

Community Vision to Action Forums

**An Organizers Guide to Participatory
Planning**

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October 2003

Acknowledgments

This manual draws on the earlier model research and development work of Vital Communities, University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension and Antioch New England Institute. In addition, it includes the thinking and input of Maureen Hart, Paul Markowitz, Marla Handy and Jack Calhoun.

Work on various versions of this manual has been funded by the National Park Service, the Baltic American Partnership Fund, Upper Valley Community Foundation, New Hampshire Charitable Foundation and the Robins Foundation.

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1—Overview and Context



How to use this Manual

Community Vision to Action Forums—An Organizers Guide to Community Planning is our attempt to pull together the lessons we’ve learned from our years of experience in supporting and facilitating participatory planning efforts in communities in the United States and Europe. In addition to materials that explore the whole process, Section 3, “Promotion and Logistics” is a special section designed just for the use of the local Steering Committee.” The manual also includes two sections designed for the use of the Advisor and Lead Facilitator—Section 4 and Section 5, which includes facilitation training materials.

The pages are designed to be removable so that you can target information to the people who need it. We consider this a work in progress. If you have any suggestions or comments, please let us know! Contact Delia Clark, delia_clark@comcast.net

What is a Vision to Action Forum?

A Vision to Action Forum is a day and a half long gathering of residents of a local community. It is a chance for a diverse group who share the same community to come together in a neutral setting to take stock of where they are, to look together at opportunities and threats on the horizon, to develop a common vision of what they want for their community and to launch some initiatives to get them there. Vision to Action Forums focus on identifying and celebrating the community assets of today, and building on them to shape a healthy and sustainable community for tomorrow.

Because they are designed to fit each community, Vision to Action forums have had concrete results in everything from small rural villages, suburban towns and urban neighborhoods. They have been used successfully to bring together residents of a single municipality and also to bring together residents of multiple towns within the same region.

The structure of a Forum is designed to foster strong participation from a wide range of community members within a short time. It starts with the key elements present in any healthy community and quickly moves to the unique characteristics, resources and issues of the particular community. The agenda alternates between full group discussions and small group sessions, allow participants to dig into issues in detail, then hear from each other to inform further discussion. Through tight facilitation, the discussion progresses from a big-picture exploration of the community's assets and problems to an identification of key issues. It then moves on to identifying a range of possible action steps to address the issues, prioritizing these based on participant interest in contributing time to carrying them out. The Forum ends with the launching of several citizen action initiatives as well as a complete report of all the assets, issues and solutions generated during the course of the day and a half.

Why Conduct a Vision to Action Forum in Your Community?

For many communities the Vision to Action Forum will be the first time in memory, or maybe ever, that residents have held a conversation such as this, which brings together the many different perspectives of local residents, reflects on where the community has come from and develops a common vision about where the people who live there would like it to go. Rather than relying on outside experts, the Vision to Action forum helps a community to determine its own path and to move along it.

Strong, healthy, vibrant communities--the kind that most of us want to live in--emerge directly from the energy, passion and good humor of the people who live in them. This on-going, informed and joyful participation in civic endeavors provides for the direct needs of local residents through the libraries, bike paths, community centers, river monitoring programs, community gardens and rescue squads which are its products. It also meets their indirect needs by bringing them together so they can learn each other's stories, see the strengths in each other's diversity, laugh together and revitalize a sense of community.

The Vision to Action forum is grounded in two beliefs. First, that our motivation to participate in community affairs comes directly from a strong sense of place--a deep understanding of and concern for the landscapes and people of our home ground. Second, that people are most eager to contribute their time to initiatives which they have participated in identifying and which they see as relevant to their lives.

With skilled facilitation, diverse community members are able to conceive and develop broad-based solutions to community issues that have far greater chances for success than ideas that have not been tempered by exposure to a range of perspectives. In the process community members often develop a strong personal commitment to local project ideas, which translates into ongoing personal contributions of time and money. We have found that most people consider it an honor, and even a pleasure, to be asked to contribute their time and talents to working with others to help their community thrive.

Social Capital: A Personal Story

By Susan Clark

I came upon it by surprise about two months ago, not far from my house: a large delivery truck stuck in the snow. It had come down a steep driveway and now was perfectly--almost artistically--placed sideways across the road. Neighbors had already arrived with shovels to help dig it out. It was pretty clear that the situation was under control, and I drove away just as another neighbor arrived with a tractor to help.

