
- Institutionalized
- Continuously renewed

COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

In order for community projects to thrive, strong, effective leadership is needed. This does not mean, however, that a single individual should be charged with the coordination and guidance of local action but that communities should rely on collective leadership, shared between many people and organizations. At a local level, systemic change doesn't happen without a broad base of support from neighborhood groups, elected officials, public servants, businesses, nonprofits, and other community networks.

Potential leaders are people from constituencies that are not well represented in the community's power structure but are representative of the community.

ISSUE-BASED LEADERSHIP

Garry Wills argued that the existence of a goal is what brings out a leader: "The followers do not submit to the person of the leader. They join him or her in pursuit of the goal."[7] A leader, by Wills' definition, is one who "mobilizes others toward a goal shared by leader and followers." Long-term community empowerment cannot rely on irreplaceable individuals to lead it. A community empowerment effort should be led by representatives of the community rather than by groups representing their own ideas or agenda. Effective leadership is based on the ability to bring together different groups within a community and channel their skills and energies toward common goals rather than prestige or position. Partners calls this the "depersonalization" of leadership. The community's leaders should be able to think in terms of a common agenda when they are considering what actions can be taken. Good ideas should have many parents.

INSTITUTIONALIZED LEADERSHIP

Sustaining a vision and keeping plans up-to-date require continuous leadership but current leaders almost always burn out or move on. The only way to ensure the necessary leadership through a long period is to institutionalize it. Community leadership must be organized as an ongoing public/private entity that will outlast the comings and goings of its individual members. The entity may be called a conference, a venture, a renaissance, an alliance, or any other name that formalizes and describes it.

LEADERSHIP RENEWAL

A continuous supply of leaders must be assured to maintain community empowerment efforts. Civic leadership is hard work and civic leaders get tired. Leadership renewal involves taking steps to make sure that when current leaders become unavailable to serve, there will be others to replace them and carry on. Communities must establish processes for developing new leaders, providing opportunities for leaders-to-be to acquire skills and prove their abilities. Project boards or other management bodies must identify local people who should be involved in community empowerment, but have not been given the opportunity to participate. Potential leaders are people from constituencies that are not well represented in the community's power structure but are representative of the community.

Do not despair if leadership resources and skills appear to be negligible in your community. As a local empowerment effort gets underway, those involved in planning committees, neighborhood groups, and community development organizations will slowly take on more responsibilities and naturally emerge as effective leaders. When selecting directors of any community empowerment effort, do not forget to include residents of the target community who are the closest to the problems and who will be most affected by any changes.

Special Section

Community Leaders are Everywhere

Most communities have a core of volunteers from businesses and professional organizations, charitable groups, religious institutions, and other similar organizations who are considered the mainstay of trustees in the community. When searching for community trustees to become involved in an empowerment effort, be sure to explore the following sectors:

- **Government Officials:** The future of their communities is often a top concern of county executives and mayors. They and other local elected officials can be counted on to be cheerleaders, healers, brokers, and much more in the empowerment crusade.

- **Owners/Managers/Principles of Local Business and Professional Firms:** Small and locally owned businesses have a large stake in their communities. Business owners and attorneys, accountants, architects, doctors, and other professionals with community ties should be sought as active partners in the planning and implementation of community renewal.

- **Corporate Executives:** As major employers and users of local services, corporate operations, even if not locally owned, also have a large stake in the community and their executives can become valuable trustees of community. Successful

participation in local civic affairs can be advantageous to the careers of corporate executives, even if the career ladder leads out of town (spread the word among the occupants of corporate executive suites on the career advantages of civic participation).

- **Community Service Providers and Advocates:** Many kinds of organizations and agencies spring up to help less fortunate people secure basic services and to advocate on their behalf. Neighborhoods in many cities have their own community development corporations. Various groups offer health care services, child care services, training and educational services, and so forth. Neighborhood-based alliances agitate and organize for attention from the public sector—to make infrastructure improvements, to fight crime, to support residential and commercial development, or to carry out a myriad of other community improvement programs. The local community advocacy sector has become entrepreneurial and collaborative in its approach to renewal, which makes its leaders true trustees of community.

- **The Philanthropic Community:** Helping is what charitable foundations are about, and they can be enlisted to participate in community empowerment efforts by the argument that collaborative and coordinated action is likely to better reflect community needs and reach more people. Leaders within the philanthropic community tend to have particular skills related to gathering resources, convening volunteers, packaging and promoting programs, and investing funds that can be put to good use in the empowerment effort.

- **Regional Stakeholders**: Locally based community empowerment cannot ignore the regional context. Problems related to education, health care, jobs, environmental quality, and a host of other community issues do not respect local political boundaries, and neither do the solutions. Cities do not operate independently of their suburbs and vice versa. Regional authorities (like councils of governments or transportation agencies) and regional institutions (like universities or chambers of commerce), as well as neighboring towns and counties, should be represented among the trustees of community identified for the community empowerment effort.

Building Effective Leadership

Once leadership bodies are identified within your community, it is not always certain that they will spring into action. Certain steps can be taken to help local leaders work together more effectively and get projects up and moving.

THE FIRST MEETING

A first and vital step in establishing effective leadership in a community empowerment campaign is holding a successful opening meeting. The initial convening of the diverse bodies that constitute the trustees of your community is an important moment in the empowerment process, giving these groups and individuals an opportunity to get to know one another and plant seeds of cooperation.

> The first meeting should take place in an informal, neutral setting.

The goal of the first meeting should be to acquaint the neighborhood activist with the corporate executive, the elected official with the foundation president, the head of the community development organization with the head of the municipal arts organization, and so forth. It is not a working meeting in the sense of trying to get through an agenda and make decisions, but a relaxed gathering where participants listen to one another with open minds and put their personal agendas on the table. To make this possible, the first meeting must take place in an informal, neutral, and non-confrontational setting. Pulling off this type of meeting, however, can prove to be enormously difficult.

To bring all interests together, find someone in the community who cannot be turned down lightly to send the invitation to a kickoff meeting or party. In 1982, when Leslie Cheek, a woman of social eminence in Richmond, invited the city's black and white leaders to her home for a dinner party, it was a command performance. She delivered to her guests a simple but necessary message, which was, in essence: "We cannot not work together for the city's future. We need to undertake a project that is so public that our failure to continue working together would be highly visible and humiliating." The result was Richmond Renaissance, the city's first biracial leadership group, and a nonprofit public/private partnership that works to spearhead downtown development. Every community needs a Leslie Cheek—someone who is bold enough and respected enough to bring together the trustees of community to discuss common needs and eventually to cooperate on programs that address them.

Provide unlikely collaborators the opportunity to **form personal bonds**. This will build familiarity and foster continued collaboration.

PROVIDE SHARED EXPERIENCES

Unlikely collaborators will not remain collaborators for long if they do not develop personal bonds. Shared experiences—retreats, study trips, and seminars related to the community empowerment effort—build first-name familiarity and personal bonds that foster continued collaboration. Partners has arranged trips for unlikely collaborators to study, for example, programs to reuse derelict industrial sites in Europe or programs to develop parks in the United States. Whatever the subject of the study tour, the tour itself leads to trust among its participants and confidence in their association.

In 1983, Partners took more than 60 Chattanoogans to Indianapolis for a three-day session on the work of the Greater Indianapolis Progress Committee. In this show-and-tell hosted by the committee and Indiana University/Purdue University in Indianapolis, the hosts explained how the region created an action agenda and found ways to act regionally on certain important issues. But the Chattanoogan trustees of community learned not only about Indianapolis, they also learned about one another. After traveling 240 miles together by bus, eating and socializing with one another, this group returned home to form Chattanooga Venture, a broad-based public/private leadership group that conducted an extensive and inclusive goal-setting program for the community known as Vision 2000.

PROVIDE USEFUL WORK AND TACKLE EASY ISSUES FIRST

It is important to provide concrete, useful work for the leadership bodies of an empowerment campaign. Few things can dishearten community leaders more than the feeling that the work they have done or are doing is of little consequence. As will be covered later in greater detail, visioning (a.k.a. goal setting or strategic planning) is highly useful work that requires leadership from just the kind of broad-based diverse group that the trustees

of community form. To keep leadership teams engaged and enthusiastic about the empowerment mission: set short-term, reachable goals and follow through with steps to reach them. Many states, counties, or cities around the country jump on the “visioning” bandwagon simply because it sounds important or is perceived to be the latest trend. These efforts often fall flat when participants see very little being accomplished due to lofty, impracticable goals or controversial issues being tackled first.

If a new and still rudimentary strategic partnership of diverse interests begins by trying to address issues that seriously divide the community—issues such as racism or minority unemployment—it will often be beset by factionalism. To turn a partnership of diverse interests into a working group for the community, it is better to begin by tackling issues that the various factions can more easily agree upon. One such issue is community amenities. Everyone likes the idea of improving or adding amenities, and planning for amenities tends to not be divisive. Once the group has worked successfully together on one issue, it can take on tougher ones without becoming hopelessly divided.

“You **can’t approach any** of these dysfunctional conditions **without approaching all** of them.”

Chapter 3:

PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATION

Although diverse and engaged leadership is vital to the execution of an empowerment campaign, the active involvement of local citizens and stakeholders is what will determine the ultimate success of the effort. Even the most imaginative and well planned community visions can fall flat without support from the residents who are ultimately affected by them. If locals feel as though they've had a hand in creating a community vision they are far more likely to support later implementation efforts and feel responsible for following through with action steps. Unfortunately, it is often the case that community visioning processes are carried out by high level officials and professional planners, reducing the citizen's role to last-minute opposition. You must remember that although their skills are useful, outside consultants and planners do not live in your community and are on short-term assignments. In other words, they are not real players in the process.

Engaging the Real Players

HOLISTIC AND INCLUSIVE APPROACH

When reaching out for community involvement, it is vital to include a broad range of stakeholders. The audience at town meetings, charrettes, and brainstorming sessions must be comprised of a broad range of organizations and interests rather than any one specific group pushing their own agenda. Community empowerment strategies need to consider the community as a machine with a long list of gears—jobs, income, education and training, child care, health, housing, and so forth—that need to function together.

