

# COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLANNING GUIDE

## INTRODUCTION

The Community Revitalization Strategic Planning Handbook is intended as a guide for communities that are starting or strengthening a local community economic development program. This handbook provides an accepted approach or process in which to undertake a community economic development effort in a community. Facilitators and community leaders who are either considering or committed to sponsoring a community revitalization process can use this handbook as a tool for developing an effective program.

### *A brief history*

Strategic planning began more than 20 years ago, and was used by businesses to focus their efforts on increasing productivity and profit. Gradually, strategic planning (and associated management) principles transferred to non-profit organizations as well as the public sector. Today, many organizations in all three sectors use a strategic planning process to increase their effectiveness.

Communities today have fewer financial and technical resources available to them. At the same time, the demand is increasing. For this reason, importance of community strategic planning is increasing. The decision to participate in a strategic planning effort is important, and can bring about visible results, both large and small, to the community. Needs within the community and the future direction a community decides for itself determines how big or small those results are.

The concept of thinking and planning strategically is common - we all do it on a daily and personal basis. Take, for example, the next vacation - destination Disneyland. By thinking strategically, we plan ahead to make sure we have a place to stay, the transportation to get to Southern California, and the resources to pay for everything we need to have a great time. These are all ways of planning and thinking strategically.

Community leaders must view their role in community strategic planning in many ways. First, this process does not allow "quick fixes." It's a long-term approach and a long-term commitment. It is measured not in days and weeks, but in months and years. Community leaders must help the community to think in this way, and channel efforts so energy and commitment to getting things done will remain consistent over an extended period of time. Second, community leaders must set aside personal biases and agendas, but assist in deciding what is best for the entire community, rather than for a particular segment of the community.

### **The Strategic Planning Process**

The Strategic Planning Process helps a group of individuals to select, prioritize, and carry out a community project or series of projects. Participants in this process will learn to define what is important for the community to achieve. They will evaluate the community's current situation. Finally, they will determine implementation actions, build a timeline, designate leadership roles and responsibilities, and identify and complete tasks.

#### *nine strategic planning steps*

The strategic planning process typically includes the following steps:

1. Develop a preliminary community vision
2. Conduct a community assessment
3. Complete the community vision
4. Identify contradictions/obstacles which might prevent reaching the vision
5. Develop new directions or goals
6. Formulate objective(s) for each goal
7. Create a community plan to reach the new directions or goals

8. Carry out (or implement) projects contained in the community plan
9. Evaluate the overall program

The handout at the end of the introduction describes each of these sections in more detail. The handout can be a useful tool for summarizing what a strategic planning process might look like.

*Who should read the Community Strategic Planning Handbook?*

This handbook describes in detail how to develop and carry out a community strategic planning process using the nine-step process described above. The information is useful to both facilitators and community leaders to gain understanding into what a proven community planning method is like. Community leaders will be able to make a more informed decision as to whether or not to undertake a community revitalization planning effort.

Facilitators will find that the Community Strategic Planning Handbook gives instruction as to how to carry out a community planning process. Each chapter is broken into modules. Each module contains information describing what needs to happen, what product(s) need to be developed, a step-by-step process for developing those products, and handouts to assist the facilitator in meeting planning objectives.

*What will happen in a strategic planning process?*

Participants in a strategic planning process will evaluate various development strategies to strengthen the local economic base, make decisions about allocating resources, provide community direction, and determine the level of local effort.

Decisions are based on information regarding community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

The Community Revitalization Team (CRT) Program staff will assist participants through the process as they make these decisions. It is their job to ensure that participants of a strategic planning process have the information they need in order to make sound decisions which will affect the community's future. CRT will also assist in increasing a community's capacity to undertake a successful community revitalization program by providing leadership, organization and volunteer trainings.

### **Community and economic development - What is it?**

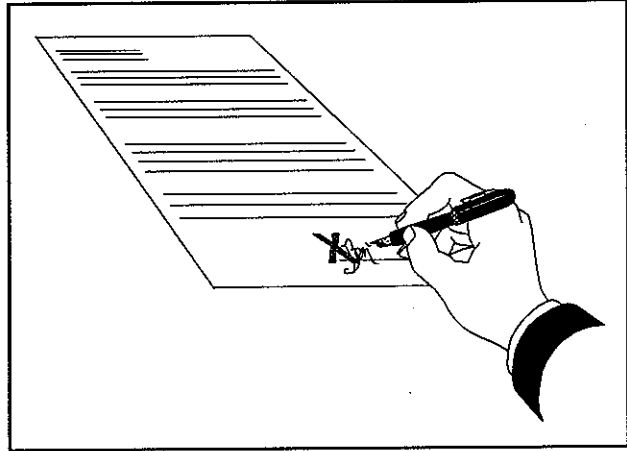
Participants will attend many meetings and read many resource materials. They will hear and see many terms of which they may or may not be aware. A few of the most common are provided below.

*Economic Development* is often viewed as recruiting outside industry into a particular community to create jobs. *Community Development* is, simply put, developing and improving the community in which we live. Housing, recreation, infrastructure, human services, historic preservation, and yes, economic development, fall into the world of community development.

*Community Economic Development* takes a more broad look at economic development. It builds upon community strengths and overcomes weaknesses to make the best use of local resources to create jobs. *Community Revitalization* includes not only developing the commercial and industrial sectors, but it also includes enhancing or maintaining social, health, education, and other aspects that establish a community's "quality of life." Quality of life issues are an important strategic component of economic development.