It's funny how those mini-emergencies seem to bring out the best in people. Nobody back there with their shovels was expecting to get paid for their labor. This is what neighbors do for each other. Sociologists actually have a name for this phenomenon. They call it "reciprocity"--the idea, embedded in a culture, that what goes around comes around. Everybody knows that someday, it might be *them* in the ditch.

Musing about reciprocity, I didn't get three miles down the road when I was flagged down by a frantic woman. As her car idled beside the road, she tearfully explained that she had been dropping a child at the bus stop and had locked the keys in the car. The heat inside the car was on high--and her three-year-old son was buckled inside.

I did what anyone would have done. I drove door-to-door until I found someone who was home to let me use their phone to call a service station to come get her car open for her. Then I went back to her car and tried to distract her frustrated child by holding up to the window a children's book I had in my car. And when the tow truck came, we were both so giddy and relieved that I unthinkingly took a gamble: I loaned the woman the \$20 she needed to pay the service man.

There are plenty of places where reciprocity is not an assumed thing--places with no Good Samaritans, either because people are frightened of each other or because they've been conditioned not to care. But if you're lucky, you have--or can build--a strong network of community interaction, trust, and reciprocity. The fancy term for this is "social capital." Being rich in social capital is good news--and not only if you're stuck in a snowbank.

Studies have shown that social capital makes societies healthier. It's linked to more democratic, responsive governments. Political scientists even have the data to show that social capital *creates wealth* in a community. That's right, civic societies are more wealthy, and that's what *causes* the wealth--not the other way around.

I'll tell you, I certainly was glad, that day, that I live in a place that is rich in social capital. That very afternoon, I bundled my baby into my car, turned the key, and--click. Nothing. It was so cold out that my car battery had gone dead. When my neighbor came

over to give my car a jump-start, I was very grateful, and I was reminded again how true it is: when you give a little, eventually, you get back a little too.

And the woman with the child locked in her car? When she sent me a thank you note--complete with a check repaying my twenty dollars--she mailed me a lot more than just money. She mailed me a huge "interest payment"--on my "investment" in social capital.

Vision to Action Forum— Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is a “Vision to Action Forum”?

A: The Vision to Action Forum is a one-and-a-half day community gathering, which brings together a broad cross-section of community members to assess their community’s strengths and opportunities and identify problem areas, to share their ideas and hopes for their community’s future, and to shape and launch an action plan to achieve their specific goals.

Q: Who organizes the Forum?

A: A citizen Steering Committee, representing a cross-section of the community, works with an Advisor / Lead Facilitator from a non-profit organization, county or borough government, university or an independent firm to plan the event. Advisors help provide the structure and the lead facilitation, while Steering Committee members decide how to make the event most successful in their community, coordinating the logistics, publicity, and cultural aspects and finding local citizens to facilitate the small group discussions.

Q: What are the over-arching goals of a Vision to Action Forum?

A: The Vision to Action Forum has three over-arching goals:

Strengthening Community Vitality

The Forum process is designed to help strengthen community, rallying renewed community spirit and energy. During the 1-1/2 day process, local citizens gather with old and new acquaintances to affirm the community’s strengths, identify common concerns, and create action steps to meet these challenges.

Building Civic Engagement and Local Leadership

The Forum process brings new faces into the community discussion process. Drawing heavily on the collective wisdom of the participants, the Forum provides a means for citizens to work together, expands the community’s leadership pool, and creates momentum and local spirit for positive change. In addition, the advisor offers facilitation training to 20 community members, who then act as small-group facilitators during the Forum event. This new pool of trained facilitators can be a valuable asset in follow-up efforts across the community.

Promoting Sustainable Development

Through participation in The Forum, residents have the opportunity to see their community from different perspectives and over a longer time frame. This expanded

vision often leads to ideas for healthy new initiatives. In addition, the Forum strengthens the local economy as community members and outside investors and funders are more likely to support projects that have emerged from a participatory process in which the underlying values and goals of the community have been examined.

Q: What are the actual outcomes of a Vision to Action Forum?