Each problem within a community affects the whole of community life and, likewise, so does each attempt at a solution to a specific problem. In its community empowerment effort in Baltimore's Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood, Community Building in Partnership (CBP) took a holistic approach. As Jim Rouse, a facilitator at the Sandtown-Wincheser effort, said: "You can't approach any of these dysfunctional conditions without approaching all of them. I believe that it is easier to do what we are doing—approaching the whole thing at once—than it is to approach it piece by piece. When many things are happening across the whole spectrum [of a community's needs], you lift the spirit"[8] of the community, which makes further progress likelier.

Despite adopting a holistic and inclusive approach, there will naturally be items on a community empowerment agenda that benefit some groups more directly than others. This is not necessarily an imbalance that requires amending. Ultimately, the needs of a specific group within the community are not likely to conflict with the needs of the community as a whole. When a city or region dedicates resources to the poorly housed, single mothers, or at-risk youth, for example, the overall welfare of a community is elevated and all residents benefit.

Community empowerment strategies need to consider the community as a system with a long list of parts—jobs, income, education and training, child care, health, housing, and so forth—that need to function together.

The New Civics Leadership

Communities throughout the country are quickly realizing that many of the problems facing neighborhoods, cities and regions today can be solved only through civic partnerships among diverse stakeholders.

Associations of property owners, retailers, tenants, residents, arts and other nonprofit groups, and public sector agencies are working to enhance the livability and competitiveness of downtowns and special districts.

Corporations are joining together with public sector agencies and institutions like universities, labor unions and foundations to launch major community programs involving, for example, education and training, crime prevention, reducing drug abuse, the replacement of aging infrastructure, and regional marketing to attract investment from around the world. For corporations, this kind of involvement in community affairs is a far cry from simply making campaign contributions in local political contests. Like other private sector actors, corporations tend to act out of enlightened self-interest rather than out of a sense of charity and corporate citizenship. They will come to the table if they can be persuaded that community empowerment will benefit their bottom lines.

Local governments imbued with the new civics mentality have become entrepreneurs of civic advancement, more proactive than reactive and more collaborative than independent. While still providing public services and facilities and protecting the public, local governments have broadened their perspectives to include the initiation of economic development activities and they have learned how to cajole and bargain with private developers and service providers to obtain outcomes that serve the public interest. Local governments often take the lead in organizing the community empowerment process, bringing other civic actors onto the stage, whose hands are less tied than the hands of local governments when it comes to risk-taking on behalf of community change.

Nonprofit organizations, which have been proliferating rapidly and are an increasingly significant force on the urban scene, are entering into productive financial partnerships with private enterprises, government agencies and others.

Foundations concerned with urban problems and issues as well as those involved in providing support for cultural facilities and events, have become investment-minded, but not in the sense of traditional profit making. Rather, they are evaluating their contributions as investments in community and looking for projects that will repay their investments many times over in terms of spin-off improvements in urban amenities, human services, and community development. Foundations are in a good position to seed innovative ideas that the public sector might find too risky or offbeat.

State and regional governments are providing structures for regional cooperation and encouraging neighboring jurisdictions to work together instead of solving problems by creating other problems for neighboring towns. More people are coming to recognize the interdependence of all parts of urban regions. State and regional governments are often an essential source of ideas, technical assistance and funding for community empowerment.

Principles for Stakeholder Engagement

While individual stakeholder engagement strategies will vary in goals and methods, there are several critical principles that should guide any effort to catalyze community participation. While these principles can be challenging to implement, they can make the difference between a project that achieves true community ownership of the initiative and one that fades away from lack of stakeholder support.

- **Involve stakeholders in the planning, not just the doing:** The first time stakeholders in your project hear about your outreach strategy should not be after the plan is fully completed. Engage the stakeholders themselves in all aspects of the design process. Concern about who "owns" the initiative will be an important issue from the start. Involving stakeholders in the planning of the engagement strategy is one of the best ways to establish credibility and send the message that community involvement and participation is important. Beyond the initial design phase, the engagement strategy should continue to include stakeholders in the planning, implementation, and evaluation tasks throughout the initiative.

- **Avoid the "build it and they will come" mentality:** Your engagement strategy needs to be shaped around the natural "contours" of the community in which you will work. For this reason, stakeholders should be engaged on their own terms. Find out what has worked and hasn't worked in the past by talking with a cross section of representatives from different groups and organizations. Even small details like whether meetings are held in the morning or evening can make a big difference. Above all else, ask the stakeholders what works best for them and then plan accordingly.

- **Strive for inclusive engagement:** All communities have divides of race, class, geography and bureaucracy that keep stakeholders from talking to each other—and hence not working collaboratively to solve their problems. One goal of your engagement strategy should be to create a framework for new relationships to develop. Don't just reach out to stakeholders who can "preach to the choir." Reach

out to groups, organizations and institutions with diverse perspectives, even those that don't get along with each other. Otherwise, there is a risk that the initiative will simply become "business as usual" in the community, failing to catalyze true change.

- **Engage the different stakeholders within groups, organizations and institutions:** While the previous principle emphasizes the importance of "horizontal" diversity (diversity across stakeholders) this one stresses the critical nature of "vertical" diversity (diversity within stakeholder groups). Simply because the executive director of the Department of Social Services is at your meeting does not mean the whole organization is involved. Make sure to include front-line workers, street-level bureaucrats, middle managers, and top executives. Many promising initiatives have suffocated in desk drawers because the staff members who had to carry them out were not involved in their planning and development.

- **Fit the strategy to the stakeholders:** In stakeholder engagement, one size does not fit all. For example, the group culture of the local chamber of commerce will probably vary from the way the council of neighborhood associations does business. Some stakeholders may be more comfortable with technical language while others may prefer informal meetings. Learning these differences ensures stakeholders will be engaged in ways that are comfortable and appropriate to them.

- **Go slow to go fast:** At its core, stakeholder engagement is about building relationships between the initiative and the community and among diverse groups, organizations and institutions. This kind of work takes time. Sometimes, "all the talking without any doing" frustrates stakeholders. It is important not to rush into project implementation without first taking the time necessary to build the trust among all involved in the initiative that is so essential to collaboration and consensus-building.

How you act on these principles will vary among stakeholders, projects and communities. However, the basics should always stay the same. An effective engagement strategy should emerge organically through the relationships and partnerships you develop with the stakeholders. Even the most carefully designed process will stumble without a sense of community ownership, stakeholder participation at all stages, and trust among all those involved.

1. **Build Community Capacity**: If you expect stakeholder groups to engage in the often complex and challenging work of consensus building, many will need support in building their basic capacities for collaboration. Fortunately, this also offers a chance to build bridges among all involved. For example, one “start-up” project might be the development of a “neighborhood college” that brings citizens, nonprofits, and private businesses together with the public sector to learn the basics of city government. Such a project builds the capacity of all stakeholders to work together while creating a vehicle (through alumni of the program) for deeper engagement and collaboration.

2. **Create Linkages Among Stakeholders**: Another opportunity for early engagement is for project leaders to play the role of “matchmaker” among local stakeholders. In every community, there are opportunities to bring together stakeholders and existing projects that are a good “fit” but have not connected due to a lack of resources. For example, a consortium of local nonprofits may have a strong set of after school programs for youth, but no connection with the mentoring program established by the chamber of commerce. These linkages can be established with a modest investment of resources while establishing the relationships that can then support more complex projects.

3. **Strengthen Political Will**: In the early stages of stakeholder engagement, one risk is to focus too much on crafting relationships with individual stakeholders and not enough time building the general political will of a community. One way to address this problem is to develop start-up projects that create community conversations about outcomes and accountability that in time create the political will essential for authentic change. Many communities have had success with the use of regular “report cards” for different issues such as local environmental health or youth education. These report cards raise awareness of the issues while at the same time create a constituency for change.

3.1 Thinking Regionally

When embarking upon a local community empowerment effort, collaboration should not be limited to only those individuals and groups who have a vested interest in the immediate area. Region-wide cooperation is a vital ingredient to sustaining a high quality of life throughout all communities.

Many of the hurdles to livability that localities face are solved only on a regional scale. These include unmanaged growth (sprawl), lack of affordable housing, uncoordinated transportation systems, disparities in tax bases, duplication or other inefficiencies in government services, an imbalance between jobs and available housing, environmental protection, and concentrations of poverty. Regionalism is a tool for bringing political or economic resources together to solve problems or capitalize on opportunities that cannot be handled within neighborhoods, towns, or cities. Local communities within regions rise or fall together: that a community's health is inextricably related to events that take place outside its borders is a central fact of urban life in America today.

Crossing the Line: Steps to Regional Cooperation

HOW DOES ONE DEFINE A REGION?

As discussed in section 1.1, regional development strategies are a valuable tool for community empowerment, and over the past few decades, neighborhoods, cities, counties and even states have been coming together more often to solve large-scale problems affecting the wellbeing of their residents. Despite this trend, there is still considerable discrepancy between what exactly "regionalism" is and how one defines a "region." Regions are sometimes identified by economic factors. The desire to compete in the global economy as one unit and the recognition that revenue sharing can strengthen a region has brought many local entities together. Regions are also defined by a sense of identity: shared history, culture or environmental conditions. More recently, regions are being defined by efforts to plan sustainable growth that will preserve open space and foster livable communities. "Regions," notes former Rochester Mayor William Johnson, "are the smallest scale at which it is possible to capture most of the key labor and revenue flows and meaningfully resolve problems in an integrated fashion. At the same time, the region may be the largest geographical unit that people can grasp and around which they can come together."[9]

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF REGIONALISM

Operating on a regional scale is not a feat cities and suburbs can achieve overnight. It is usually necessary to start with small projects and collaborations, slowly building a mindset in which regionalism becomes a natural approach. The basic steps to functioning as a region are as follows:

1. **Regions need new leaders and new roles for traditional leaders**: Local entities, such as municipal governments or community-based organizations, many times do not have a vested interest—or lack the time, mandate or region-wide access—to address problems that either emanate from outside their borders, or require resources not locally available. Working regionally may require bringing in new players, such as the private sector, foundations, faith-based organizations, colleges and universities, and cultural institutions. Look to government as a resource, but look to the community for leaders.

