

# DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY VISION

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WORKBOOK 5

## Developing a Community Vision

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The Church has the responsibility to be vitally concerned with and involved in the everyday life of its community. Jesus was the Messiah of the *here and now*, as well as the signpost for the life that is to come. He invites his followers to join with him in making life here and now a foretaste of what is to come.

## 1. Helpful Terms and Questions

### “Visioning”

Visioning is a process through which any community can develop a picture or series of pictures for its future. By picturing where it wants to go, a community can consciously and purposefully begin to create the future it desires, rather than simply reacting to prevailing trends and external forces of change. Visioning can be extremely helpful to any community.

#### *Questions:*

1. Do you know whether the residents of your congregation’s neighborhood have developed a vision for their future?
2. Are there stakeholders who wish to develop a community vision?
3. What position has your congregation taken regarding helping its neighbors develop a shared vision, and what could your congregation’s position on this realistically become?

### “Shared Vision”

Developing a shared vision is about stakeholders connecting together to share their stories and to discuss issues that affect them. When a congregation engages in shared visioning with its neighbors, it does so as a partnering stakeholder of the visioning process. Mutual exchange among stakeholders is the key to creating shared community vision.

Church members who live in the community should be involved in community visioning activities like any other member of the community. They bring the values of the Kingdom (love of neighbor, care for the poor, care for creation etc.) to the visioning table. If the church is a commuter-based institution—if there are few members of the church living in the neighborhood—a preferred role for the church is to provide the facilities and process by which residents are convened and develop a picture of their preferred future. It is inappropriate for a church to decide for a community what a community’s vision will be.

Developing a shared vision is mostly about gathering people over time and in a variety of ways to decide together how to strengthen their community.

#### *Questions:*

1. What events or experiences has your congregation engaged in whose goals were simply to build relationship and identity between church members and other neighborhood stakeholders?
2. Might a small series of these “connecting” events be sponsored by your congregation or one of its ministry teams

3. Does your team or congregation have anyone experienced in facilitating shared visioning? If not, are there persons in your wider community who can assist your congregation or team in this way?

List some natural ways for members to gather with neighbors	Who in the church would be the leader/encourager for this?	Who would be a good facilitator for the event?

4. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages, opportunities and threats, of creating a shared community vision (versus casting a leader’s particular vision)?

**“Felt Needs Concept”**

The “Felt Needs Concept” seeks to answer the challenging question "How do we affirm the dignity of people, motivate them, and help them to take responsibility for their own lives?" By beginning with the people's felt needs—what they say they need now—it is possible to establish a trusting relationship. This relationship enables one to move to deeper issues of development. The idea of beginning with people's felt needs is called the *felt needs concept*.

*Questions:*

List your church’s current outreach ministries or programs	Does it affirm the dignity of the participant?	Does it motivate a participant to take responsibility for his or her own life?

1. Meet with two or three ministry recipients of the outreach ministries you considered in Question #1. Ask them the same question. Are their responses the same as or different from that of your ministry team’s responses?
2. What are one or two things you can do to increase the degree of dignity those ministries impart?
3. What are some things you can do to help ministry recipients take more responsibility for their own lives?

**“Relationships”**

Relationships are the building blocks for all community organizing activities. They are the *means* for achieving community goals. Organizing a group of community members to get rid of unfair housing practices, organizing to bring public transportation, organizing to add a park—any change will be built on good relationships with community stakeholders.

<b>List three outreach ministries:</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
In what specific ways do you think your relationship to God undergirds or is expressed through these ministries?			
Ask ministry recipients to comment on how their perception of the life of Jesus is portrayed by this ministry			
Is this ministry model “forced on” recipients as opposed to developed through consensus with them? How can you build more consensus-seeking into your ministry planning and implementation?			
What does the term “ <i>Shalom</i> ” mean to you? How is this ministry “shalom”-seeking?			

### **“Community Development”**

Simply put, the process of community development involves listening to a community, determining the assets and resources within the community, casting a vision for a preferred future and developing programs and activities that meet felt needs within the community using community resources. The entire process should happen on the community’s initiative and with its active participation.

#### *Questions:*

1. In what ways have you or a group from your church helped neighbors to identify and work toward their preferred future for their community? What could you do to improve your ministry in this area?
2. What role has your congregation played in promoting better living for the community located, say, within five blocks of its building? What could you do to improve your ministry in this area?

### **“Being the Church *with* the Community”**

Refer to the introduction of the *Communities First* book to review how the church can be *with* its community. Then answer the following questions:

<b>Think about how your congregation engages its neighborhood.</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Ideas for Change/Improvement</b>
Does it desire to impact the community?			
Does it desire to be impacted by the community?			
Is the community involved in planning and assessment of community ministries?			

**“Trust-Building”**

The degree of trust between church people and community people will impact powerfully, positively and negatively, the willingness of each side to work openly and honestly with the other.

<b>Consider the way your church does the following:</b>	<b>Does it build trust? Yes/No</b>	<b>List ways to increase community trust</b>
Deciding if/when to start a new ministry		
Designing a new ministry		
Assessing ministry effectiveness		

Are you and your church committed to increasing community trust in tangible, long-term ways? What will it take to do that?