A: Although each Vision to Action Forum is as unique as the community it represents, all Forums have three outcomes:

Community Projects

During the 1-1/2 day event, participants begin with big-picture visioning, and then narrow their ideas down to concrete, prioritized action steps. These action projects are only limited by the imagination of the community and, in other communities, have included such efforts as launching a community newspaper, building a town trail system, organizing an industrial park, launching a comprehensive planning effort, creating a support group for new small-business entrepreneurs, and many, many others. Oftentimes a community opts to launch a larger scale effort requiring significant planning time, while simultaneously launching smaller concrete projects, thus attracting the efforts of a range of community members.

Vision to Action Forum Report

The results of the small- and large-group sessions at the Vision to Action Forum event are all recorded and transcribed, and result in a Forum Report that is distributed to all participants as well as town committees and the library. Far from another report that will sit on the shelf, the Forum Report includes the many ideas and suggestions citizens offered at the event. Once towns have successfully completed the first round of action steps, they often go back to the report to “mine” it for additional ideas.

Strengthening a Sense of Common Purpose

Although this outcome may be the hardest to measure, it also may be the most important. The Vision to Action Forum draws on a broad range of viewpoints, examining cultural, economic, environmental and social issues, each in light of the other. Forums focus on thoughtful issue identification. Rather than polarizing a community around problems, it brings people together around solutions.

Q: Who should participate in a Vision to Action Forum?

A: Everyone! The Forum event is broadly inclusive. Forum planners work hard to make sure that the many different groups and corners of the community are represented, in order to make for the most vibrant, accurate discussion of the community’s past, present and future. Well-rounded participation also ensures that the action steps that come out of a Forum have broad citizen support and create sustainable solutions.

Although the average size of a Forum is around 120 citizens, Forums have ranged from as small as 40 citizens to as large as 250. The most important factor is that all parts of the community feel included and are represented.

Each community is unique, and it is up to the Forum Steering Committee to decide whether there are non-resident “stakeholders” who should also be included in the Forum event (for example: seasonal residents, people who work or own businesses in town but live elsewhere, etc.).

Q: How long does it take to plan a Forum?

A: We suggest a minimum of 3 months from the first Steering Committee meeting to the date of the Forum event itself. This offers enough time for thorough planning and, most importantly, allows for the word to get out to ensure broad community participation. Some communities have taken as long as a year to plan the event, talking it up on the beach in the summer and at meetings of all the local organizations. In general, the shorter the planning time, the harder and faster the committee will have to work to get the word out.

Q: Where did the Forum process originate?

A: Vital Communities and Antioch New England Institute staff developed the Vision to Action Forum model, drawing on models developed by the Cooperative Extension Services of the Universities of Vermont and New Hampshire and from a variety of current thinkers on community development. We developed the model to build in an emphasis on sustainability, community capacity building, inclusive participation, and an integrated assessment of community issues. The Forum process has been used successfully in scores of communities in the United States and Central Europe, from small villages to urban neighborhoods and from single municipalities to regional clusters of towns with similar concerns.

Vision to Action Forum—Sample Agenda

Friday Evening

5:30 *Sign-In, Supper*

6:30 *Welcome*

Introduction to social capital and participatory planning

Overview of Vision to Action process

Who is here?

Mosaic and Vision

7:30 *A Look at Yesterday and Today*

Presentation of local history and demographic data

8:00 *Presentation of Components of Successful Communities*

1. Effective Community Leadership
2. Informed Citizen Participation
3. Positive Inter-group Relations
4. Vibrant Arts and Cultural Heritage
5. High Quality Educational Opportunities for All Ages
6. Adequate Physical Infrastructure (roads, public buildings, etc.)
7. Equitable and Adequate Social Services
8. High Quality Environment and Natural Resources
9. Strong and Stable Local Economy
10. Planned Growth and Development

8:15 *Small Group Discussions of Components*

(Small group facilitators)

Random assignments to small groups, one component per group

- Strengths of your community in the component area
- Problems
- What would you like to see in the future?
- What are the 5 key issues that need to be addressed?