## **SERVICE AGREEMENT**

Establishing expectations early on is very important to increase the effectiveness of a community economic development program. This is ordinarily done through the formulation of a document called a *service agreement*. A *Service Agreement* is a written understanding between the community organization or government sponsoring the project, the Community Revitalization Team, and other participating organizations. It clearly defines the level of commitment and responsibility that all parties agree to as partners in this process. *A service agreement is not a contract binding DCD to contribute financial resources.*



### *CRT's roles and responsibilities*

The *service agreement* allows a community to understand the types of technical assistance the Community Revitalization Team Program will provide. Typical CRT services include the following:

1. CRT staff consultation services:
  - help with identifying steps to undertake process
  - facilitate meetings as needed
  - assist with development of a workplan
  - organizational development
2. Leadership and Committee trainings;
3. Coordinate state, federal, and regional resources; and
4. Provide a lead staff person to be accessible to the sponsoring organization..

*The community's roles and responsibilities*

The Community Revitalization Team agrees to work with a community because of its local interest and commitment, leadership capacity and support, and the potential for sustaining a local community economic development effort. The *Service Agreement* clarifies the roles and expectations which the community agrees to undertake in order to participate with CRT in a community revitalization program. By signing the *Service Agreement*, community leaders commit to:

1. Undertake the process;
2. Complete the process;
3. Develop community leadership;
4. Get a cross section of community participation;
5. Use a public process;
6. Coordinate efforts with regional organizations;
7. Recruit for and maintain an active volunteer program; and
8. Appoint a local contact person.

A sample *service agreement* which can be used by facilitators and communities begins on the next page.

A successful community economic development program starts at the community level. Community participants determine what the process looks like. This requires true commitment to the process and to the community. The most important resource needed to begin an effort is the time and commitment of the community's citizens and leaders. This process will only work if those who participate do so seriously and show a willingness to do what is best for the entire community. Half-hearted efforts will lead to half-hearted results.

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## **DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION TEAM AND (SPONSORING BODY)**

### **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SERVICE AGREEMENT**

#### **Background and Purpose:**

The Community Revitalization Team (CRT) has developed a program to assist communities build local capacity for sustainable community revitalization.

This service agreement defines the technical assistance to be available from CRT for planning and implementing projects. The agreement also defines the level of commitment and the responsibilities of the local sponsor.

***This agreement is not intended to provide funding for projects or other activities. If state funding is deemed necessary for a project or activity a separate contract will be developed.***

**Prepared by: (Specific CRT Staff Person)**

**Community Served: (Name of Community)**

**Organization Initiating Request, if appropriate: (Name of Organization)**

**Local Sponsors/Participants: (Name of organizations sponsoring or committed to participate in community revitalization effort)**

**Collaborating Agencies: (Local, regional, state, and/or federal agencies who will participate in the community effort)**

**Project Description: (Brief description of project with expected outcomes)**

**Type of CRT Assistance Requested: (Description of types of services CRT will provide to the community)**

**Recommended Work Plan: (A plan of work is formulated with CRT assistance and attached to the back of the service agreement)**

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**Method of Evaluating Results:** A description of the method to be used to evaluate whether or not roles and responsibilities are being met, and when the agreements outlined in the service agreement have been met. Evaluation criteria could include such things as:

1. *A vision statement describing the preferred community economic future of the community;*
2. *A community assessment which, minimally, describes general community conditions as well as community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats;*
3. *A description of potential obstacles which will prevent the community from reaching its identified vision;*
4. *Identification of a minimum of three strategies or goals which the Community is committed to pursue to reach their vision. Additionally, these strategies will be ranked in order of importance to the community;*
5. *An Action Plan which identifies a project or projects for each of the community strategies or goals. Each project will be ranked in order of priority. Each project will contain the following:*
  - \* *a list of action steps needed to complete the project;*
  - \* *identification of dates for completion of each step, the person, persons, or organization responsible for each step's completion, and the resources (including funding and supplies) required for each step.*

**Sponsoring Organization's Responsibilities/Commitment:** (A description of the sponsoring organization's roles and responsibilities are included here)

**CRT Responsibility/Commitment:** (A description of the Community Revitalization Teams roles and responsibilities are Included here, as well as the designation of a staff person to provide lead support to the community.)

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**Other Participating Organization's Responsibilities/Commitment: (A description of the roles and responsibilities of any other organization who will play a role should be described here)**

The undersigned have read the above and the attached workplan, understand the roles and responsibilities of CRT and the participant, and agree to the elements described in the attached workplan.

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**(CRT Staff Person)**

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**(Community Revitalization Coordinator)**

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**(Other Participating Organizations)**

## COMMUNITY ORIENTATION

### *Obtaining Support*

Before strategic planning can begin, the local economic development leadership must be convinced of the importance of planning and must support this effort. These leaders may be represented by city and county government, the local chamber of commerce, ethnic groups and organizations, and various committees and civic organizations. While some (or many) may choose not to actively participate in the effort, they should not oppose it. However, it's important to include as many people as possible. Excluding any one group or individual who regularly participates in community activities make it more difficult to carry out community projects.

### *Facilitator's Tip*

Forming a representative group:

Ask:

- \* *who is affected by the problem?*
- \* *who might be affected by the plan?*
- \* *who will be responsible to support/fund the plan?*

Seek a mixture of old and young, male and female, wealthy and low-income, college and self-educated members. Seek a mixture of viewpoints. Seek people from different geographical areas and representatives from different agencies. The focus of your planning effort will help you select appropriate representatives. For a health planning effort, you would want health professionals and consumers. For a land use plan, you would want a mixture of development and preservation interests. For a community-wide effort, you will need a cross-section of the entire community.