## 2. Community Relationship Building:

### Some Tips for Establishing Trust Between a Congregation and Its Neighbors

Effectively building a community vision and constructing community-strengthening programs is often a two-part endeavor:

1. planning events that focus solely on building a sense of “togetherness”
2. planning events whose goal is to create a specific change for the community.

Below are some tools and suggestions for helping your congregation or ministry team to focus on building a sense of “togetherness” between a congregation and neighbors.

*“They broke bread in each other’s homes with glad and sincere hearts....And the Lord added to their number daily...” (Acts 2)*

This Scripture passage is often used when a church begins to build a small-groups ministry. It contains important elements that can serve to build community for the sake of the church’s neighborhood. Here are some key features:

1. “Breaking bread”: Think of times when you felt you were part of a nurturing community. Perhaps family gatherings evoke such memories for you. Sharing food probably contributed to both the atmosphere of togetherness and provided physical sustenance. In community relationship building, as with some of your memories, food symbolized something powerful about feeding and sustaining each other. It provided something vital to the background as people connected. Find solid and creative ways for ensuring food has a place in your church/community gatherings.
2. “In each other’s homes”: Gather in an environment that reflects something about “community.” Don’t gather in some sterile location and expect the warmth of inter-personal bonding to be enhanced. Find a location that says “we are of the same tapestry.”
3. “With glad and sincere hearts”: This kind of gathering should highlight the great things about being in relationship. *We* are our agenda in this kind of gathering.

## **Good Vision Statements**

In the simplest terms, a vision is a shared image of what a community seeks to be in the future. Often adopted as a formal statement, a vision can serve both as a guide to future decisions and actions as well as a framework for important public policy, directions, and choices.

“A community where building a sense of community is an everyday activity for each one of us.”

“A community where an understanding and respect for differences create the neighborhood of ‘XXXX’”

“A community where all members feel no fear or threat to their personal well-being.”

“A community where each resident has the opportunity to develop and live life to his or her fullest potential with equal opportunities for all.”

“A community where there is a commitment from the community to allocate the necessary resources to create a friendly, healthy, safe environment.”

*"If you can provide any structure for people to come to grips with the issues—even though you do not know the answers and you have no perfect models— you have given them a gift of unbelievable value."*

— Louise Singleton

### **3. How to Conduct a Visioning Process**

As a community-based planning process, visioning typically follows a series of distinct steps. These often include:

- organizing the community
- profiling the community
- exploring the impact of emerging trends and issues
- creating a vision for the future
- developing a strategic action plan to achieve that vision

This outline provides a step-by-step process that a community could take in creating a vision. The visioning process can take different forms depending on the personality and diversity of the community. Visions are typically illustrated in forms of comprehensive community plans, master plans, or regional plans.

#### **Step 1 Understand the Community**

Get to know the community.

- Build relationships in the community (preferably live in the community and become a member).
- Understand the culture(s) within the community.
- Understand the issues of the community prior to public meetings/ interviews.
- Understand the political dynamic within the community.

How? Walk and talk in the community. Prayer walking and asset mapping are great ways to make connections and discover the people, the culture, and the issues.

Identify key groups and organizations that should to be involved in the visioning process. In addition to the residents, keep in mind:

- elected officials
- representatives of political parties
- government agencies at the national, state and local level
- private industry
- academic community
- conservation and advocacy organizations
- local civic organizations
- key landowners
- investors

## **Step 2 Research Model Visions**

Research visions that other communities have developed. The Sustainable Communities Network provides a portal to several community visions (<http://www.sustainable.org/>)

## **Step 3 Obtain Community Input**

### *A. Types of public involvement*

- group meetings
- one-on-one interviews
- general public participation

Some tips for successful public involvement activities:

- Understand your audience and be prepared to break down misconceptions by presenting facts about the community.
- Have community members facilitate the sessions, rather than a consultant or tag team.
- Have a prop (i.e. slides of the community or a video showing initial components of the community vision). This gets people thinking about what a vision is and what it means to them. Everybody likes to share ideas on their favorite place or favorite thing to do—so let them talk.
- Use small groups as much as possible. They help you hear every participant's voice.

### *B. Recording community input*

- Take accurate notes.
- If you can, devote at least one person to note-taking.
- Ask the facilitator to make sure everyone gets an opportunity to speak. The facilitator should acknowledge each speaker's contribution, perhaps by repeating the remark so the speaker knows he or she was understood.
- Write responses on a flip chart in front of the room so participants see that their responses will be incorporated.
- If possible, ask one person to attend as an outside observer to provide feedback after the meeting.

#### **Step 4 Develop the final product**

- Organize the vision under common themes (other community visions will help you identify these).
- Present the final vision in an eye-catching, easy-to-read document, using lots of visuals and quotes.
- Remember that the final vision must reflect the actual voice of the people.
- Distribute a free report to the participants.
- Hold an event to show residents how they can get involved in meeting *their* vision.

#### **Step 5 Implement the vision**

Evaluate current projects in the community. Are they meeting the vision? Are they competing with it? Begin new programs, projects, and campaigns by organizing leaders from the community and helping to resource them.