9:30 *Adjourn*

Saturday

8:45 *Coffee and check-in*

9:00 *Small group reports*

Each of the ten small groups report to the large group, five minutes each

- 10:00 Selection of Key Issues**
Discussion to refine list of 50 Key Issues down to about ten, based on consensus
- 10:25 Individual selection of Key Issue**
Participants select issue to work on
- 10:30 Break**
- 10:45 Small groups meet for Key Issue discussion**
(Small group facilitators)
- Define the problem or opportunity
 - Project goals - identify what you want to accomplish
 - Identify potential projects/solutions
 - Evaluate potential projects using impact-feasibility grid
 - Select 3 projects to bring to the full group
- 12:15 Lunch**
- 1:00 Report Back from Small Groups**
- 2:00 Project selection**
Which project do you think we should move forward on?
Which is the most important project for your community right now?
Individual selection of project development groups
- 2:15 Break**
- 2:30 Project development - Small groups**
(Small group facilitators)
- Goals and objectives
 - Potential obstacles, solutions
 - Resources needed
 - Principal leadership
 - Action steps
 - Timeline
 - Coordinator, first step
- 3:15 Where do we go from here?**
Full group
- Plans for follow-up meeting
 - How to communicate with each other and the community
 - Coordination of committees' projects
- 3:30 Adjourn**
-



2—Getting Started



Overview of Roles

The Steering Committee

Steering Committee members will have the following responsibilities:

- ◆ Attend all Steering Committee meetings
- ◆ Work together to select the best date and location for the Forum
- ◆ Work together to develop budget and track expenses for Forum
- ◆ Work together to develop an invitation list
- ◆ Work together to sign, address, and mail invitations
- ◆ Think strategically about the best way to get colleagues, neighbors, friends, family, and other people you know to attend the Forum
- ◆ Call individuals and encourage them to participate in the Forum
- ◆ Work on specific tasks such as food, publicity, locating small-group facilitators, report creation, etc. (see "Steering Committee Job Descriptions," below)
- ◆ Attend small-group facilitator training (optional)
- ◆ Attend and participate in the Forum
- ◆ Attend a de-briefing session after the Forum
- ◆ Help in Forum Report distribution as necessary
- ◆ Plan follow-up gathering(s)

The Advisor / Lead Facilitator

The Advisor and Lead Facilitator, who are often the same person, may come from a local non-profit organization, regional government, the cooperative extension service of your local university or may be an independent consultant. The Advisor's role will include the following:

- ◆ Present the Vision to Action process to local community leaders and residents, returning as often as needed to build a critical mass of people interested in moving forward with planning an event
- ◆ Advise core local organizers on the establishment of a diverse and functional Steering Committee

- ◆ Attend the first few Steering Committee meetings to help establish roles and to ensure clarity about organizational tasks
- ◆ Attend other Steering Committee meetings upon request, including the last meeting before the event.
- ◆ Attend the Forum and offer logistical and other support as needed.
- ◆ Attend de-briefing meetings and Advise the Steering Committee about developing the report, supporting action committees and planning a follow-up event.

The Lead Facilitator's role will include:

- ◆ Attend a Steering Committee meeting part way through the planning process so that the committee members can meet you, share their concerns and special considerations, ask any questions and develop a sense of mutual trust.
- ◆ Deliver the small group facilitator training during the week or two before the Forum.
- ◆ Act as Lead Facilitator for the Forum.
- ◆ Attend the first de-briefing meeting of the Steering Committee if requested.

The Local Participants

When we invite citizens to attend a Vision to Action Forum, here's what we're asking for:

- ◆ Attend the Vision to Action Forum on Friday evening (5:30-9:30) and all day Saturday (9:00 a.m. 3:30 p.m.). Bring family, friends, neighbors and colleagues if you wish!
- ◆ Bring your complaints and your positive comments about the community—your greatest fears and highest hopes—and be willing to share them
- ◆ Be courteous to other participants, and keep your mind open to new ideas
- ◆ You will have the opportunity to volunteer for a follow-up action committee. Consider serving on one if one of the projects is of interest to you, but this is by no means required.

The Steering Committee— Roles and Responsibilities

Steering Committee Composition

Why Have a Steering Committee?

The success of this participatory model relies entirely on its core group of volunteers--the Steering Committee. Without the talent, local knowledge, and hard work of these key community members, no amount of paid staff work could accomplish the goals of this participatory process.

The Advisor supports and provides information and guidance to the Steering Committee. However, it is the volunteer Steering Committee members who will make the critical community contacts and carry out the many tasks necessary to making the event a success.