A handout entitled "Checklist for Community Representation" appears at the end of this section. It can be valuable in identifying persons who together will make up a broad based representation of the community.

*Getting the community involved is crucial for success*

The next step after identifying people crucial to the process is to ask for their participation in the effort. Unfortunately, the process of bringing these people together to talk and decide about a community's future may not be so easy.

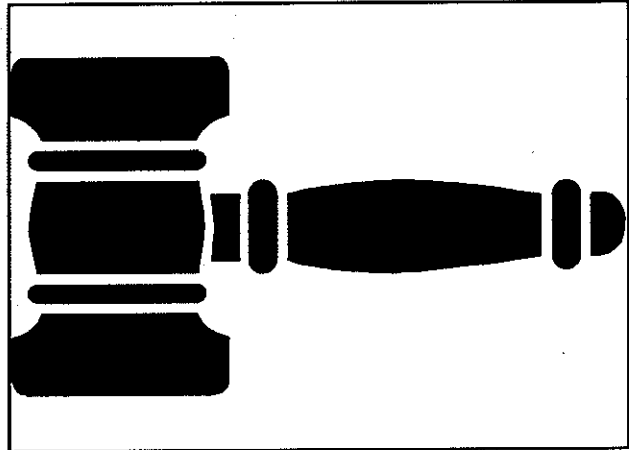
For some communities, unsuccessful past efforts may have created high skepticism among these people that a community planning effort could be successful. In other instances, those who led efforts in the past have become "burned out" and reluctant to spend time and effort on a new process. There may be suspicions about the motives of certain groups or individuals behind such an effort. Still, its important to, at minimum, create the opportunity to involve these citizens - which in turn increases the chance for success.

**Holding a Public Meeting**

A public meeting is a good start to build support for a community revitalization effort. Generally, a first meeting is an orientation to community revitalization. Participants become more aware of what community revitalization is and what type and level of commitment is necessary for a community planning effort to succeed.

The meeting should target those in the community who are willing to work towards revitalizing their community. Remember, include community leaders currently

involved in community activities, and those who are "burned out" or skeptical about being involved in such an effort. Don't, however, expect a great deal of enthusiasm from those who are already spending a great deal of their spare time volunteering for other projects. The purpose to include this group is to create the opportunity for them to participate if they so choose.



The sponsoring applicant may be a logical starting place for organizing strategic planning efforts. However, if its membership does not include a broad spectrum of the community, a new group should be convened for this process. A community planning process should be associated as something the community is doing, not something that is a "chamber" or a "kiwanis" or some other organizational project.

A sample agenda and a detailed description of the agenda appears on the following pages.

**COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION ORIENTATION MEETING**

**SAMPLE AGENDA**

**WELCOME**

**INTRODUCTIONS**

**REVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS**

**TIME COMMITMENTS**

**IDENTIFICATION OF FIRST STEPS**

**COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLANNING HANDBOOK**

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**Community Orientation Meeting  
Micro Design for Sample Agenda**

What	How	Who	Time
Welcome	Put into context	Mayor or Community Leader	5 min
Introductions	Speakers and Participants introduce selves, and explain why they are here	Community Coordinator	10 min
Review Agenda, expected outcomes, ground rules	Review Agree	Facilitator	5 min
Overview of strategic planning process	Present questions and answers	Facilitator All	10 min 10 min
Time commitments	Present questions and answers	Community Coordinator All	10 min 10 min
Identification of first steps Assign tasks to those who wish to be involved	Brainstorm Agree	Facilitator All	10 min 10 min
Closing remarks, meeting evaluation	Open forum Review group record - Change anything?	All Facilitator All	10 min 5 min

## **DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY VISION**

### ***What is a community vision?***

A community vision is a statement or series of statements which describe what a community could be like 10 or 20 years in the future. Other terms which mean the same thing include "a practical picture of the desired future" or "futuring."

A vision statement becomes the basis of the strategic plan. It also enlists community ownership of the problems and solutions associated with developing a plan. Developing a vision not only allows, but calls for participation by a broad sector of the community. This first step of the community revitalization process provides a foundation for working together. Participants who provide input into the visioning stage communicate their broad community ideals and dreams, and transform them into a general statement which can be easily supported by members of the community. Later, this vision will be used to develop manageable community action steps.

### ***Designing the visioning meeting***

It is best to have slow, peaceful music playing in the background. A person reads a statement slowly and calmly to the audience, whose members are sitting in relaxed positions with their eyes closed. Research shows that music paced to the human pulse/heartbeat, a voice that is somewhat monotone, and an atmosphere of relaxation is important to release the power of human visualization.

The other important ingredient is crafting the right words for the people and the situation. The basic storyline of a 3-5 minute statement that results in futuring or visioning involves taking the individual out of their current situation and having them return at a date distant in the future. Upon their return, they are invited to use all their senses in imagining the changes that have occurred.

### Facilitator's Tip

The three following scenarios can be useful in determining different types of responses from the audience. The facilitator can pick one of the three, but will need to redefine and expand the story to ensure it is suitable for use in the community.