2. **Regions need strong cores**: Successful downtowns help to further define regional identity and can serve as a uniting element, pulling all communities together around a strong urban core. Strengthening the core includes empowering groups that have traditionally felt disenfranchised and fear further loss of power in a wider regional agenda.

3. **Regional success depends upon self-interest, not charity**: Take an inventory of your region. Different interests in a region need to determine what they can give and take from each other. Regional efforts begin with a comprehensive overview of the area's assets and problems, and the different organizations and resources being used to address them.

4. **Involve every community**: At the root of any successful regional effort lies a process that involves residents from every community in the planning and decision-making. Thriving regions are made up of strong neighborhoods, each of which bring resources to the table; be sure that all are on board.

5. **Boundaries don't matter but places do**: Develop and articulate a regional identity. Inventory your culture, history and economic interdependence to define a common regional identity. Be sure to include residents from diverse areas and backgrounds in this conversation. If individuals within a region feel they can rally behind a common identity, there will be much more energy and support for strengthening regional ties and creating new programs.

6. **Regionalism needs a multi-pronged agenda**: Identify your region's priorities and then adopt multiple simultaneous and complementary strategies to address them. Engage an array of organizations to tackle many regional obstacles rather than addressing issues one at a time. Housing, health care, and education, for example, can often be improved through complementary policies that recognize the connections among them.

7. **Regions are full-service communities**: Think long-term. Regions should help to sustain us at every age, and in every aspect of life. Regional strategies must address the needs of aging adults, young children, and ensure a livable region for those in-between.

8. **Communication is key**: Generating public and private support is vital. Make sure that projects are easily and frequently explained. Input and feedback from the public should not be solicited in the last phases of planning. Residents must be engaged in every step of the process.

9. **Regionalism is a continual process**: Allow for changes in goals, leadership and efforts. One of the keys to success is to constantly involve new people and groups. Any action plan should be flexible enough for transitions in leadership and reevaluations of priorities and strategies.

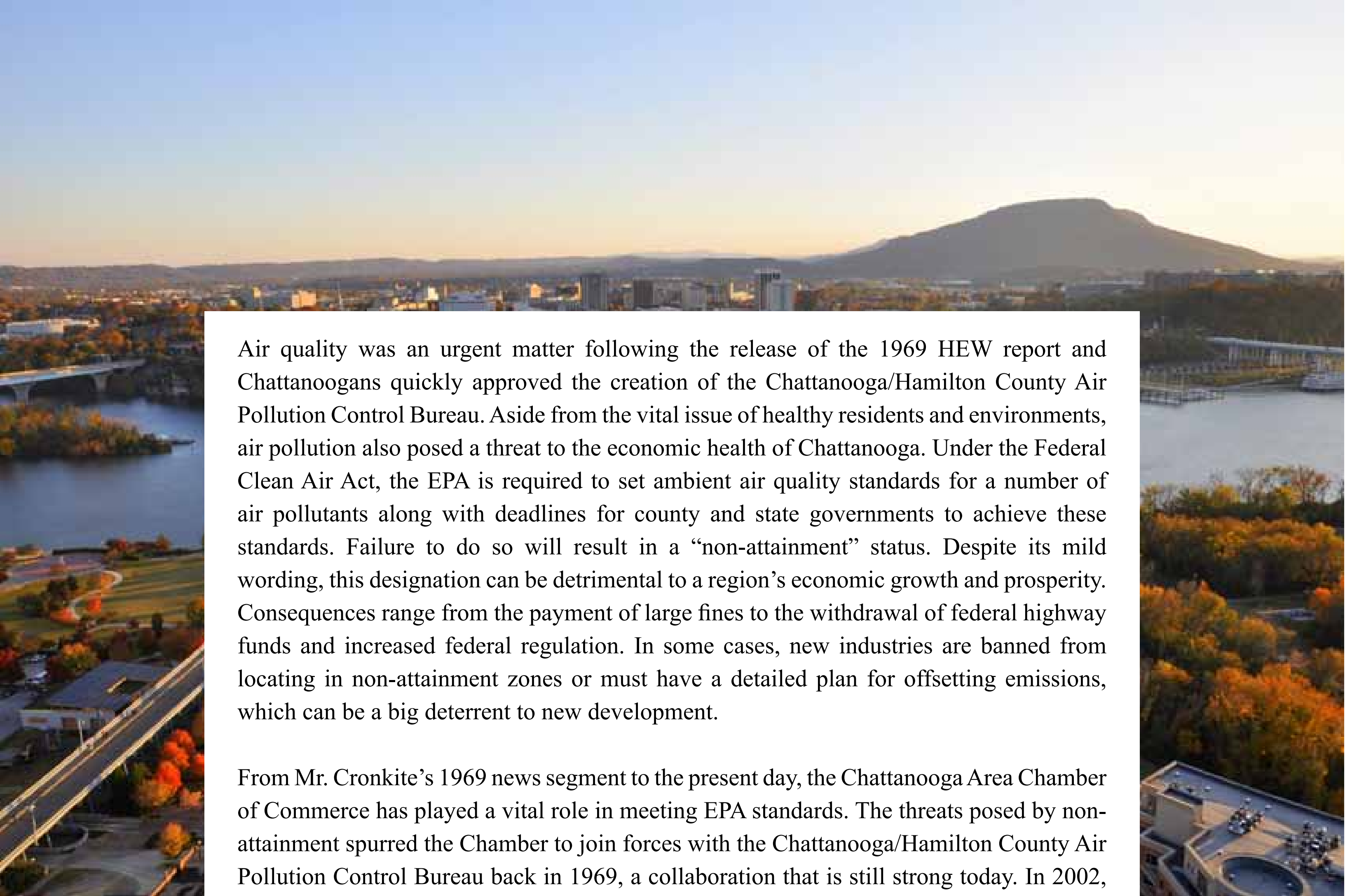
10. **No one governing system is right for all**: What works for one region will not guarantee success in another. Regions can learn from one another but each region needs to go through the process of mapping resources, defining goals and identity, and involving residents.

Most importantly, efforts to encourage a regional mindset should be approached positively. When first broaching the topic with local organizations and institutions do not, for example, appeal for city-suburb cooperation with the message that "if we go down so will you." This is likely to turn off potential regional partners. Appeals based on the abstract notion that the city and region are a single socioeconomic unit are also unlikely to inspire regional cooperation. Rather, engage suburban residents and government officials with constructive messages about the city's role in regional quality of life. Highlighting the city's sports facilities, museums and other cultural resources, its great neighborhoods, and its central location will best motivate leaders throughout the region to become partners in city-suburb programs.

Take a page from their book:

Chattanooga, Tennessee

During an evening news broadcast in 1969, Walter Cronkite announced to a national audience the most polluted city in all 50 states. A report released that January from the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) named Chattanooga, Tennessee, the most heavily polluted city in the country. As a major industrial center, the city had some of the highest concentrations of particulates ever recorded; material from factory smokestacks and trains often caused smog so thick drivers were forced to flick on their headlights in broad daylight. In the four decades since, Chattanooga has relinquished its grimy throne to become a city known for its high quality of life, healthy environment, and bustling economy—a feat that would not have been possible without the leadership of a strong business community.



Air quality was an urgent matter following the release of the 1969 HEW report and Chattanoogans quickly approved the creation of the Chattanooga/Hamilton County Air Pollution Control Bureau. Aside from the vital issue of healthy residents and environments, air pollution also posed a threat to the economic health of Chattanooga. Under the Federal Clean Air Act, the EPA is required to set ambient air quality standards for a number of air pollutants along with deadlines for county and state governments to achieve these standards. Failure to do so will result in a "non-attainment" status. Despite its mild wording, this designation can be detrimental to a region's economic growth and prosperity. Consequences range from the payment of large fines to the withdrawal of federal highway funds and increased federal regulation. In some cases, new industries are banned from locating in non-attainment zones or must have a detailed plan for offsetting emissions, which can be a big deterrent to new development.

From Mr. Cronkite's 1969 news segment to the present day, the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce has played a vital role in meeting EPA standards. The threats posed by non-attainment spurred the Chamber to join forces with the Chattanooga/Hamilton County Air Pollution Control Bureau back in 1969, a collaboration that is still strong today. In 2002, the two organizations teamed up to submit an Early Action Compact to the EPA. This voluntary program provided a flexible approach to reducing pollution in which potential non-attainment designations that were to be given in 2004 were deferred, as long as all communities met agreed upon milestones by 2007. Through the Chamber's work with local businesses to implement voluntary emission reduction measures, Chattanooga easily met all EPA markers by the December 31, 2007, deadline.

With the path cleared for new businesses to settle in the region, the Chattanooga Area Chamber has dedicated a great deal of effort to attracting major clean energy industries. Focused on firms involved in the manufacturing of hydroelectric power, wind energy, LNG (liquefied natural gas), hydrogen fuel cells, geothermal and other related energy sources, the Chamber recognizes that these industries not only provide jobs and a clean source of energy, but most are clean manufacturing operations that will not harm local air quality. Volkswagen is in the process of constructing their first US manufacturing facility in Chattanooga, which will produce low emission vehicles specifically for the North American market. Three leading nuclear power corporations have also recently announced major expansions in the Chattanooga area. The efforts of the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce have allowed the region to thrive economically and shine environmentally. Equipped with a dedicated business community and strong collaborations throughout the region, Chattanooga can breathe easy while continuing its tradition of industrial might.

“**The people who get shaken and moved** need to be around the people who move and shake.”

Chapter 4:

VISION

Visioning, also referred to as goal setting or strategic planning, is a process by which a community envisions the future it wants and creates a plan of action to achieve that future. Every resident has a vision of his or her community, a vision that is often influenced by personal expectations and always shaped by personal experience. The public participation component of a community empowerment effort is successful to the degree that it turns individual visions into a collective community vision. The work of drafting the collective vision is done by the leadership group, and its staff and consultants. A community vision is generally expressed as a series of shared goals, which address and recognize—holistically—the interconnections among economic, social and environmental conditions.

A community vision will generally formulate goals relating to education, effective community leadership, human relations, parks and open space, transportation, growth management, economic development, housing and cultural amenities.