Who should serve on the Steering Committee?

The Steering Committee members should:

- ◆ Represent a broad cross-section of the town in geography, employment, age, gender, length of time living in town, socio-economic group, etc.,
- ◆ Have (or develop) a clear sense of why the community is undertaking the Vision to Action Forum at this time, and what it hopes to accomplish,
- ◆ Be supportive of and interested in the event, and willing to promote it to friends, neighbors, family and colleagues; and,
- ◆ Be able to take on specific tasks and follow them through.

The Steering Committee should represent all parts of your community, including citizens who may not have been involved in town affairs before. If you look around the room at the first Steering Committee meeting and recognize only your friends and neighbors, you may not have looked far enough for Steering Committee members!

The Steering Committee should represent the same type of diversity that you will want to achieve in your list of event participants. Thus, we recommend that the Steering Committee brainstorm a list of groups it hopes will be represented at the event, and then consider who might serve on the Steering Committee to represent each of these groups. (Some individuals will represent several groups.)

Your list might include the following:

Long-time residents	Men
Newcomers	Women
Local business owners	Various political parties
Retirees / seniors	Handicapped

High school students	All ethnic groups
Young adults and middle aged	Funders and philanthropists
Wealthy	Different geographic regions of town
Economically disadvantaged	Religious groups
Schools—staff, teachers, parents, students	Civic groups
Government employees	Active citizens
Local government representatives	Inactive citizens
Local employees	New parents
Married people	Parents with school-aged children
Single people	Parents with older children
Farmers, foresters, fisherman, miners	Artists and craftspeople
Community leaders	Representatives of local clubs
Managers of publicly-owned land such as parks, forests or preserves	Non-profit environmental, social, economic or cultural organizations

How many individuals do we need on the Steering Committee?

The Steering Committee is one group where the rule is, "The bigger, the better!"

Although some people feel small groups work more efficiently, the Steering Committee is an exception. A larger Steering Committee will work to your advantage for a number of reasons:

- ◆ The Steering Committee should represent community members from as many different backgrounds and parts of the community as possible;
- ◆ Most of the work will be done by smaller subcommittees, so it helps to have plenty of Steering Committee members to go around; and
- ◆ Word-of-mouth from organizers will be the most effective way to get lots of people to come to the event, so the more diverse the group that is talking about it, the better!

Specific Functions and Tasks of the Steering Committee and its Sub-Committees

Specific roles and tasks of the Steering Committee are listed below. All Steering Committee members should choose one or more sub-committees to serve on. These smaller sub-committees perform the critical tasks leading up to the Forum event..

Chair or Co-Chairs

The Chair or Co-Chairs are responsible for keeping the event planning on schedule, staying in touch with all of the people who have taken on specific tasks to make sure they are on course, and keeping the Steering Committee nurtured and encouraged. The most important traits in the Chair(s) are that they are enthusiastic, organized, and knowledgeable about the event process. (It can also be helpful if at least one co-chair is a well-known person in town--someone who many townspeople are familiar with as an organizer or leader--to give the event credibility.)

Responsibilities include:

- ◆ Schedule and run Steering Committee meetings
- ◆ Act as a liaison with lead facilitators
- ◆ Keep track of all other committees' progress, keeping the event planning on schedule and helping to solve problems when necessary
- ◆ Maintain enthusiasm and energy of the group: actively acknowledge and thank people for their continuing efforts, encourage group members' work by reminding them how important it is, and celebrate their small successes as the planning process goes along
- ◆ Actively encourage all Steering Committee members to be involved in recruiting Forum participants and getting the word out to their friends, family, neighbors and colleagues
- ◆ Arrange follow-up activities after the Forum, and be the person/people to whom small-group projects are ultimately accountable.

Treasurer

The Treasurer is responsible for keeping track of the finances of the event

Responsibilities include:

- ◆ Develop budget for Forum and related work
- ◆ Keep track of income and expenses for the event and pay bills
- ◆ Maintain close contact with Fundraising Committee

Secretary

The Secretary keeps track of all decisions made at each Steering Committee meeting. The Secretary keeps notes on the meetings, and if the group wishes, distributes the notes to

Steering Committee members. The bulk of the Secretary's role comes after the event, however, when s/he types (or arranges for the typing of) the event report, and sees that it is published and distributed in a timely manner.

