

*Rural Community Revitalization
Discussion Guide Series*



Facilitator Guide 1: How To Build the Rural Community Development Puzzle

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VALUES. WORTH. ACTION.

About the Rural Community Revitalization Facilitator's Guides:

For the past three years, the Center for Rural Affairs monthly newsletter has carried a column by Michael Holton focused on rural community revitalization. Some articles referred to community development successes, while others related various struggles that come with the territory in community development.

In December 2006, Michael used his experience and insight to define the top 10 reasons rural community development is so difficult to accomplish. (See the feature article on our website, <http://www.cfra.org/newsletter/1206.htm> to read that article.)

The Center will be publishing a series of discussion guides and companion facilitator's guides to use in working with your community in asking the right questions. This facilitator's manual is the first in that series, an overview of the community development puzzle. It is intended to empower community leaders to help with the discussions.

Once communication and dialogue begins, real change can occur. With a little help we can all be part of our community's development. Maybe then we can create a real chance for the vigorous, prosperous life we dream of in small rural communities across the country.

HomeTown Competitiveness

A Come-Back/Give-Back Approach to Rural Community Building

HTC is a comprehensive approach to long-term rural community sustainability. This approach goes beyond the traditional tunnel vision of economic development. HTC helps the community to focus on four interrelated strategies that depend on each other for ultimate success. The four strategic areas of HTC are:

- Developing Leadership
- Energizing Entrepreneurs
- Engaging Youth
- Charitable Giving

To find out more, visit <http://www.htcnebraska.org>

HTC partners include the organizations below:



Completing the Rural Community Development Puzzle

For a puzzle to be complete, every piece must be in place. Community development is a process that requires multiple pieces, and economic development is but one. Many people equate economic development with community development, but the two are distinctly different. In terms of logic, community development is not a part of economic development, but economic development is a part of community development.

In order to conduct a community dialogue, you will need to make it clear to all participants why you are having a meeting. To have a successful session where opinions and thoughts are shared, the leader and/or facilitator must prepare for the meeting to produce conducive dialogue that will provide meaning.

PREPARING FOR THE DIALOGUE

Determine the purpose for the meeting.

Using the companion discussion guide as the reading, you may want to emphasize the assets of the community as a common ground for everyone to start with. You will also want to ask yourself these three very important questions.

*Is the meeting intended to inform people?
Is the meeting intended to consult people?
Is the meeting intended to involve people?*



The purpose of the meeting needs to be crystal clear to both the facilitator and the audience.

Another area to consider is whether or not the intended result is best achieved by conducting a meeting. Opinions and other alternatives will be discussed, and you will need to be prepared for change.

Meetings not planned well often have participants feeling frustrated and believing that the meeting was a waste of time.

Build relationships with participants in advance.

Identify key stakeholders and make them be a part of the solution and not the problem. A successful dialogue will include a diversity of people who have a substantial interest in the welfare of your community.

One of the first things you can do as the facilitator of the meeting is to effectively remove yourself as a facilitator or leader of the discussion and build a rapport with

the group. If they see you as a participant with them, you will become a person rather than someone who is attached to a potentially controversial topic.

Have a draft agenda.

Before a meeting takes place where dialogue will be the mission, a draft agenda should be present. Agendas can be changed by the participants, but the initial agenda is important because it serves as a guide as well to help the facilitator keep the group going. An agenda along with the discussion guide will be your guarantee of a well conducted meeting.



Consider your meeting space.

An often overlooked item is the meeting space. If participants are uncomfortable with the set up of the space, then dialogue will be diminished. If you are the meeting planner, identify an appropriate location and be in charge of the room arrangement. Semicircles or a U-shape design of tables and chairs often is the most effective arrangement as it allows for face-to-face attention. It also allows for people to see flipcharts better or the facilitator/leader.

Beginning the Dialogue.

Set the tone of the meeting or dialogue by personally greeting as many of the participants as you can. Light refreshments would soften the tone as well. Make sure that you have a sign-up sheet at the entrance to be able to get information that will surely assist you in follow-up meetings. Helping people feel comfortable communicates to the people participating in the dialogue that their presence will go a long way in building trust and ultimately, commitment.

Open the meeting by passing out the dialogues as they are presented. The first dialogue is geared toward discussing the complexity of the community development puzzle. It will be important for the participants to begin to work through identification of the assets of the community and actually develop a puzzle with real pieces that they call their own community.

Asking simple questions can help set the tone as well. Questions like, "Why is this meeting important to you?" or "What needs to happen here today for this meeting to be a success to you?" This is a process called checking in. Later in the meeting it will be important to use the same process called checking out.

REMEMBER TO TREAT ALL PARTICIPANTS LIKE ADULTS

An important part of the dialogue process is to realize that individuals will get different takes on the meeting, and it will be up to you to make sure that you get the

most from each participant. Now that you have set up the meeting and everyone is comfortable, how will you treat the people during the meeting? Here are a few simple tips to remember when trying to carry on conversations with adults who have come to the meeting.

Adults Will Want to Know Why They Should Be There.

If people are going to invest their time in what is usually a very busy schedule, then he or she will want to know what kind of benefit they will get by attending this meeting. One of the first tasks for a facilitator/leader will be to show what tangible or direct benefits the participant will gain with the knowledge they acquire from the meeting. Strategies often are developed based upon the input from this type of dialogue.

Adults Have a Need to Take Care of Their Own.

As busy as all of our schedules are, we have a desire to take care of our own. This comes from a lifetime of managing our own lives. Small group discussions will often allow participants to use a question that is posed to them and develop a list of responses to bring back to the large group. This way, the learning curve allows responsibility in their statements and actions during the dialogue.

Adults Approach Problem Solving from an Experience Level.

When you develop these dialogues for small rural communities and you are asking people to participate, they will most likely come to the meeting with a lifetime of experiences. No two people will match exactly. As the facilitator, you will need to know how to take the wealth of experience that all people have and make it productive for the meeting.

For example, before beginning a strategic process, you may want to ask the group how many of them have ever participated in strategic planning methods. From the show of hands, allow some time for those people to share their stories. This will make sure that the process you are beginning is rooted through the experience of the group and not some outside unrelated and boring lecture.

Adults Want to Learn and Are Motivated by Internal and External Forces.

Adults want to learn, yet they feel they are being told what to do in many meetings they attend. As the facilitator, you must present the dialogue in such a way that it promotes a benefit to the discussion participant.

If the individual who is invited can take at least one piece of the dialogue home with them, learning will have been confirmed. Youth often equate learning with memorizing materials to pass a test, whereas adults only learn if they view the learning as it applies in their lives. With community development dialogue, how does the material fit with them? This is the question that should be the premise of the conversation.



External forces that will motivate the discussions will be such items as community celebrations, building a new library, fundraising for a new church, etc. While all of these are powerful forces, they will only remain as long as the need exists. Once the need has been satisfied, the external forces cease.

Internal forces are far greater and manifest themselves in such things as self-esteem, achievement, competition, and accomplishments.

The secret to conducting successful dialogues in your community will be to appeal to the participants internal needs and working to enrich their lives.

The key to the success of these dialogues is to listen to what the community has to say. Materials can be used to stimulate the discussion, but no two communities will be alike. This is what makes these conversations genuine and, in most cases, unrehearsed. Building your community to be able to solve problems carries a tremendous advantage. These are the communities that get the competitive edge in the market and in the social sectors. People like to live in a place where other people care.

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