**Scenario 1:** "You have just won a lottery and are awarded an all expenses paid trip for yourself and your family to (a wonderful, distant location.)" *Research shows that creativity is released when people feel playful and safe, so whatever story you make up that takes individuals out of their current situation should have those ingredients built in.*

**Scenario 2:** "You are offered an exciting job in (name of place) that you can't turn down, so you end up staying much longer than you had planned. After ten years, you find yourself missing your home. You miss the (describe with carefully chosen adjectives the natural features that characterize the environment). You miss your friends and people are asking you to come back and help them in a changing situation." *Careful crafting of this will evoke the things people value most about their community or organization.*

**Scenario 3:** "You fly into (name local airport) and drive/walk through (community/organization). What do you see as you look at (name a section of town or a part of the organization. Repeat the questions until the main parts of the setting for which you are planning have been visited.) What has changed? What do you hear people talking about? How does (name of place) feel?" *Then leave a quiet time for people to digest the information their own brains and hearts are generating during this journey before inviting them to open their eyes and instructing them to write down the key elements of their vision.*

***Creating a Common Future: Two Group Exercises***

**EXERCISE 1**

**Goal:** To enable a group to establish a common vision for their preferred future

**Group Size:** Unlimited

**Time Required:** Approximately an hour for a small group (10-20) 1 1/2 hours for larger.

**Materials:**

1. A guided visualization statement suitable to the group and its purpose
2. A tape recorder with soft, slow music
3. Pencils and paper for each participant
4. Newsprint, marker pens, and masking tape for group reports

**Physical Setting:** A retreat setting is preferable in an attractive room separate from the daily work of the participants.

**Process:**

1. Explain the purpose of the activity and the time it will take (1-2 minutes).
2. Turn on the music and invite people to sit in a very relaxed position and close their eyes.
3. Slowly read the guided visualization statement (3-5 minutes)

4. Invite people to open their eyes when they feel ready and allow as much time as is needed for everyone to do this. (2 minutes)
5. Pass out paper and pencils and **ask people** *"Based on what you have heard (earlier in the meeting) and the vision you just experienced, write down four goals or examples of what you would like (name of community or organization) to look like in the year (ten years from now)".* (5 minutes)
6. Ask people to form into small groups to discuss what they have written on the cards and begin looking for similarities and differences. Group size can vary from 6 to 12. Someone should serve as recorder and reporter for each group. Suggest that everyone take turns and describe one thing on their card and if anyone else in the group has a similar idea, share it at that time. Go around, one by one, until everyone has had a chance to share. Then, if there is time, ask if there are ideas that have not been discussed. These small group instructions should be written on newsprint and the facilitator should observe the groups while they are working to make sure they are functioning. (3 minutes for instructions 20-30 minutes for groups)
7. Each group give a 3-5 minute report. Newsprint summaries are put on the wall. (time = number of groups times 3-5 minutes)
8. Work with the large group to clarify whether what has been described fits their vision of what they would like in the future. Continue refining the words on the newsprint until there is general consensus about the vision.

**EXERCISE 2**

The first step is to identify the vision or the preferred future of your community. Do this by asking the following question: *In three to five years, what do you want to see in place?* Direct the groups thinking into the future by visualizing or imaging in "their minds eye."

Have the group brainstorm individually, with each person listing concrete elements of the vision that they can see completed in the next 3-5 years, on the hand-out provided. Then have each member select their clearest idea and write it on a card. Then discuss what the group is saying. What do you see happening in the next 3-5 years? During the discussion the group may bring out additional items that need to be presented as part of the vision, have those additional cards passed up.

Look for themes among the cards. Organize the themes into blocks of cards. Try to limit these blocks to four or five. Give titles to these blocks.

You can either stop here or continue to develop a vision statement that reflects the themes.

Writing a vision statement takes time and patience on the part of both the facilitator and the group. Remember, a community vision statement is a clear concise statement or series of statements that represents what people want your community to be like 10 to 20 years in the future.

Break the group into small groups with each focused around each of the themes that were developed in the last exercise. Ask each group to develop a statement that best reflects what the themes is saying. Ask them to make it short and concise.

When each of the groups have completed their statements have them one at a time present their statement that reflects that theme. While they are presenting their statements, you the facilitator will write their statement on a flip pad and that best that you can try to put it into a paragraph. When they are all completed, present their overall statement back to the whole group for final comments.

Two products are produced here. The first is titled themes with clear descriptive cards describing the vision of that theme. Second is cumulative vision statement describing all the themes.

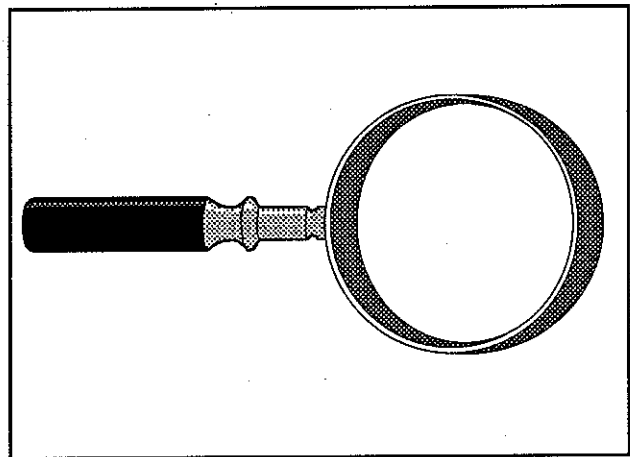
The group typically finds that they share similar hopes and dreams of their community.

## **COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT**

### ***What is a community assessment?***

Community assessment is a process which attempts to answer the communities strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The assessment presents an in-depth picture of the community at a particular point of time. The assessment is useful to help establish a more informed opinion to be used to filter the ideas generated during the community visioning step.