The importance of formalizing the community's collective vision cannot be overstated. A collective vision can give the community a focus that makes realistic planning possible. Absent a collective vision and with the community's independent competing visions—each based on the needs and hopes of a specific segment of the community—the development and implementation of workable plans is decidedly difficult.

The essential tasks of the visioning process are threefold:

1. **Learn** what people want and need.

2. **Determine** what human and physical resources the community has that can help (or human and physical problems that can hinder) in the attainment of what people want and need.

3. **Weld** wants and means into a single, if multifaceted, vision or strategic plan for the community as a whole.

To get a community change process off on the right foot, it is often advisable to also come up with a broadly appealing idea about where the community is going—a flagship idea—that can move the community to action and keep it together.

The Elements of a Vision

A community vision is an expression of the community's shared goals. **A true and workable vision is**:

- Inclusive
- Holistic
- Community-driven
- Action-oriented

Aim for a vision that is inclusive, holistic, community-driven, and can be implemented quickly.

A VISION MUST BE INCLUSIVE

The visioning process must seek out and involve all members of the community, including people who tend to be isolated and effectively disenfranchised, who tend to live beyond the confines of the civic dialog. Inclusion brings the knowledge and resources of many different constituencies into the process. It also arouses the goodwill of residents and creates ownership of the vision and its goals. People with a sense of ownership, in turn, tend to support initiatives and projects that are needed to implement the vision and together they produce a strong sense of community identity that gives the ongoing decision-making process needed consistency and continuity. "How inclusive?" is a legitimate question. Asking everyone's opinion is an unrealistic approach and asking no one—the power broker model—is an unworkable one. Somewhere in between an exhaustive process and no process is the right answer. John Krauss, a senior fellow at Indiana University, said of the needed balance: "The people who get shaken and moved need to be around the people who move and shake."[10]

A VISION MUST BE HOLISTIC

A vision must deal with all areas of concern to the community's residents—economic development, job creation, the environment, education, social life, crime, traffic, recreation, and other factors that have an important bearing on the quality of life in the community. A comprehensive vision, achieved through an open process, will provide a complete picture of the needs and aspirations of the community. This picture will also show how the community's various problems are linked—that problems and solutions do not fit into neat professional, bureaucratic or geographic categories.

A VISION MUST BE COMMUNITY-DRIVEN

The steering committee(s) that leads the initial visioning process and the subsequent implementation phase must reflect the community's economic, social, and ethnic makeup. It must include leaders from the public sector, leaders from the private sector, local business and professional people, and spokespersons for the community's residents. For any project or empowerment campaign to be successful, the community must have a strong sense of ownership over the initiative. Outside experts or consultants cannot be the driving force behind a major agenda.

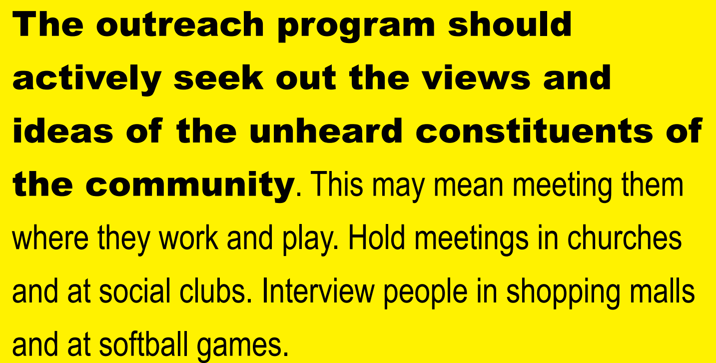
A VISION MUST LEAD SEAMLESSLY TO ACTION

No hard and fast line separates goal setting from implementation in the visioning process. While strategic planning is still underway, work with local government to line up some actions in advance that will prove the "success" of the process. Find ways to act quickly on some of the goals that emerge from the visioning process. Implementation gives momentum to the process that can help carry it through the long term. People will not contribute time and energy to develop a vision that bears no fruit in the first 25 years, but a vision that bears fruit within the first two years (and periodically thereafter) energizes people for the long haul.

The Flagship Idea: A Mission Statement

A flagship idea is essentially a slogan on which a campaign for change can be based and a way to motivate leadership and energize communities. It often happens that the community visioning process succeeds in identifying problems, finding resources, and setting achievable goals while it fails to articulate a theme around which the community can coalesce. In this case, the process may produce long-term goals that are both realistic and potentially efficacious, but can struggle to rally the community to action. In either case, coming up with a broadly appealing idea about where the community is going can provide the needed spark. A flagship idea can also provide the glue that a community change process needs to keep from fragmenting as time goes on and difficulties are encountered.

Be creative, solicit ideas, and spend time in coming up with (and marketing) a flagship idea that will inspire the community. It must state a goal that bridges all the key issues identified in the visioning process, and it must be achievable. The flagship idea is usually a simple but powerful statement that expresses where the community wants to be or what it wants to be at some point in time that is as many as 20 years in the future. The idea should be straightforward, inspirational and memorable. "A regional center for high-tech industry" might be one community's flagship idea. "A livable community and a good place to raise children" might be another's.



Outreach

Once the need for action is clear, and before any mission statement is crafted, the ideas of all the affected residents and parties must be heard, considered, and reconciled into the plan for action. The pulse of the community must be taken. Rarely does a plan that is imposed on a community from above succeed. A process of strategically managed citizen participation is best suited to teasing individual visions into the open. Public meetings are important, but usually they are not a subtle enough instrument for taking the pulse of the community. Often, they are not well attended. Formal hearings—which tend to be held at the convenience of city employees at the same time every time (usually around 7:30 p.m.) and in the same place (usually a civic building)—attract the usual suspects. At that hour, the people who turn out are the people who always turn out, and you know exactly what they are going to say. They are generally filled with hostility and are the persistent, chronic critics of civic action—the civically obsessed. The outreach program should actively seek out the views and ideas of the unheard constituents of the community. This may mean meeting them where they work and play. Hold meetings in churches and at social clubs. Interview people in shopping malls and at softball games.

For the sake of efficiency, the process of gathering constituents' ideas and opinions needs to be focused. However, it is usually not useful to begin with a community-wide survey, which is a big-ticket item. At the beginning of the empowerment process, apathy is likely to be the most common attitude among community residents. The goal of the outreach program is not to measure this attitude but to change it. Like money, which will come along when good ideas need it, ideas will develop when a good outreach program is put into effect.

EFFECTIVE OUTREACH METHODS

Among the potentially effective methodologies for getting the community to generate ideas are focus groups, goal committees, resource teams, and community charrettes.

- **Focus Groups**: The focus group technique, which is borrowed from marketing, can yield valuable and representative information on the public's attitudes in a short time (and at a much lower cost than surveys). A focus group is made up of four to 12 individuals chosen to represent a certain constituency or constituencies. The group meets with a professional facilitator for a limited period of time, which may be no more than an hour, to provide ideas and opinions on a tightly focused topic. The facilitator explains the purpose of the group, assures the group that all contributions will be taken seriously, and gives everyone the chance to talk and be heard.

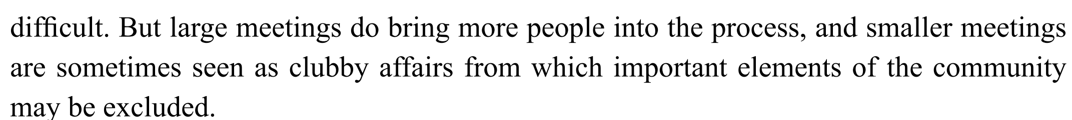
- **Goal Committees**: A goal committee is a representative committee formed to consider a specific proposed undertaking, for example, a government complex in Fontana, California. In 1990, a team of facilitators worked with a group of 300 people to consider the design and program elements of a proposed new government center on a new site. The committee included people who are not normally represented in public hearings and forums. It produced an agenda for a government center that included the following elements: a city hall, a botanical garden, a magnet educational complex, a health care service center, an excellent restaurant, and public transportation access.

- **Resource Teams**: For specific issues like downtown economic development or reclaiming the waterfront, it is sometimes useful to bring in teams of experts—resource teams—to educate groups on possible approaches and cutting-edge techniques, to lead discussions on the issue, thus stimulating the creative juices of community leaders and residents.

- **Community Charrettes**: A charrette is an example of an event that makes participation fun—and thus attracts participation. In 1989, the city of Brea, California, staged a Brea by Design charrette to solicit ideas for the renewal of its 23-acre downtown area. Over a full weekend, trained civic facilitators led brainstorming sessions that elicited the views of thousands of residents. Not much later, a consensus on goals for the renewal area was reached in a process that also made use of public access TV and involved political leaders. A renewal plan was prepared and implemented through the solicitation of private development.

Meetings

For most strategic planning initiatives, public participation centers on meetings where planning ideas are presented and the public's input and reactions are solicited. Running successful meetings is both an art and a science worth learning. Larger meetings are harder to run than smaller meetings, and making decisions with a greater number of attendees is



difficult. But large meetings do bring more people into the process, and smaller meetings are sometimes seen as clubby affairs from which important elements of the community may be excluded.

RUNNING PRODUCTIVE AND EFFICIENT MEETINGS

Any group discussion presents three management challenges: keeping the meeting on schedule, keeping it on track and focused, and resolving differences. Creating session management teams for key meetings will help ensure these meetings are efficient and productive. A well-planned agenda is the foundation of any successful meeting, while meeting logistics—physical arrangements, equipment, amenities—are also important factors.

In many ways, planning a participatory meeting is like planning a party. The initial considerations may be thought of as a series of questions also asked by party planners. For what purpose will the meeting be held? When will it be? Where will it be? Who will be invited? What activities will take place? A meeting differs from the usual party, however, in that it has specific objectives: an agenda to discuss, a goal to accomplish, and decisions to be made.