Responsibilities include:

- ◆ Record decisions reached at meetings and make sure the information is available to those who can not make a meeting
- ◆ Arrange for preparation and distribution of event report
- ◆ Arrange for or write thank you notes after event

Invitations and Programs

Tasks of individuals responsible for invitations and program:

- ◆ Write and design Forum invitation
- ◆ Organize suggestions for invitation list and best approaches for contacting individuals
- ◆ Generate or obtain mailing labels and coordinate mailing of invitations, preferably with the Steering Committee personalizing invitations (see “Tips for Invitations and Programs”).
- ◆ Design and print program and any accompanying information you may wish to offer participants

Fundraising

Tasks of individuals responsible for fundraising:

- ◆ Identify possible contributors (individuals, businesses, organizations, foundations, etc.) that may wish to donate funds or other resources to the event, and solicit these contributions
- ◆ Coordinate any solicitations for fundraising or in-kind donations to avoid repetition
- ◆ Stay in touch with Food Committee which may be soliciting donations of food, serving utensils, etc. for event, to avoid repetition.
- ◆ Keep track of contributors so that they can be thanked in event materials
- ◆ Maintain close contact with Treasurer

Food

Tasks of individuals responsible for food include:

- ◆ Arrange dinner for the first evening
- ◆ Decide how to run the lunch on Day 2 (brown bag, catered as fund-raiser, donations, etc.) and coordinate it
- ◆ Arrange for food for the two coffee breaks
- ◆ If you will need to know how many people will be participating in meals, coordinate with the people making the invitations to put a meal check-off box on the invitation

- ◆ Purchase or seek donations for food, beverages, or supplies (napkins, cups, etc.), maintaining contact with Fundraising committee to avoid duplication in solicitations
- ◆ Coordinate with Site Logistics Committee to make sure the site will work for your meal plans
- ◆ For more details on all of the above, see "Tips for Food Logistics."

Site Logistics

Tasks of individuals responsible for site logistics:

- ◆ Arrange for use of site, and act as liaison with the site supervisor
- ◆ Coordinate with Food Committee to make sure the site will meet their needs
- ◆ Arrange for rooms, chairs, tables, custodians, etc. (See "Site Set-Up Tips.")
- ◆ Coordinate set-up and clean-up crews
- ◆ Obtain name tags and other non-food supplies

Registration

Tasks of individuals responsible for registration:

- ◆ Handle responses from community members and monitor diversity of responses
- ◆ Coordinate follow-up phone calls to encourage a broad and diverse attendance
- ◆ Set up and run registration table for check-in at event (both days)
- ◆ Make sure registration sign-in list is given to the people who will be producing the event Report
- ◆ For more details on all of the above, see "Tips for Registration"

Publicity and Promotion

Tasks of individuals responsible for publicity and promotion:

- ◆ Arrange posters, town and school newsletter articles, radio spots, press releases, letters to the editor, etc. to publicize Forum ahead of time (See "Tips for Event Publicity.")
- ◆ Arrange for presentations about the event to local organizations
- ◆ Encourage local media to cover the event, both before and on the day itself
- ◆ Throughout the planning process, remind all Steering Committee members to discuss the upcoming event with their community contacts (friends, family, neighbors, colleagues) to encourage broad Forum participation.

Small Group Facilitators Coordination

Tasks of individuals responsible for coordinating the small group facilitators:

- ◆ Recruit 20 small-group facilitators and recorders from among townspeople (See "Tips for Selecting Small-Group Facilitators.")
- ◆ Set up date, location, and snacks for Facilitator Training
- ◆ Assist the lead facilitators at the event

Child Care and Transportation

Tasks of individuals responsible for child care and transportation:

- ◆ Solicit information from potential event attendees (for example, through a check-off box on the Forum invitation) on whether they would like child care and/or transportation to be provided the day of the event
- ◆ Arrange for on-site child care for the event (if needed)
- ◆ Arrange to provide transportation to those who wouldn't be able to attend otherwise (if needed)
- ◆ Work with Invitation and Publicity/Promotion committees to publicize the availability of both of these services
- ◆ For more details on all of the above, see "Tips for Child Care and Transportation."