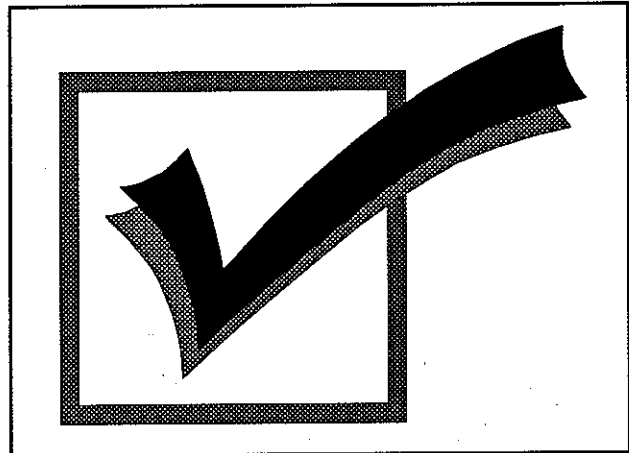
An assessment is used by the community to develop a more realistic plan which will provide direction using the vision and constraints of your community. Without it, you may decide upon some activity which is not within the capabilities of your community to successfully implement. For example, City A might decide on a year-round destination theme park as a tourism project. An assessment, however, might identify that due to the lack of population and available local support services in City A, a destination theme park is not a realistic project.



Failure to take assessment to the planning stage, and then to implementation, will foster a defeatist attitude among participants. People will greet new efforts with cynicism and the belief that "it's a waste of time."

There are several techniques in conducting a good assessment. One of which CRT has participated in the past is the use of consultants. These consultants utilized a technique called a SWOT process. These specialist can conduct research and describe the communities strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Another is to establish a survey form that people can use to objectively rate what they see in your community. Ask residents to complete the survey as if they were a visitor from outside. Compare the survey to identify common themes that are used to describe the community.



Solicit groups of citizens for input about the opportunities and barriers that they see in the community. These brainstorming sessions can generate lists of issues and ideas that can be prioritized by the frequency that the issue is introduced. Town meetings among motivated citizens can contribute to the generation of enthusiasm and interest in making things happen in the community.

Pursuing these techniques will reveal community values, perceptions, and attitudes, which is very important. Basic data needs to be collected However, as important are basic data that needs to be gathered and generated. This is the type of information such as survey of roads conditions, housing and businesses, capacity of the city's sewer and water. Is there a current Comprehensive Plan or any Capital Improvement Plans? What is the City's population and demographics? To name a few.

Don't expect an assessment to provide a list of solutions. It should generate a list of options to evaluate which determine how a particular solution might benefit a community. A good assessment is the first step to develop a plan of action that will guide a community toward a successful economic development program.

A detailed description of the kinds of information which can be examined follows on the following pages.

## **COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

### **PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW**

#### **A. Purpose**

The purpose of a community assessment is to get a realistic picture of the current economic situation in the community and the trends leading up to it, in order to choose actions that will be most effective in creating the desired changes. The final product will be an assessment of the community's current strengths and weaknesses, opportunities for future development, and likely threats to the economy that must be dealt with. The purpose is useful as a starting point in a strategic planning effort, as a foundation for a community profile brochure, and to create momentum for development activities. However, the most important factor in the decision to conduct an assessment is the intention to take positive action based on its results.

#### **B. Overview of the Community Assessment Process**

1. Identify the basic character of the community economy and the demographic and economic trends of the recent past.
2. Identify the resources available for community development, through direct observation and interviews with key local experts.
3. Identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for development, by discussing previously collected information and other issues with a cross-section of community residents, usually 20-30 people.

**PART 1: BASIC ECONOMIC ANALYSIS**

**A. Population** (All available in 1980 Census, may be available for 1990)

1. What are the population trends for the community and county, since about 1960? Is the community growing, declining or stable?
2. What are the age breakdowns in a few relevant categories (e.g.: under 5, 5-18, 19-40, 40-65, 65+) for the community, county and state? Is there an unusual distribution?
3. What are the ethnic characteristics of the community? Is the minority population higher than average for the state?

4. What are the per capita personal income levels for the community, county and state? How have they changed over the last 10 years? Is disposable income keeping up with the rest of the state?
5. What percentage of the population has low to moderate income, compared with other areas in the state?
6. What is the education level of people in the community, compared with the county and state? This can be an indicator of potential earnings.

**B. Labor Force and Economic Analysis**

1. How does the community compare with the county and state in its breakdown of employment by industry? What are the dominant industries? Is there a significant dependence on a single industry? Who are the major employers in the community? (Census, local experts)
2. What are the wages paid within the county in each of the industries? (Employment Security Wage Rate reports)
3. What do the labor force participation rates indicate? Include labor force participation, % employed, % unemployed. Is there a high level of unemployment? Is there a large proportion of the population not in the labor force? Include data for community, county and state. (US Census)
4. What have been the retail sales trends over the past 10 years? Are they increasing or declining? Are they relatively stable or fluctuating dramatically along with cycles in the dominant industry? (Sales tax trends from Dept of Revenue, discuss w/local expert) Is employment in the retail sector consistent with these trends? (US Census)

**C. Review Planning and Other Background Documents**

The focus of this review is on documents that describe or could affect the economic potential of the community. Examples include comprehensive plans, existing economic development strategies, market and feasibility studies, industrial land inventories, and other base data about the community.