THE AGENDA

It is hard to hold a productive meeting of any kind without at least an informal agenda. For large meetings with audience participation, an agenda is essential. The crucial elements of an agenda include the following:

- Date, time, and place
- The meeting's sponsor(s) and, if it is a part of a series of meetings, its identification
- The topic(s) to be presented and the key questions that the meeting's sponsor/organizer wants to make certain are covered

- The objective(s), such as to identify community problems that need solving
- The hoped-for product(s), such as a prioritized list of community problems

The agenda also should allocate a defined amount of time for each topic or task. In planning a meeting, how much time is needed for different parts of the agenda should be determined—for example, 60 percent for presentation, 15 percent for Q&A, and 25 percent for workgroup discussions. In the printed agenda, the actual times should be provided—for example, presentation 10 a.m., Q&A 11 a.m., workgroup discussions 11:15 a.m., full group discussion 11:45 a.m., and adjournment 12 p.m.

MEETING LOGISTICS

Choice of meeting location rests on a number of considerations: who will be at the meeting (a neighborhood meeting should be held in the neighborhood), who is sponsoring the meeting (a government or a corporate sponsor may have access to its own meeting space), and how much rent expense is covered in the budget. The number of participants will influence the seating arrangements, while the seating arrangements will influence the nature of the meeting. In an auditorium with rows of seats facing a stage or speakers platform, the discussion tends to be controlled and not spontaneous, while people seated in a small circle tend to engage in less structured give-and-take.

The more participants there are in a meeting, the more important it is to structure and manage the discussion. If having a free-wheeling discussion is desirable but the group is large, consider breaking the meeting up into small workgroups and reconvening as a full group to hear and discuss workgroup reports. Many other logistical details are involved in planning a successful meeting, from equipment needed (such as a computer, sound system, easels and flipcharts, projector and screen) to materials (handouts, maps and other visuals, questionnaires), refreshments and other supplies (coffee, soft drinks, snacks, pencils, paper), and registration needs (sign-in sheets, name tags). Some meetings may involve touring sites or visiting people off site, which can necessitate transportation arrangements.

THE SESSION MANAGEMENT TEAM

For important, difficult or large public meetings, it is usually advisable to put together a session management team composed of a subject facilitator who is familiar with the issues on the agenda, a process facilitator who knows how to keep a meeting moving smoothly, a scribe, and a prompter who must energize a flagging discussion.

- The **subject facilitator** is a specialist. Each meeting in a series may need a different subject facilitator, for example, a journalist specializing in urban affairs might be the ticket at a meeting to discuss empowerment efforts in other cities

and a foundation fundraiser might facilitate a meeting to discuss financing the community's plans. A subject facilitator needs to understand what the expectations are for the meeting (why it is being held) and to understand that the meeting is just that—a meeting and not an opportunity for a speech. A subject facilitator must be willing to make an opening presentation or to at least contribute his or her special knowledge at appropriate points in the discussion. This person must also work with the rest of the session management team and participate in the post-meeting debriefing.

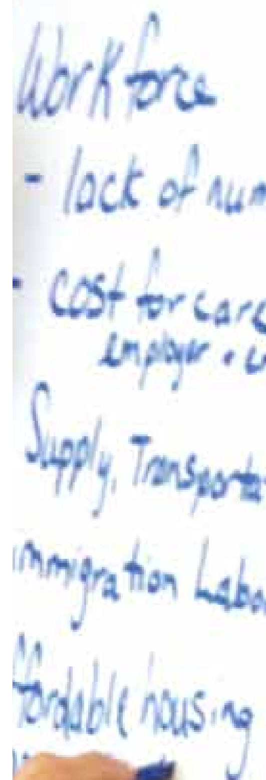
- The **process facilitator** is a specialist in meetings and acts somewhat like an emcee in keeping the discussion within time limits, on the subject, and moving smoothly. But unlike an emcee, a process facilitator is not the star of the event or even an attraction. This role is most notable for its unobtrusiveness. A process facilitator also needs to understand what the expectations are for the meeting (why it is being held). As co-leader of the meeting, the process facilitator makes the meeting work—makes sure that everyone participates, keeps any one person from dominating the discussion, stimulates the discussion with the right questions and with appropriate summaries, records key points made on flip charts, and keeps an eye on the agenda and the clock.

- The **scribe** is the meeting's recording secretary or reporter. He or she needs to understand why the meeting is being held and should have some general knowledge of the subject to be discussed. The scribe summarizes the discussion, notes where the participants seemed to be either in consensus or in disagreement, and records what the session management team believes to have been the highlights and key points of the meeting as revealed in the session management team's post-meeting debriefing.

- The **prompter** is the session management team's audience plant or shill, the person who is relied on to bring up different ideas and provide new perspectives when the discussion flags or when it is going in the wrong direction. The prompter needs to understand why the meeting is being held and also needs to have a general working knowledge of the topics that will be discussed.

DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

Before a meeting or a series of meetings gets to the heart of the matter(s) under discussion, basic guidelines for the group discussions should be established and communicated to all participants. Having such guidelines helps keep sessions on time and on track, and simplifies the resolution of differences. The following discussion guidelines are illustrative examples, and they may be added to or modified by the meeting's organizers or by the participants at the outset of the meeting. Keep discussion guidelines simple and make sure that everyone understands them.



- **All opinions will be heard and respected**. Everyone is encouraged to participate, to express her or his opinion. No one's opinion will be disregarded or not taken seriously. No one will be laughed at, unless what he or she says is intended to be amusing.

- **No single person or faction will be allowed to monopolize speaking time or discussion time.** Leaving room for everyone to participate is important in a community-wide process.

- **Everyone is responsible for keeping the meeting on time**. No one should take more time than is necessary to make his or her point. No one should waste the meeting's time with frivolous or irrelevant comments.

- **Everyone is responsible for keeping the meeting on track and accomplishing the meeting's goals in the given time frame.** Everyone should be aware that the meeting is for working and not for schmoozing, grandstanding or politicking.

POST-MEETING FOLLOW-UP

Group discussions and focus group sessions are not over as soon as the last participant has left the hall. When the meeting disbands, there is still a lot to do. The most important post-meeting tasks are to hold a debriefing session in which the key points of the discussion are recapitulated and evaluated and to disseminate the results of the meeting.

The session management team and, if possible, the effort's organizers should get together for a debriefing very shortly after the meeting. The purpose of the debriefing is to summarize the discussion's key points and identify areas of consensus and areas of disagreement. The scribe should prepare a session summary sheet based on this recap of the discussion. Include a list of the session's goals, a list of the outcomes of the discussion, and a list of any specific actions that need to be taken, along with deadlines. Such lists simplify the task of following up on agreed actions.

The sharing of the results of the meeting is very important. If people feel that the effort they made to contribute their two-cents worth simply vanished into a black hole of community participation, they will be reluctant to participate further. A report based on the session summary sheet should be written and disseminated. Many options for dissemination exist. The report can be mailed to all the participants (an option made possible by the availability of a good sign-in sheet) and to other people who request it. The report can be published in local newspapers, newsletters or on a community website. It can be sent to a list of key organizations in the community or sent to news media in the expectation of press and broadcast coverage.

Drafting the Vision and Action Plans

Focus on what is possible: Craft a vision that is rooted in the needs of the community and based on its assets and strengths.

ASSESSING PROBLEMS, ASSETS, AND PRIORITIES

After outreach efforts have brought the right people to the table, a first step in any community visioning process is to identify local problems, assets, and priorities. This initial discussion should include local residents, stakeholders, and occasionally outside consultants. Bringing in an outside professional as a pair of fresh eyes can be helpful, as communities sometimes overlook their assets—location advantages, cultural or historic resources, labor force skills, and so forth—because they take them for granted. Likewise, they sometimes miss opportunities because they prefer to do things the way they've always been done. Remember, however, that outside consultants do not live in the community and are on short-term assignments; in other words, they are not real players in the process.

During this phase of the visioning process, participants should identify:

- **Problems**: What problems do we face in our community? What are the pressing needs?
  Examples include:
  - Lack of affordable housing options
  - Concentrated poverty
  - A stagnant local economy
  - Poor design: sprawling suburban areas; a lack of quality public spaces
  - A shortage of cultural attractions
  - Inefficient transportation systems
  - Deficiencies in social services or educational opportunities

- **Assets**: What do we love about our community? What resources are available?
  Examples include:
  - Popular public spaces such as parks, gardens, courtyards, or trails
  - Cultural assets such as museums, theaters, performing arts halls, libraries, and art centers
  - Public transportation systems
  - Organizations such as community development corporations, youth groups, social service groups, environmental organizations, and other nonprofits
  - Local events such as art festivals, music concerts, and sporting events
  - Social capital assets such as universities, colleges, and job training programs

- **Priorities**: Which of the identified problems is the most pressing? What issues should we dedicate local resources to first?

Developing the Plans

Once the community has identified local needs, existing assets, and its goals and priorities for the future, plans must be developed before action can be taken. Planning for community empowerment has three initial components—the long-range strategic plan, an initial five-year business plan, and an initial one-year investment plan.

THE LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN

The long-range strategic plan should look 20 years or more into the future. It is important to build flexibility into the plan, so that it can accommodate unexpected changes in basic conditions—like the economy or transportation—without having to be completely rethought. Ideally, the long-range plan prioritizes the needs and goals that emerged from the visioning process. The most pressing issues should be flagged as needing to receive immediate attention. The long-range plan should set benchmarks against which progress can be measured. Benchmarks are a baseline measurement of certain conditions that the plan sets out to improve—such as job creation rates, commute times, air quality, school dropout rates, tax rates, and the like. Several years down the line, a comparison of conditions now with conditions then, across one or more benchmarks, provides a measure of progress under the plan. Where the plan's implementation has produced notable achievements, these should be widely publicized to further solidify community support for the empowerment effort. Where results have fallen short of goals, reasons should be sought and any necessary adjustments made to the plan.

THE FIVE-YEAR BUSINESS PLAN

Determining which goals will be achieved in the first five years, the five-year business plan introduces an element of strategic action to the empowerment process. The items included in the business plan can be presented to the local government(s) as action steps that need executive or legislative sponsorship and funding. At this point, one of the advantages of having key civic actors in the empowerment process from the beginning becomes clear. If the actors with the resources to actually undertake programs and projects have developed a sense of ownership in the vision, they generally will be willing to commit resources to specific programs that contribute to the attainment of the vision. A five-year business plan should be created with the same degree of professionalism as a corporate management strategy. It should include the first half-decade of investment, changes and flagship projects needed to affect the long-term 20-year agenda. It should include leadership training, organizational development, campaigns, public relations, communications, planning, and fundraising goals to lay the infrastructure for achieving the long-term 20-year agenda.