#### **Step 6 Celebrate**

Celebration needs to be an integral part of every step of the Community Development process. Celebrate the defined vision to bring energy to the implementation process.

#### **Step 7 Evaluate the vision**

Communities change over time. Different market trends can dictate the nature of the community. Demographics can change the job market, the environment, and the interest groups in the community. New cultural customs emerge. Therefore, the vision may change.

For more information see Steve C. Ames' book *Guide to Community Visioning* (Chicago: APA Planners Press. (rev. ed. 1998). This book, a product of the Oregon Visions Project, provides an in-depth guide to developing a community vision. It helps citizens understand the connection between the kind of place they want their community to be and the policies that will support their vision. It shows how to design and implement an effective visioning process while providing ideas on how to use graphics in visioning.

#### 4. Developing a Strategic Plan for the Community

Strategic Planning is the process of selecting the goals of the community, determining the policies and programs needed to reach those goals, and establishing progress indicators to ensure that the changes and strategic programs are executed.

Strategic Planning employs a variety of perspectives, models, and approaches. The way a strategic plan is developed depends on the nature of the community's leadership, the culture of the community, the complexity of the environment, the size of the community, or the expertise of its members.

There are a variety of strategic planning models, including goals-based and issues-based models. **Goals-based planning** is probably the most common. It starts by focusing on the community's mission and vision. It then sets goals to work toward the mission/vision, strategies to achieve the goals, and action planning (who will do what and by when). **Issues-based strategic planning** often starts by examining issues facing the community, strategies to address those issues, and action plans. Scope and length of strategic plans can vary—some plans are scoped to one year; many look three, five, or ten years ahead.

The *Communities First* Team recommends beginning with one or two achievable goals rather than attempting to work out a full-blown strategic plan.

Strategic planning serves a variety of purposes in communities, including:

1. establishing realistic goals consistent with the community's mission in a defined time frame
2. communicating those goals and objectives to the community's constituents
3. developing a sense of ownership of the plan
4. ensuring the most effective use is made of the community's resources by focusing the resources on the key priorities
5. providing a base from which progress can be measured and establishes a mechanism for informed change when needed
6. bringing together everyone's best efforts—this has important value in building a consensus about where a community is going

## 5. Implementation of the Vision/Strategic Plan

The plan must identify the goals of the community. This must be an ongoing effort; goals must be adjusted whenever necessary to reflect changes in the needs of the community. Once the goals are attained, new goals must be identified. Organizers must solicit active participation from representatives throughout the community in order to identify appropriate indicators of progress. Since it is commonly known that "what gets measured gets improved," organizations must regularly measure those indicators of progress. Organizers must bear in mind that effective strategic implementation is a long-term process, not a short-lived program.

The *Communities First* Team recommends the following steps for beginning a visioning process for the first time in your community:

1. Get to know the community by interacting with the residents.
2. Do a survey in the neighborhood, interacting with as many residents as possible. Ask three questions:
  - a. Tell me what life was like at its best in this community...
  - b. If you could wave a magic wand and make one thing better in this community, what would you want to change?
  - c. If others would join you in making that change, what would you be willing to do or provide to make that change possible?
3. Consolidate all responses and pick the one or two things that were the most important to residents and most doable given your initial resources.
4. Create a report to the residents that articulates the one or two things you are going to work on with them to make life in this community better for everyone.
5. Convene a community implementation team to begin the work.

Remember, a vision is a picture of a preferred future.

**Resources**

Walsh, Mary L. *Building Citizen Involvement: Strategies for Local Government*. ICMA, Washington, DC, 1997.

Ames, Steven C. *Charting a Course for Your Community in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

Storti, Deirdra. *Developing a Community Vision: Conducting a Visioning Process*.

Lorenzo, A.L. *Managing Uncertainty: Thinking and Planning Strategically*. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 84,47-60., 1993. (ED 367 403)



# DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY VISION

## CREATING A PLAN FOR CHANGE THROUGH COVENANTAL COMMITMENT

This book will help you determine whether your church programs adequately recognize and utilize the gifts that God has already placed in the people you serve. You'll also discover how to:

- Build trust between the church and your neighbors
- Conduct a visioning process
- Develop and implement a vision/strategic plan

This book is part of the *Communities First* series, designed to help churches and Christians bring unique gifts to their neighborhoods and communities. Combined with consultation, these materials will help you engage with your community and influence it in ways that will make life better for everyone here and now. As a result, you will see your community respond and change in surprising and redemptive ways. The Church and God's Kingdom will grow.

In addition to the cornerstone book simply titled *Communities First*, other workbooks include:

*The Theology of Development: A Biblical Understanding of Christian Mission and Community Development*

*Through God's Eyes, With God's Heart: Building Readiness for Community Ministry*

*Meeting Needs: Moving from Relief to Individual Development*

*Case Management: Creating a Plan for Change through Covenantal Commitment*

*Developing a Community Vision*

*Community Strengthening*

*Community Organizing*

*Justice: Creating Policies, Laws and Systems that Work for Everyone*



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