The amount and quality of information available differs greatly from one community to the next. Information received is generally not used for quantitative data analysis. Rather, the emphasis is on identifying key trends, opportunities, threats and options for action.

**PART 2: RESOURCES AVAILABLE**

1. Basic Industry Development
  - a. Developable land (EDC)
  - b. Labor force availability (local industry rep)
  - c. Sewer and water capacity (public works director)
  - d. Transportation costs (local industry rep)
  - e. Raw materials (EDC)
  
2. Entrepreneurial Development
  - a. Affordable facilities (EDC, commercial real estate agent)
  - b. Capital, preferably high risk (EDC, SBDC, local accountant)
  - c. Support services (EDC, SBDC)
  
3. Retail Development
  - a. Commercial area design: general appearance, entryways, public improvements, condition of buildings, signs, storefronts, windows (direct observation)
  - b. Retail mix: strength of existing stores, vacancies. (Retail owners/mgrs, EDC, direct observation)
  - c. Market area, trends, and characteristics, leakage (Retail owners, mgrs, EDC, demographic info, sales tax info)
  
4. Tourism Development (direct observation, VIC, Regional Tourism Council)
  - a. Scenic assets, outdoor recreation, image
  - b. Lodging, RV parks, camping, restaurants, shopping
  - c. Attractions: natural, man made, historical, cultural, recreational
  - d. Signage: parking, RV parking
  - e. Special events

**5. Residential Development**

- a. Housing availability, range, condition, cost, vacant land (local residential real estate agents, local CAP agency, EDC)
- b. Infrastructure, public services, schools and higher education (public works director, school administrator, general interviews)
- c. Retail goods and services, range and quality (direct observation, general interviews)
- d. Medical facilities and senior services (hospital administrator, CAP agency, senior center)
- e. Activities: social, cultural, recreational (direct observation, VIC, Regional Tourism Council)

6. **Organizational Capacity and Community Attitudes (lead organization)**
  - a. Existing community organizations and their track record for community development work
  - b. City government involvement in CD, and clarity of goals
  - c. History of public/private cooperation
  - d. History of volunteerism and financial contribution to CD
  - e. Community attitudes toward change, new people, new ideas
  
7. **Overall Image of Community (direct observation, possible slide show)**
  - a. Downtown area design: general appearance, entryways, public improvements, condition of buildings, signs, storefronts, windows (direct observation)
  - b. Community entrances
  - c. Appearances of residential areas
  - d. Unique aspects to the community
  - e. General impressions from an outside perspective

**PART 3: THE SWOT PROCESS (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)**

**A. Visit Community and Conduct Interviews**

The community visit and interviews are generally conducted over a 2-3 day period depending upon the number of persons identified and the complexity of issues that may need to be addressed.

A strategic assessment survey format is used as a guide for the interview. While the questionnaire format is not followed rigorously in each interview, it serves as a general format to assure that all key topics are covered. Each

interview may tend to emphasize particular topics, depending upon the interest and expertise of the person interviewed.

The interviewee is introduced to the process being followed and the purpose of the assessment, the final product and what will be done with it. The interviewee is assured that his/her responses will be kept confidential.

The strategic assessment survey questionnaire contains the following types of questions:

1. How long have you lived here? What role(s) do you play in the community?

2. What kind of place is your community? What is it like to live and work here? What brought you here, and why do you think other people move here? What do you like best about living here?
3. Have you ever thought of leaving here? What might lead you to consider moving to another place? What do you like least about living here?
4. How do young people fit into the future of the community? Are they staying in town when they finish school? Do you see that changing? What role could they play in community development?
5. What is the community's attitude towards change, growth?
6. What are the three major strengths or assets in your town? What are you known for?
7. What are the three weaknesses or liabilities in the area? Who is affected by them? How can they be reduced?
8. What are the major competitive threats (external or internal) to future development in your town? Are there real problems with future economic development of this community? What is the nature of the threat? How has the community responded? How should it be responding?
9. What are the best investment opportunities for future development in your town? What major forces outside the community might provide future economic or community development opportunities? What needs to be done to take advantage of those opportunities?
10. Are there people who want to start up new businesses? Can they get what they need in your town? Are people supportive?

11. How would you describe the organizational, political and cooperative climate for getting things done in your community? Who are the community's leaders? How effective are they?
12. Based on your community's strengths and weaknesses, what do you want the town to be good at, or known for, five years from now? What about 10 years from now?
13. What three things would you like to see happen in the next year?
14. Have I asked the right questions? Who else would I talk with?

**B. Prepare SWOT Report**

Following the community visit, the interviewer will prepare a written report. The report describes the SWOT process, identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, makes preliminary recommendations, and suggests possible follow-up arrangements. The report also identifies persons who have been interviewed.

The analysis contained in the report is more qualitative than quantitative. While findings and observations are those of the interviewer, they are based on common themes that emerged from the interview process.

**C. Conduct Community Briefing**

After a preliminary draft report is circulated to the community, a briefing is scheduled. The purpose of the briefing is to present the preliminary findings of the SWOT assessment, obtain comments and discuss possible next steps for follow-up. The local contact person is asked to invite individuals who may be interested or active in SWOT follow-up. Subsequent to the briefing, a SWOT report is modified and put into final form, reflecting corrections or suggestions made as a result of the briefing.

**D. Follow-up**

Follow-up to the Community assessment can differ from one community to the next, depending upon local circumstances. It is recommended that the assessment be followed by a strategic planning process, although that process can take various forms depending on the history and capacity of the community.