ONE-YEAR INVESTMENT PLAN

Just as the five-year business plan is a way to actualize some of the goals in the strategic plan, the one-year investment plan is a way to actualize the specific actions called for in the five-year plan. The investment plan sets aside specific resources and assigns responsibility for specific actions. The investment plan schedules regular events and small-scale projects, and celebrates success to show citizens that change is happening. Individuals should be hired to work on specific tasks and build the credibility of the plan so that more structured implementation can occur in the time ahead.

Without signs of progress, it will be impossible to build up support for the empowerment effort within the community at large. Make sure that the community empowerment program is designed to achieve some visible results—the more the merrier—in its early stages and from time to time down the road as the community executes its long-term strategy for renewal. Tackle easy projects first and choose initial projects with care.

FOLLOW THROUGH AND FOLLOW UP

Don't just put this plan up on a shelf. Creating a community vision should be an on-going planning process. No one vision is set in stone and the act of refining specific goals and priorities will help keep enthusiasm levels high and aid a smooth transition into the action phases of your project. Don't be afraid to change course or modify your objectives. Continually reassess!

“We can do this.”

Chapter 5:

ACTION

In Partners for Livable Communities' long experience, the most successful community empowerment campaigns have many of the characteristics of entrepreneurial undertakings. They are action-oriented, competitive, mission-driven, focused on results, market-oriented and community-owned. Why does such an approach work so well?

These characteristics allow the campaign to be dynamic and to hold the community accountable, thereby sustaining the community's vision and commitment and maintaining a high level of across-the-board participation.

As a matter of fact, one campaign or leadership group, even one with a broad base in the community, cannot usually accomplish the overall goal of community empowerment single-handedly. Like any good entrepreneurs, community empowerment campaigns will expand their capabilities through partnerships. They may partner with public or private entities, with organizations with important resources to contribute to the effort, with groups in neighboring jurisdictions that share the same problems, and with regional entities.

WORK FROM SOLID PLANNING

The goals and strategies created by your community during the visioning process should serve as a road map for the action phase of your empowerment campaign. The long-range strategic plan provides a steady guide for all action steps throughout the following years, ensuring they contribute to the community's overall vision of its future. Your first steps, however, should be small-scale, short-term projects that break up long-term goals into doable steps. These first action plans should be based on the players and resources available to your community at the time; they should identify the range of tasks in any project, specify who will carry out these tasks, and provide timetables for when work should be done.

Use the skills within your community.

- Play to your strengths. What do members of your group do well? If they have special skills or interests that they don't fully use in their everyday work, put them to work!
- Event planning experience, public relations skills, graphic design skills, and many other special abilities can be put to good use for the first project.

On a broader level, the community as a whole may have a particular asset that you would want to capitalize on for your project.

AGREE ON PRIORITY NEEDS

During the visioning process, your community discussed assets, problems, and priorities. Using the information gathered during this conversation, revisit the issue of local priorities to determine a good first project. Often, leaders from various backgrounds and fields of expertise can agree fairly quickly on the most important community needs, such as housing affordability, public transportation, and the accessibility of community services. These priority needs can form a framework for identifying productive first steps.

DEFINE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The leadership body of your community empowerment campaign, which should have been established before the visioning process, plays a vital role in the action stage of the campaign. The leadership group will serve as the decision maker and coordinator of action steps, large and small. This is not to say they will impose ultimatums without community input, but rather will ensure the division of responsibilities and follow-through from those charged with tasks. The leadership body is accountable to the community for achieving the goals set in place during the visioning process.

In order to make good decisions and assign tasks appropriately, the leadership body must have good information and advice, close ongoing ties with the larger community, and a strong web of relationships with the community's various social networks. This requires consistent attention to the "pulse" of the community through interactions with different parts of the community – such as its neighborhoods, business groups, and service providers. This kind of informal, ongoing input keeps the leadership body's work anchored in the on-the-ground realities of the community. As explained in Chapter 3, the leadership group should be made up of community members who are diverse geographically, economically, racially, and socially; you need ambassadors from various parts of the community to get and relay accurate, helpful input.

TACKLE EASY PROJECTS FIRST

The best way to move participants from visioning and planning into action is to develop short-term projects that can be completed within three to six months. These first accomplishments have a large impact:

- They allow campaign participants to feel a sense of accomplishment: “We can do this!”
- They provide marketable victories to showcase to the community, demonstrating the progress being made.
- They enable leadership bodies and other project team members to become accustomed to working together as a group and iron out wrinkles in communication on a smaller scale.
- They build the capacity of participants to plan for longer-term projects and goals.
- They build trust among stakeholders, setting the foundation for deeper partnerships.

Culture and Community Renewal

Partners has found that “culture” offers an easy, high-impact jumping off point for action in community empowerment programs. As economist and dean of the UCLA School of Planning and Architecture Harvey Perloff has said, culture broadly defined includes gospel choirs, zoos, parks, historic preservation boards, sewing circles, basketball leagues, and any other form of activity in which what counts is quality rather than quantity.[11]

Partners considers a community’s physical setting—land use patterns, urban design, and open space—to be a cultural resource. No matter how good your performing arts are, if getting to them requires going through sprawl and ugly strip development, your cultural profile is diminished. Air quality and water quality are also cultural issues. The Sierra Club, the Trust for Public Land and the Isaac Walton League are cultural organizations.

Cultural programs make good groundbreakers in community empowerment efforts. They offer relatively easy opportunities for success in settings that are fun. Arts programs introduce people to people, often in ways that put people with needs in touch with people with relevant resources that would otherwise remain undiscovered.

Arts and cultural activities are excellent tools for learning important life skills. They can provide training in conflict resolution. They can teach basic skills, including discipline and decision making. They can instill a belief in one’s self and in one’s possibilities. Arts programs have proven to be an especially effective way of working with young people, who are less inhibited than adults about engaging in artistic and cultural activities. They

can encourage youth to avoid drug-related activity. Arts programs that engage young people often translate into lower school dropout rates and more interest in pursuing higher education. In addition to their success with youth, arts and cultural activities have also proved useful in working with people with disabilities, the elderly, and the homeless.

Cultural resources can be an effective means of strengthening community. They can help build a sense of shared identity or rootedness in neighborhoods where this sentiment may have eroded. Group projects (painting a mural, for example), community involvement in the design of capital improvements, and neighborhood celebrations help create ownership in and commitment to the community. The establishment of community resource centers provides neutral meeting space for residents. Artistic expression—acting, music, and painting—can offer safe avenues of communication between groups and individuals who have not communicated well before.

Cultural resources can provide information about ethnic and other groups that can be helpful in overcoming prejudices. Artistic representations of culture are generally nonthreatening, so festivals, performances, and interactive exhibits provide a potentially effective way of addressing racial and ethnic issues and overcoming biases affecting particular populations, such as disabled persons. Oral history projects, hip-hop dance groups, and traditional arts activities have proven useful in restoring a sense of identity to communities of color and low-income groups, which may not see their values and icons reflected in mainstream culture.

Finally, cultural resources can be marshaled to complement economic initiatives. Communities can take advantage of their economic spin-off value (spending, construction, and employment) and training value to boost economic development and employment programs. A community's cultural resources and potential cultural resources should be evaluated in terms of their revenue-generating power, their tourism draw, the jobs and job training that they provide, and their role in business and homeowner retention and attraction.

Accommodating Change

The structure(s) established by a community to direct and manage a vision implementation program has to be capable of creativity in devising means, overcoming obstacles, and coping with change. Equally important, the structure itself must be flexible. Eloise Hirsh, Pittsburgh's planning director thinks "Whatever body there is, it has to have the capacity to change, or sunset, or do something that reflects the changing reality."[12] Chattanooga Venture, for example, was established largely as an incubator that could offer budding endeavors a safe place in which to grow while they were still fragile. Created in 1984, Chattanooga Venture was a nonprofit organization that not only supported new programs

but also provided a channel for citizen participation in envisioning the city's future. Since that time, many strong organizations have emerged, including Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprise (affordable housing), River City (economic development), Neighborhood Network, and a revitalized chamber of commerce. The city's visioning process and Chattanooga Venture produced new and revitalized institutions, active neighborhoods, and a government that is oriented to community needs—that is, a community as a whole that takes care of itself. In the end, the strength of a vision lies in the spirit it instills and the forces it awakens within the community. Inevitably, those forces will transcend the structure(s) designed to foster them and the directors of the visioning process have to be prepared to let them do so. Visioning is not the end-all and be-all. The end goal is having an organized, self-sufficient, self-directed community.

