

Community Visioning & Action to Reduce Poverty



June 2009 to April 2010

WHAT IS COMMUNITY VISIONING?

Virtually every step forward in the progress of humankind has started with a dream. Seeing something in the mind's eye has been the first step to achieving it in reality.

Visioning is simply a process by which a community contemplates and discusses the future it wants, and plans how to achieve it. It brings people together to develop a shared image of what they want their community to become. Once a community knows where it wants to go, it can begin to consciously work toward that goal.

A **vision** is the overall image of what the community wants to be and how it wants to look at some point in the future. A **vision statement** is the formal expression of that vision. It depicts in words and images what the community is striving to become. The vision statement is the starting point for the creation and implementation of action plans.

By going through a visioning process, a community can: 1) better understand the values of its citizens and use them as a basis for planning; 2) identify the trends and forces that are affecting the community; 3) articulate a big-picture view to guide short-term decisions and long term initiatives; and 4) develop tools to achieve its vision. (A Guide to Community Visioning, Oregon Visions Project, Oregon Chapter, American Planning Association, 1993)

THE COMMUNITY VISIONING PROCESS

The community visioning process brings together the many ideas and skills generated during Study Circles and LeadershipPlenty®. During this activity, the broader community is mobilized to adopt a shared vision and a plan for poverty reduction. **At least 15 percent of the total community population is expected to participate in a variety of visioning activities throughout this phase.** Communities are encouraged to recruit participants from all parts of the community, paying particular attention to low-income people and parts of the community not always represented in the community processes. This is an appropriate time to bring back the list of ideas created during Study Circles phase.

As communities develop their vision and plan, the Horizons Leadership Team will be working with the Montana Community Foundation to make available a \$1500 grant. These funds can be used to help implementing poverty reduction ideas and leverage other resources.

Vision & Action Process

The local Horizons Steering Committee, with assistance from LeadershipPlenty® graduates and Study Circles participants will develop and schedule local visioning activities during the

summer months. These activities should be designed to engage many people and create community conversation about community values, hopes, trends, local assets, and goals. These activities should generate ideas, themes, and potential action ideas that will later be used during Community Action to Reduce Poverty phase.

Steering Committee and Community Coach need to create a **Vision Statement** representing the input and ideas generated during these visioning activities and events. Communities may choose from the activities listed below or create their own ideas on how to involve the community in defining its future and creating a Vision Statement.

- Photo scavenger hunt of local assets (based on Heartland Center themes/attributes of thriving communities)
- Community-wide Survey (on-line, in person, focus groups)
- Visioning Booth at community events (County Fair, Community Picnics, 4th of July activities, etc)
- “Future Of Our Community” Essay Contest
- Youth/adults drawing pictures depicting the community in 2020
- At a community gathering place, roll out butcher paper and allow the community to write/draw responses to visioning questions:
 - What is working well in our community?
 - What are the identifying features/unique characteristics in the community?
 - What “things” should we be investing in?
 - What should be “saved from the wrecking ball”?
 - “Clean Slate” scenario (flood event? Tornado? Hurricane?) If we had to rebuild our community where would we start first? What would we invest in first? How would we design the community?
 - Use Lincoln logs or Legos – rebuild your community
 - What are our community’s natural and cultural amenities?
- Community interviews (videotape?) community leaders, elected officials, senior citizens, youth and families. Ask them to describe their desired future of the community. Ask seniors about past community visioning exercises and have them discuss their vision for the future. Post interviews and videos on community blog.
- List of potential questions to use during visioning activities:
 - In what ways is our community thriving?
 - What in our community are we most proud of?
 - What are our future opportunities as a community?
 - In what ways can we better support our youth or young families?
 - To be a more thriving community in the future, what infrastructure investments should we be making today?
 - Who should we be partnering with today and in the future to help become a more thriving community?

Each community will be assigned a Visioning Facilitator who will work with the Community Coach and Steering Committee to coordinate and implement the Visioning Action Rally Event during late summer or early fall (August or before September 15, 2009). The Steering Committee and Coach will work to implement Visioning to Action Process reflecting these four basic steps:

1. Community Profile and Trends - *Where did we come from? Where are we now?*
 - a. Descriptive information
 - b. Community Values
 - c. Trend Information
 - d. Economic Profile System
2. Connecting the present to the future – *Where might we go?*
 - a. Probable Scenarios
 - b. Futures Game
 - i. Understanding consequences of decisions
 - ii. Using the Triple Bottom-Line when planning for the future
3. Vision Action Rally – *Where do we want to be?*
 - a. Community Vision Statement
 - b. Organize Community Action Teams Seven Approaches to Poverty Reduction
4. Action Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating – *How do we get there and when will we know it?*
 - a. Goals, Strategies & Actions
 - b. Action Agenda and Priorities
 - c. Action Teams
 - d. Tie Study Circles Actions to Visioning process

Converting any community vision into a viable plan of action is a critical component to the successful outcome of the Horizons Process. Therefore, three to five **Community Action Teams (CAT)** will be formed around the Approaches to Reduce Poverty and will focus on developing goals, strategies & actions for implementation over the next two to five years. The CATs focus will be on the Approach to Poverty Reduction and will combine actions generated during the Study Circles process and the Visioning Activities held during the summer.

The community coach and steering committee will monitor each CAT's progress and assist them in filling out the **Community Visioning & Strategic Planning Forms**. The Vision Facilitator and Horizons Leadership Team Community Liaison can provide support to communities during this planning phase.

Steering Committees and CAT should begin planning creative avenues for building their capacity and developing partnerships through speakers, field trips/study tours (single or multiple days), panel presentations, demonstrations, exchanges (visit and host groups), study groups, study circles, hosting a conference or web-based classes. These events can be held locally or by partnering with other Horizons and non-Horizons communities in their region.

A series of three community-wide meetings facilitated by Horizons Visioning Facilitators and/or the Horizons Leadership Team members will be offered in each community. At the conclusion of the final Visioning Action Rally, the Steering Committee will work with community members to organize "Community Action Teams" responsible for generating organizing and prioritizing action ideas.