

Developing a Community Vision
Conducting a Visioning Process
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This outline provides a step-by-step process that a community should take in creating a vision. Several communities have developed visions for future growth. Visions are typically illustrated in forms of comprehensive community plans, master plans, or regional plans. This outline shows the necessity of developing a vision that unites the voice of the people.

More in-depth coverage of community visions can be found:

- The Sustainable Communities Network: <http://www.sustainable.org/>
- Ames, Steve C. (1998). *Guide to Community Visioning*. Chicago: APA Planners Press. (rev. ed.). 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.

Step I. Understand the Community

Research the history of the community.

Identify key groups and organizations that need to be involved in the visioning process. Keep in mind:

- Elected officials
- Representatives of political parties
- Government agencies at the national, state and local level
- Private industry
- Scientific community
- Conservation and advocacy organizations
- Local civic organizations
- Key landowners
- Investors

Once you have identified key individuals and groups, think hard about who is under-represented and find ways to include them in the process.

- Understand the issues of the community prior to public meetings/ interviews.
- Understand the political dynamic within the community(s)- municipal leaders must be supportive of process in order to shepherd its success.

Step II. Research Model Visions

Research visions that other communities have developed.

Visions can be found on the web - The Sustainable Communities Network provides a portal to several community visions. <http://www.sustainable.org/>

Step III. 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 instead of consultant or tag team. Who are the champions in the community? Get them to facilitate the sessions instead of consultant, or tag team. Ask the right questions.
- 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 (the same or different). Everybody likes to share ideas on their favorite place or favorite thing to do—so let them talk.

B. Recording community input

- Take accurate notes.
- If you can, devote at least one person to note-taking.
- Have a facilitator who makes sure everyone gets an opportunity to speak. The facilitator should acknowledge to the speaker's contribution, perhaps by repeating the response to the speaker so that 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 IV. 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, 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 V. Implement the Vision

Evaluate the current projects in the community. Are they meeting the vision? Are they competing with the vision? Who are the committed members of the community that will carry on its success?

Step VI. 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, but how much?

Developing a Community Vision
Ladder of Change