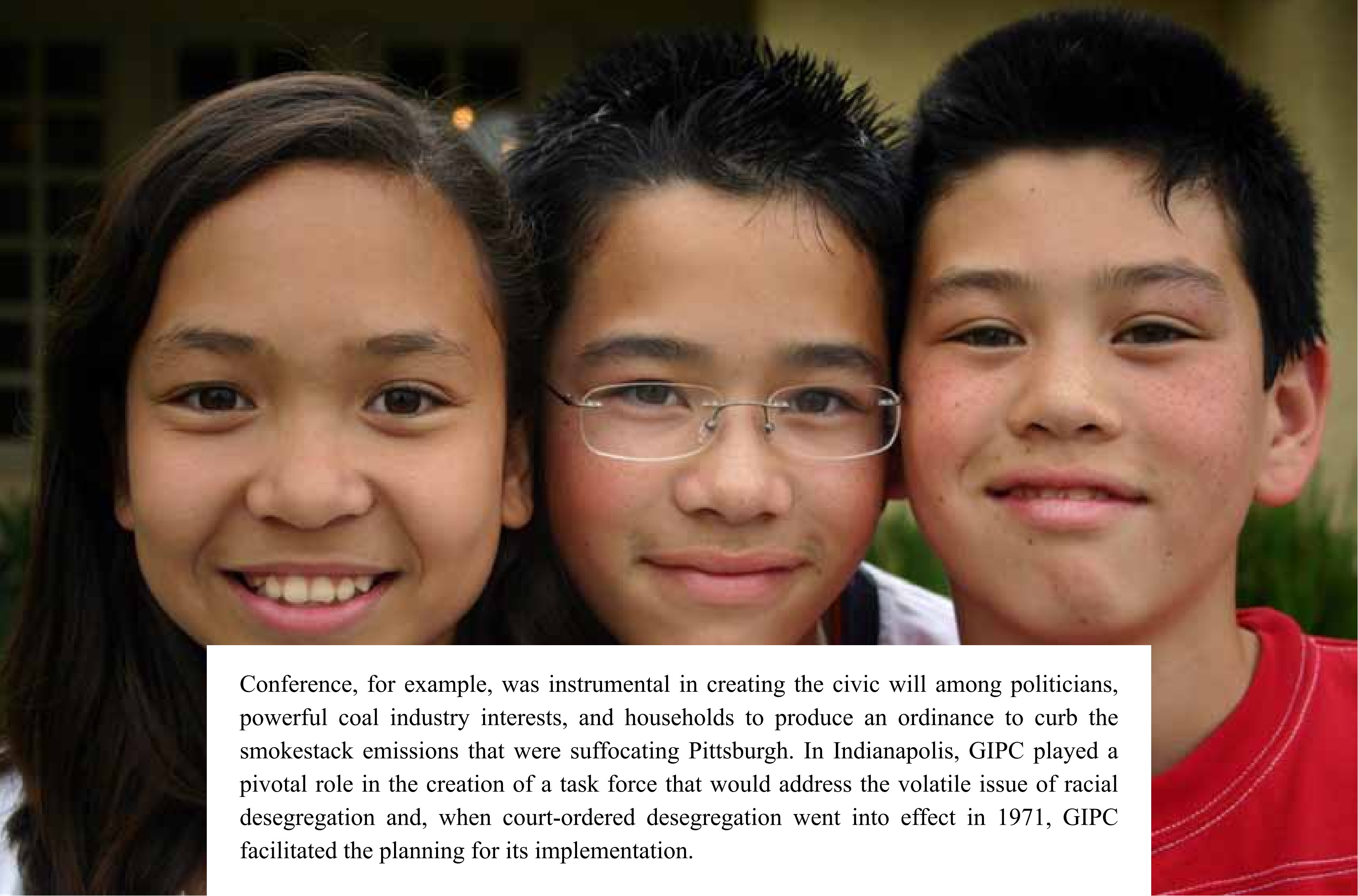
A STEWARDSHIP BODY

To manage the process of ongoing planning or the process of effective reaction to change, communities need a coalition of community voices whose purpose is to speak for the community. Such coalitions have successfully guided many communities through the growing pains that often accompany change, for example the Allegheny Conference in the Pittsburgh region (established 1943), the Greater Indianapolis Progress Committee (GIPC) (1965), Richmond Renaissance (1982), and Chattanooga Venture (1984). Partners calls such a coalition a "stewardship body."

A stewardship body's basic orientation as a forum distinguishes it from a change agent, which is created to perform specific tasks (see below). Rarely is the stewardship body directly responsible for action. It generally sets the stage and motivates the appropriate actors to undertake appropriate initiatives.

In general, a stewardship body has a small five- to seven-person volunteer executive team and a full-time staff numbering less than ten. Its true action element is usually a cadre of volunteers—trustees of community—who serve on committees that address various issues facing the community. The strength of the stewardship body lies in its composition. Its members should represent all significant interests in the community and they should be able to integrate the interests that they represent with a concern for the good of the community as a whole. In creating the stewardship body, ask who must be included to make the empowerment effort succeed.

As a broad-based forum for the articulation of ideas and support of community actions, the stewardship body must be nonpartisan and apolitical. It must not be made responsible for carrying out—or even establishing—a political agenda. The stewardship body must remain above the fray of politics, which will allow it to tackle difficult, politically sensitive issues. In situations where political considerations are hampering community leaders from tackling difficult issues, a stewardship body is often able to help build the consensus for a bold action or at least to provide the forum for addressing such issues. The Allegheny



Conference, for example, was instrumental in creating the civic will among politicians, powerful coal industry interests, and households to produce an ordinance to curb the smokestack emissions that were suffocating Pittsburgh. In Indianapolis, GIPC played a pivotal role in the creation of a task force that would address the volatile issue of racial desegregation and, when court-ordered desegregation went into effect in 1971, GIPC facilitated the planning for its implementation.

Its broad base of community leaders gives a stewardship body a great deal of power. Often such coalitions lack a bureaucratic structure, which leads some people to call them "phantom" organizations. For many communities hoping to gain control over their future, a stewardship body contributes a community-wide perspective, community participation, nonpartisan oversight, and balance to the process. It also provides consistent leadership over time, unlike political administrations, and thus can provide continuity in long-term community undertakings, such as a 20-year plan.

CHANGE AGENTS

In contrast to a stewardship body, a change agent is directly responsible for ensuring action following the visioning process. After a long, intensive, and exhilarating visioning process, public agencies, nonprofits, service-providers, citizens and other participants are often too tired or too excited to concentrate on the specifics of administering implementation of the vision while the momentum is still strong. What is needed in this situation is an organization to follow up, to function as a change agent.

A change agent is an entity that is responsible for following up on short-term "doables" in the strategic plan. While an existing organization or an amalgamation of existing organizations can serve as the agent, it's preferable to create a new entity. Starting from scratch in this context can help ensure the change agent is focused solely on delivering

the agreed upon community vision, rather than incorporating their own agendas. The feasibility of establishing such an organization should be examined early on in the community empowerment process. To create a community vision without having sufficient resources to establish an entity that will help deliver it is a waste of money and civic capital.

Be responsive and accountable to the community: Continuously ask citizens what their priorities and needs are and assess the vision's effectiveness in meeting them. Keep residents informed of progress along the way to maintain support and enthusiasm for the project.

Having a change agent provide day-to-day oversight of the plan adds an important element of flexibility to the plan's implementation. Based on an ongoing evaluation of plan actions as they are undertaken, the change agent can subtly influence the direction of future efforts. Community change is a fluid process that can benefit from the lessons taught by successes and failures. In learning by doing, the community can sharpen its vision—moving forward when actions show promise and pulling back when little support materializes.

Change agents usually take the shape of a nonprofit public/private venture with a specific mission and staffed by professionals whose jobs depend on how successful they are in implementing the mission rather than on the ballot box. Though it's not always possible, the change agent should be staffed with, or at least in connection with, high-powered members of the community. Individuals that are able to raise financial resources and encourage participation from influential stakeholders in the community are necessary to moving the vision from paper into action.

In many cases, what Partners calls "**animation authorities**" make effective change agents. An animation authority has a single, if multifaceted, charge: to make its area—usually a downtown—more vital, more lively, and more secure. Urban change agents include the following and any action-oriented groups funded by them: business or special improvement districts, Main Street programs, and responsible hospitality zones. Examples include the Downtown Dayton Partnership (funded primarily by a special improvement district to provide business development, advocacy and marketing) and Protect San Jose (a collaborative effort of the San Jose Police Officers' Association along with neighborhood and community leaders to promote safety).

A long-term strategy cannot be executed without the continued interest and involvement of the community, which is why Partners emphasizes the importance of issue-based and institutionalized leadership (see Chapter 2). Like the plan itself, the leadership structure must be dynamic. Community leaders should never stop planning. Continually reassess goals and programs. Keep asking why you are doing what you are doing. Do not shrink from making alterations to the strategic plan to make it more effective or to rebound from setbacks. There will always be setbacks, which need not derail the process and which, in fact, can provide lessons that will strengthen the process.

Take a page from their book

Change Agents Case Study

By the year 2000 Holyoke, Massachusetts, was starkly divided between the "Old Holyokers" and the new Latino immigrants, and much of the blame for the depressed economy of the region was placed on the newcomers. These socioeconomic and racial dividing lines were sending this former industrial boomtown into rapid decline.

Nuestras Raices was founded in 2004 to stop the downward spiral of pollution, poor economic output, and racial segregation. With the goal of promoting economic, human and community development, Nuestras Raices tapped into the artistic and agricultural heritage of the Puerto Rican community. The organization acquired various plots of land and a 4.5 acre farm—La Tierra de Oportunidades—for the creation of community gardens and farmland. Since these original acquisitions, Nuestras Raices has expanded their garden network to include 26 riverfront acres; renovated a central plaza; built a restaurant, bakery, education center and farm stand; constructed a greenhouse in the city; and built an outdoor stage as a venue for African dance and drumming, Puerto Rican music and arts, and Latin jazz.

Simply describing what the organization has constructed or developed does not fully illustrate the impact that Nuestras Raices has had on the Holyoke community. Before they began their work in 2004, many caucasian residents reported having negative perceptions of the Latino and Puerto Rican community. Through the work of Nuestras Raices, the community now often identifies Latinos as having a strong cultural identity and ties to productive, sustainable agricultural practices. With a network of community gardens and other cultural institutions, Nuestras Raices has created networks of interpersonal relationships that not only cross intergenerational boundaries—allowing the old to pass down their knowledge of rural Puerto Rico to their grandchildren—but also the racial divide in this previously segregated community.

Special Section

Indicators and Benchmarking: Documenting Progress

Indicators as they relate to the community development and planning field are measurements that allow a community to assess their progress in a variety of livability arenas. By applying indicators to elements such as education, health care, employment, civic amenities, and environmental health, communities can more accurately judge their progress in improving local quality of life.

THE USEFULNESS OF INDICATORS

Indicators help communities implement their empowerment strategies in four ways:

1. They can make goals concrete.
2. They can clarify the interconnectivity of problems and solutions in community development.
3. They can help the various elements in a community work independently toward common goals.
4. They can document progress in a quantifiable way.

CLARIFYING CONNECTIONS

The process of defining indicators can be instructive in itself, especially in highlighting the interconnectedness of many elements of community life. This demonstration of interconnectedness constitutes a powerful argument for collaborative approaches to community empowerment. The process of collecting and discussing data itself can shape a community's perception of what is possible and what its future can be.