## **FINAL VISION MEETING**

After the assessment has been completed, the vision statement developed prior to undertaking the assessment should be re-evaluated. This can be accomplished by comparing the original vision statement to the assessment. This will help to determine if there are any gaps in the vision and act as a reality test for the community effort. There may be a need to make only minor adjustments to the vision statement; occasionally, some groups find they need to make major modifications to their statement.

This is also the time to ensure that commitment still exists within the community.

The culmination of the vision statement and the assessment provides you with the ground work required to initiate the community economic development strategy.

## **CONTRADICTIONS/OBSTACLES**

The second step is to identify contradictions or obstacles which might prevent the vision from becoming reality. It is very important to deal with those issues that may block or obstruct the community in reaching its desired future. Obstacles and contradictions can take many forms. Examples include:

- Economic;
- People or organizations with competing agendas;
- Attitudes;
- Economic trends;
- Location;
- Physical or structural conditions;
- Organizational deficiencies; and
- Many more.

For most of us, its easier to just ignore those things we don't like to think or talk about. Sometimes, these are things we just don't have any control over. Activities may be able to be done a little different, however, to compensate for these types of obstacles. Other things we do have some control over. These kinds of contradictions and obstacles can be dealt with "head-on".

Dealing with an obstacle to a project doesn't mean ignoring it, and it probably doesn't mean eliminating it. Dealing with an obstacle means finding ways to work with or around a potential roadblock. The next section, which describes how to develop goals or new directions, describes how to formulate strategies to meet this objective.

***Identifying potential contradictions or obstacles***

Again, as in the last brainstorming activity, individually list 8-10 obstacles that block you from reaching your vision. **Focus Question:** *What contradictions, obstacles, or roadblocks exist which prevent the vision from becoming reality?* From that list each person is to select two obstacles or contradictions that each person feel best represents the most important obstacle or contradiction. You are not to write your statement by starting it with the words "lack of". Have your responses be concrete and specific.

We will then group those that share the similar root causes and name them.

## **NEW DIRECTIONS/GOALS**

At this point, a vision for the future has been developed those things which could block the vision from happening have been identified. If the vision is so desirable than why hasn't it already occurred? The answer should be in the contradictions previously identified. What can be done to "unblock" these obstacles so movement towards the vision can occur?

### *Facilitator's Tip*

**Focus Question:** *What innovative practical actions will deal with the contradictions and move us toward your vision?* Individually brainstorm actions which will deal with the contradictions or obstacles. Write one for each group we developed for the contradictions or obstacles.

Focus on one theme at a time. Have the group submit those cards up that correlate with that theme that the group is focusing on first. Put them on the wall and read through the new directions. Have a discussion, but do not let it get bogged down. Then do the same for the rest of the themes.

## **ACTION STEPS**

The final step of this process is the action steps. This step in the process will determine the activities or implementation activities that will occur during the next twelve months. Action steps will promote the successful launch of a project at its most critical phase by:

- clarifying directions;
- aligning resources;
- designating leadership roles and responsibilities; and
- building team support and trust.

### *Facilitator's Tip*

**Focus question:** *What actions do we intend to take in the next 12 months?  
What are the substantial actions required to carry out the new directions?*

Have the group brainstorm a list of appropriate actions for each of the new directions. Again, only focus on one new direction at a time. Have each person submit one substantial action and put them on the wall. Discuss the actions and have any other actions submitted that do not appear on the wall that need to be included. Do this for each of the new directions.

Have the group break into smaller groupings. The number of groups should correspond to the number of new direction groupings.

The small groups are each assigned one of the action groups. The small groups are to develop an action plan based on what they can do during the next 12 months. They do this according to the following steps:

1. Sequence actions along tracks according to whether they are - launch activities, ongoing activities, and completion activities. Fill in other actions as necessary.
2. Place activities into the 4 quarters on the 12 month period (3 months/quarter).
3. Decide on two events or projects per quarter. You should have a total of 8 events/projects for the year and 4 quarters.
4. Then talk through the first quarter events by answering the following questions:
  - How do we do these events/projects?
  - who will do it?
  - When?
  - Where?
  - What will it cost? (Identify financial and human resources)
  - What is the potential source of funding?
  - Who will coordinate, an individual or organization (It may not be this group)?
5. The small group then reports out their work to the larger group.

***Facilitator's Tip***

After actions plans for each of the new direction focus areas are developed, the following questions should be discussed: *Will these events and action steps implement the new directions and move us toward our vision? Where do they overlap? Where are the gaps? What can be combined?*

The overall workload as a group should be evaluated to determine if it is realistic. The group may find they have planned for more work than they can handle. If this happens, prioritizing the overall strategic plan will enable the group to work on the most important issues first.

Have all the cards and work typed up. This will be the make up of your strategic plan for the organization. Include in this document your mission statement, vision statement, list of members, by-laws, past accomplishments and other items you deem important.

There are some other questions that you need to ask yourself before you begin to implement this community strategic plan. Such as:

- o Are we organizationally set-up to take this effort on?
- o Are there other people or organizations in the community that might be of additional assistance because of their talents or expertise?
- o Could any of the regional organizations assist us? These might include such organizations as a local economic development council (EDC), a Port Authority, Regional Planning Office, or County Gov't.
- o Could we benefit from some specific training opportunities being offered?
- o How are we going to ensure that this plan gets carried out? Are we going to set-up committees? How are we going to coordinate with them?
- o What are options for raising the necessary capital to implement these projects?
- o Are there projects which will need special expertise (such as a consultant) to conduct technical feasibility or engineering work?