Local Officials

Tasks of individuals responsible for serving as a liaison with local officials:

- ◆ Act as liaison with local leaders such as the community council, etc., keeping them informed and up-to-date on event planning
- ◆ Solicit information from local leaders on how the event can be most useful to them, and communicate this information to event Chair(s)
- ◆ Encourage local officials to attend and participate

Data and Historical Preparation

Tasks of individuals responsible for data and historical information preparation:

- ◆ Arrange for the research and lively presentation of background information on your community (1/2-hour presentation at event on the evening of Day 1. (See "Tips for Data Gathering and Presentation."))
- ◆ Ensure that data (charts, graphs, photos, and accompanying commentary) is provided in a useful format to the people who will create the event Report.

Youth Participation

Tasks of individuals responsible for encouraging youth to get involved:

- ◆ Arrange for publicity of event that will reach youth (for example, through high school classes and clubs, community groups, etc.)
- ◆ Be in contact with local schools and youth-related organizations to determine ways to involve youth (for example, teachers may wish to include the Forum in a course curriculum)
- ◆ Identify and invite individual youths who may be interested in participating (For example, student leadership groups, etc.)
- ◆ Consider specific roles youth may play in event (see "Tips for Involving Young People.")

The Planning Process: A Detailed Timeline

Steps of the Forum Process—An Overview

1. Introduce the idea of a Forum to key people in town
2. Promote "ownership" of the project by meeting with many different constituent groups
3. Form a Steering Committee and begin to meet regularly
4. Determine date and location
5. Develop a budget
6. Advertise and promote the event to the general public
7. Invite diverse targeted individuals through letters, phone calls or personal meetings
8. Coordinate event logistics (food, set-up, child-care, clean-up, etc.)
9. Identify a team of twenty small-group facilitators
10. Coordinate small-group facilitator training session taught by the lead facilitator
11. Trouble-shoot on the day of the Forum
12. Arrange a de-briefing session after the Forum
13. Coordinate production and distribution of Forum Report
14. Coordinate a follow-up meeting

Will it really take three months to plan our Forum?

In our experience, very broad-based citizen participation in both the Steering Committee and the event itself is the most critical element in the success of a Forum event. Without complete participation and “buy-in” from all sectors of the community, the results of the event will be open to challenge, weakening their credibility and value.

In order to achieve full participation, time is necessary, both in building the Steering Committee and in publicizing the event. Broad publicity, presentations at various organizations, councils, clubs, personal meetings, as well as the vital “word-of-mouth” factor all take time, but they’re critical to allowing public interest to ripen.

Some groups choose to take longer than three months to plan their Forums. You should plan on a few false starts as it might take a while to build momentum for this idea in your community. If you decide to take longer, just keep in mind that the planning process is likely to lose momentum over the Christmas/New Year’s holidays, and in particular over the summer. If your planning process will include either of these times, build in extra time to re-gain momentum after what is likely to be a planning hiatus

Timeline: An Overview

<i>Milestone</i>	<i>Timeline</i>
1) Initial planning meetings	(Varies)
2) First Steering Committee meeting	At least three months before Forum
3) Second Steering Committee meeting	3-4 weeks later
4) Additional Steering Committee meetings and sub-committee work	Ongoing
5) Invitations mailed (optional)	Four to six weeks before Forum
6) Facilitator Training Session	Two weeks before Forum
7) Hold Vision to Action Forum	Friday evening and Saturday of Forum
8) Report completed	Within two weeks after Forum
9) De-Briefing Meeting	Within a month after Forum
10) Follow-Up Meeting	Three to six months after Forum

Timeline: In Detail

1) *Initial planning meeting(s)*

- ◆ The lead facilitator works with interested community members and involved leaders to present the Forum concept to appropriate groups within the community to build interest
- ◆ Group begins to define goals, strategies, and timeline for the Forum
- ◆ Group drafts a broadly representative Steering Committee list. Organizers divide up names so that they can phone potential Steering Committee members to invite them to first Steering Committee meeting

2) *First Steering Committee Meeting*

At least three months before Forum

- ◆ Review what a Forum is, how it works, its purpose and likely outcomes.
- ◆ Determine whether this Steering Committee successfully represents a broad enough cross-section of community. If not, brainstorm names of potential additional Steering Committee members. Divide up names so that nominated members may be phoned and invited to attend next meeting.
- ◆ Group agrees upon date and location for Forum (availability may need to be confirmed in following days)