Seattle's Sustainable Community initiative aims not just at rejuvenating municipal and social service structures but at making them more responsive in the future. The planning effort identified links among indicators from different domains—for example, employment, number of children living in poverty, and land devoted to open space. The identification of links led to the identification of new indicators of sustainability. For example, Seattle tracks employment concentration (a measure of economic diversity), which impacts the ability of the region to weather economic downturns, and the less diverse the economy, the more a

downturn will affect the level of poverty and the region's ability to support environmental protection. The Seattle initiative has made it clear that everyone has a stake—government, businesses, conservationists, and citizens—in the region's economic diversity and quality of life. In this way, it has also made clear that a sustainable future for the region depends on partnerships among diverse stakeholders.

MAKING GOALS CONCRETE

Carrying out a strategic plan for a community's future can seem like an overwhelming task. You have said in your vision statement that you want to focus on livability, to diversify the economy, or to reorient the community's life to the riverfront. But what specifically will you do? How can you go about coordinating the activities of the area's various agencies, institutions, and associations involved in education, social welfare, community development, business promotion, and cultural affairs so that they work (independently) to help carry out the purposes of the plan? One method is to define progress toward the plan's goals in terms of concrete, quantifiable measures—crime rates, hospital admissions, welfare rolls, and so forth.

A plan to improve police-community relations in Long Beach, California, exemplifies the process of translating abstract goals into concrete goals. A wide-ranging effort that included city officials, police officers, community groups, citizens, and business leaders came up with three goals for police-community relations in the city: an overall sense of safety in the community, building trust between the police department and the community, and establishing a cooperative working relationship between the department and the community.

Long Beach was then confronted with a tough question: What specifically should be done to carry out these relatively abstract goals—safety, trust, and cooperation? And how could progress be measured? City officials needed data they did not have. So, drawing on citizen surveys that gauged general feelings about public safety issues, the city defined a number of indicators such as emergency response times, the number of positive stories in the press about the police department, and the number of police field offices. By working to improve the indicators, the city would be taking concrete steps toward achieving the overarching goals in the police-community relations plan. Additionally, the set of indicators represented a to-do list for the whole community.

ENCOURAGING WIDESPREAD ACTIONS TO REACH GOALS

Creating indicators was a key element of the strategic planning process in Noblesville, Indiana. Jim Bray, a community activist from Noblesville, describes another aspect of indicators: they encourage "simultaneous action by disparate groups toward a common

goal."[13] Community empowerment depends on widespread participation, action and leadership at the grassroots. Indicators provide information that neighborhood groups, social service providers or cultural organizations can use to tailor their community improvement efforts to fit within the scheme of a strategic plan.

Directing local actions to contribute to goals for the state as a whole was a key purpose of the Oregon Benchmarks project. "Oregon Benchmarks: Setting Measurable Standards for Progress" states its purpose as follows: "Benchmarks are based on the premise that Oregon will have the best chance of achieving an attractive future if Oregonians agree on where we want to go and then join together to accomplish those goals. By keeping track of whether we are measuring up, we are more likely to sustain the focus and energy that will be required to bring our dreams to fruition."[14]

Since the legislative chartering of the Oregon Progress Board in 1989, the state has had multiple governors and more legislatures. Despite changes in political leadership, the bench marks established by the Oregon Progress Board have enabled a diverse set of citizens, nongovernmental associations, businesses, and government agencies at the state and local level to meet common goals through coordination over decades. Through these efforts, Oregon has been able to improve its economy, increase educational attainment, and improve built infrastructure. For example, vehicle miles traveled (a measure of the efficiency of the road system and quality of public transportation) reached an all time low in 2007.[15] Measuring the progress in achieving these goals has helped to establish the permanence of the state's effort to implement a long-range plan. Likewise, the existence of a highly visible platform of quantified goals has given citizens a way to engage and make a difference. Shared goals and language have made independent efforts collaborative.

DOCUMENTING PROGRESS

While goal setting is a galvanizing force, it can also create a checklist for measuring progress. A growing number of jurisdictions from New York City to Sacramento are starting to tie program dollars to outcome indicators. Budgets are being based not on what was spent last year but on what agencies plan to achieve in the next year.

Funding agencies for community development activities are also making this shift to performance standards, and they are increasingly linking money to system-wide program coordination. Communities looking for funding need to focus less on obtaining discrete funding for various programs and organizations and more on defining target outcomes that rely on collaborative efforts among partners in community development. Funds linked to performance measures can truly empower communities. They can encourage organizations to use the dollars at their disposal in ways that make the most sense in terms of the unique partnerships and capacity-building opportunities within the community.

TYPES OF INDICATORS AND BENCHMARKING

- **Search for Best Practices**: The search for best practices is a technique borrowed from business. Communities with a specific quality-of-life issue explore how other communities have handled that issue and learn from their successes as well as their failures. Many communities already do this routinely—that is, they look at what other communities are doing and adopt practices that seem to be relevant and promising for their particular situations. The search for best practices is an essentially noncontroversial benchmarking technique. Communities should be careful to study the context of the practices observed in considering their transferability, and also careful to avoid unfair and unwarranted comparisons. In general, the search for best practices provides many communities with good ideas.

- **Competitive Comparisons**: The second type of benchmarking, competitive comparisons, measures the community's situation against the performance of communities that are similar in size, location, demographics, or some other key characteristic. Performance data such as median incomes, crime rates, homeownership, school test scores, commute times, or many others may be compared. In market research terms this would constitute an analysis of the entity's competitiveness, but competition is not usually an issue for community empowerment initiatives. For communities, this kind of exercise can provide objective information on how they stack up and where there is room or need for improvement. However, some experts in the community empowerment arena warn that this type of competitive benchmarking can lead to unfair comparisons or foster unwarranted complacency.

- **Quantified Goals (Indicators)**: The third type of benchmarking is the setting of specific measurable goals based on the community's strategic vision—and the monitoring of those goals as a means of keeping track of progress and flagging problems. The attempt to benchmark a strategic plan in this manner can be problematic, because many aspects of its realization are not likely to lend themselves to numerical measures, or the data may be difficult and expensive to collect. But a well-conceived and executed benchmarking effort of this type can become a reliable guide for the implementation of a vision and an excellent yardstick for measuring progress.

BE CAREFUL! THE TROUBLE WITH INDICATORS

The use of indicators is a promising technique for community development, but it has its drawbacks too. First, the initial task of establishing indicators can be confusing and daunting. Second, ongoing task of monitoring them can be expensive. Third, it is easy for communities to mistake the complex and costly indicators and benchmarking process for an end in itself. If the process becomes more than a means to an end, it can obscure the actual goals of the empowerment effort. When it comes to developing indicators, it is better to err on the side of selecting fewer indicators than it is to try to measure everything that moves. It is very easy to get bogged down in the process of developing indicators. Communities ought to focus on core indicators that represent real action and progress.

Mary Sue Rowland, former mayor of Noblesville, IN, suggests four questions that a community should answer before deciding to embark on a benchmarking effort.[16] If the answer to any of the questions is “no,” investment in a benchmarking effort will yield little value.

- Is there a window of opportunity open? (That is, is the community open to change?)
- Are there talented people in the community who are willing to devote time to the effort?
- Performance standards require the close examination of performance. Is the local government willing to risk the kind of scrutiny that comes with the territory?
- Is there a critical mass of leadership and interest that can bring resources to the process without dominating it?

“Partners is committed to helping communities become **livable places for all** their residents and workers.”

Chapter 6:

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

For more than 30 years, Partners for Livable Communities has helped communities improve their quality of life by jump starting economic and social development in towns and cities across America.

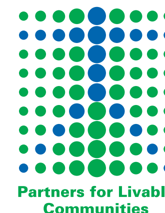
Amenities such as arts, culture, folklore, popular culture, humanities, and the natural environment, are the keys to making a community ideal for living and working. A community rich in quality of life is more likely to attract skilled workers, satisfied residents, tourism, and business investment. A livable community is a vibrant and strong community.

Partners is committed to helping communities become livable places for all their residents and workers. Partners' planning services build on a community's cultural and humanitarian institutions, natural resources, and physical design. Through Partners' community technical assistance program, cities and towns receive guidance on improving their economic development and social capital assets.

WHAT CAN PARTNERS DO FOR YOU RIGHT NOW?

Partners can provide technical assistance to your community on a number of livability issues. From business development and preservation of open space, to making multiculturalism a vital asset, Partners' consulting services are designed to improve your community's quality of life and meet its unique needs.

Partners' List of Offerings and Fees



Offering	Fee
Jump Start Programs • Strategic Planning – 1.5-day Workshop • Executive Consulting Service	$ 2,500-9,500
McNulty Speaker Service and Brainstorming Sessions	$ 1,800 - $5,000
Leadership & Visioning Training • Effective Outreach Methods • Meeting Management • Organizing the Leadership • Drafting the Vision • Assessing Assets and Opportunities • Visioning and Goal Setting • "Trustees of Community" Workshop • "Community Futures Goal Setting" Forums • Managing Public Participation • Branding and Marketing Services	Upon Negotiation
A Community Checkup: A Comprehensive Strategic Review of Your Community	Upon Negotiation
Smaller Community Technical Assistance	Upon Negotiation
Aging in Place • Understanding the Issues • Knowing the Issues and Beginning the Discussion • Initial Facilitation • Engaging the Broader Community for Your Demonstration Project • "Putting Planning into Action" Meeting • Continued Services	$ 1,000 - $15,000, Upon Negotiation
Mobilizing Culture to Build Community: Strategic Planning Services	$25,000 - $75,000, Upon Negotiation
Culture in Hard Times • Presentation by Glenda Hood • Presentations by Robert McNulty and Glenda Hood • Workshop (options for Final Report and Technical Assistance)	$5,000 - $25,000, Upon Negotiation
Art, Culture and Youth • Getting Started • Developing Community Alliances • Getting Underway	$2,500 - $50,000
Charrettes on Community Development • New Idea Corps: Implementing Best Practices in Your Community • Design/Development Charrette • Placemaking: Designing & Planning Physical Spaces • City Gateway Assessment • Amenity Assessment and Planning	Upon Negotiation

For further information or to request our Community Assistance Guide, contact:

bmcnulty@livable.org or 202-887-5990 x 108.

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ACCOMPLISHING A PLACE-BASED PEOPLE STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION

Community Empowerment
Manual

2ND EDITION

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