*Facilitator's Tip*

Throughout the action step planning process, ensure that the group has time for the following conversations:

- Do we need to choose one objective or another? Can it be both?
- We thought we were in agreement to this point, but now there seems to be disagreement on how to implement. Let's talk this out. (this is where you may discover you had a different interpretation on goals or objectives)
- Are we moving too fast? I sense some people are not quite ready to commit to this plan. What are your concerns?
- Let's check for group consensus. Is there anything happening that you cannot live with?

In terms of the task, you are answering the questions about:

- What exactly will happen to achieve this objective?
- Who will be responsible to carry out the activity?
- Whose support do we need?

There are different ways to record this information. You can choose the format you think will work best for your group. The important thing is to **write it down** and give everyone a copy. This is the stage where, if a plan is not written, it will affect people's ability to get the job done.

**ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

***DEVELOPING A MISSION STATEMENT***

***What is a mission statement?***

An organizational mission statement can develop out of a visioning activity, but is more focussed in nature than a vision. In a community development context, the mission statement may be for the planning group that is attempting to actualize the vision. In established organizations, the mission statement clarifies what the organization is or is striving to become. Obviously, achieving a community-wide vision may require many different organizations with varying mission statements. An organization itself, however, might choose to develop a vision that is broader and creates a larger context within which it can then refine its mission statement.

The three basic elements of a mission statement are:

- 1) **What** customer or client needs the organization exists to fill (not what products or services are offered)
- 2) **Who** are the primary audiences the organization exists to serve
- 3) **How** does the organization carry out its business (its style, activities, and methods)

It is important that the mission statement be clear and understandable and brief enough that most people can remember it.

*Why have a mission statement?*

The value of a mission statement is that it:

- reminds members of their basic, overriding purpose;
- clarifies the arena in which the group operates
- can help determine how resources are to be allocated to different demands; and
- helps distinguish the organization from others.

*How do you develop a mission statement?*

A mission statement can be established by using brainstorming and prioritizing techniques described in previous chapters. The number of people who should be involved and how much time it will take depends on the complexity of the organization.

## EVALUATION

### *Why Evaluate?*

Evaluation is the least practiced part of planning in most communities. However, community groups which receive money from any outside source will be expected to provide some type of summary report. **Evaluation is the process not of summarizing what you accomplished, but comparing it to what you set out to accomplish.**

It asks the question:

*Did we do what we set out to do?*

A complete evaluation also asks:

*What was the impact of our activity?*

It is not unusual that well-conceived actions result in unanticipated results. Even if everyone carries out the actions that were agreed upon, evaluation may show that those actions did not achieve the objective or goal. If you do not evaluate, a group can continue actions long after the goal has been achieved or continue action which are not achieving the goal at all.

*How do we evaluate?*

Planning how and what you are going to evaluate must occur *before* activities begin. The coordinator who is monitoring activities to ensure that they are in place is the person most suitable for keeping records needed for evaluation, unless you have money to pay an outside evaluator. Some large projects funded by public monies require an outside, neutral evaluator.

There are two basic philosophies of evaluation. One is that the evaluator should be separate from the action and as neutral as possible he or she collects the information, analyzes it, draws independent conclusions, and presents recommendations to the group that has carried out the plan. The other philosophy is that of participatory evaluation and believes that those who carry out the plan are the best qualified to interpret the information and draw conclusions. In either event, recommendations are seldom valued unless the group who must adopt them is involved in refining them.

The planning group should develop answers to the following questions:

- Purpose: 1. What do we want to know?
- Levels: 2. What level of outcome do we want to example? (see next page)
- Evidence: 3. How can we measure the outcome? (next page)
- Data Gathering: 4. Who will collect the information? How will they collect it? When?

- Analysis:** 5. What does the information tell us? Who will interpret the information that has been collected and draw conclusions and make any recommendations?
- Reporting:** 6. Who is the information reported to? What format does it need to be in?
- Resources:** 7. How much time and money will be involved?

The evaluation should make sense to the group that is coordinating the action. It should help you know whether you reached your goal or not. It should help you justify what next steps are needed.

*What kinds of things should be evaluated?*

Only the group which is sponsoring the project can answer that question. The following page lists the different types of events which can be monitored and the kinds of evidence that will measure them. It begins at the lowest level (i.e., how much time was spent by how many people and how much money was spent) to the highest level (what was the end result of the activity; how many people were helped; what changes occurred?) Inputs are the means to an end. End results are the goals you are trying to achieve.

Examples of Evaluation Indicators

<i>Level</i>	<i>Examples of Possible Indicators</i>
7. End results	Increase or decrease in numbers of businesses; population increase; improvement in public services or facilities; reduced drop out rate.
6. Change in behavior	New capacity by local citizens to implement development strategies; changes in how a group makes decisions or who they cooperate with.
5. Increase in skills	Workshop evaluations show that leaders have learned something new; behavior or opinions demonstrates new knowledge was acquired.
4. Reaction/Attitudes	Participants report feelings of renewed commitment, enthusiasm, confidence (or anger, hopelessness); People honored their contract to attend meetings and carry out activities (or did not).
3. People involvement	Change in numbers of people participating in activities, client contact, etc.
2. Activities	Number of workshops delivered; committee meetings held; new partnerships formed.
1. Inputs	Amount of new money raised; in-kind contributions; hours of expertise or labor committed to project.