- ◆ Members choose which specific tasks they would like to take on (see “Steering Committee Job Descriptions”) including chair or co-chairs and other roles. Form sub-committees to do these tasks and think of other community members to invite to serve on them.
- ◆ Plan a time for each sub-committee to get together one time before the second Steering Committee meeting to do initial planning

3) Second Steering Committee Meeting

Approximately 3-4 weeks later

- ◆ Briefly review Forum purpose for any new members
- ◆ Finalize Steering Committee roster: is your committee now well-rounded and complete?
- ◆ Finalize date and location for Forum
- ◆ Arrange for initial publicity—press releases for the media and local newsletters. Include date, location, and how people can get involved.
- ◆ Reports from each sub-committee on their activities for example the Promotion Sub-Committee could outline publicity and outreach campaign for Forum, with all members offering contact information and ideas

4) Subsequent Steering Committee Meetings and Sub-Committee Work

In the subsequent days and weeks, the lead facilitator will be “on call” to advise the Steering Committee and other involved participants in their efforts. As described in the attached materials, sub-committees of the Steering Committee take on planning tasks.

The Steering Committee should meet approximately once every two weeks, or as needed, to monitor each sub-committee’s progress, coordinate efforts, and maintain focus. In these meetings, you will:

- ◆ Enlist all members’ ideas and help in publicity and outreach campaign and follow-through
- ◆ Follow through on additional Steering Committee tasks

5) Invitation “Mailing Party” (optional)

Four to six weeks before Forum

- ◆ If you decide to mail personal invitations to residents, the Steering Committee gathers to address and personalize invitations

6) Facilitator Training/Final Meeting with Steering Committee

Two weeks before Forum

- ◆ The lead facilitator trains 20 volunteers in facilitation skills, to act as citizen facilitators during visioning workshop
- ◆ The lead facilitator works with Steering Committee and other involved participants to finalize details of visioning workshop
- ◆ Set date for de-briefing meeting.

7) Vision to Action Forum

- ◆ The lead facilitator facilitates 1-1/2 day Vision to Action Forum

8) Create and Distribute Report

Within two weeks after Forum

- ◆ Steering Committee volunteers type, compile and distribute Forum Report

9) De-Briefing Meeting

Within a month after Forum

- ◆ The lead facilitator meets with Steering Committee members and contact people for committees that came out of the Forum to critique the Forum process and check in on what follow-up the new committees may need
- ◆ Determine who would like to serve on a new, re-configured Coordination Committee to oversee the work of the committees that came out of the Forum and to plan the follow-up meetings.
- ◆ Set date for follow-up meeting.

10) Follow-up Meeting

Three to six months after Forum

- ◆ The Coordination Committee organizes a follow-up meeting of all Forum participants. This should last for 2-3 hours and could be on an evening or weekend afternoon and should include some food, local art work, activities and/or music. It should be a fun celebration of all the accomplishments of the committees that began at the Forum and an invitation for others to join in. It will provide motivation for each committee to complete it's tasks as they will be reporting on them to the public, and it will offer a great chance to bring together residents to celebrate their community.

Budget and Materials

The costs associated with putting on a Vision to Action forum tend to be covered by a combination of sources from both within and outside the community. These might include government and private grants as well as contributions of money, goods and services by both businesses and individuals within the community. For example, one community might cover the majority of expenses for the event through a state planning grant while in another community the budget might be cobbled together by a combination of contributions from local businesses and individuals, a fundraiser selling notecards featuring the event logo designed by a local artist, and contributions of food and printing costs by local residents.

Since there is great variability in costs depending on the size of the event, how it is publicized and how many of the direct costs of goods and services are contributed, and regional variation in expenses, we are providing a list of budget requirements that you can use to develop your own budget, rather than a proscribed budget. In our experience, total budgets for Vision to Action Forums up through the printing of the report but excluding follow-up work with the action committees and excluding the follow-up event/s run in the range of \$6,000-\$10,000.

Your Budget Should Allow For:

Advisor / Lead Facilitator

Sometimes the person or team in this role is made available to work for no cost to the community through their job or through a grant they have received. Other times you will need to cover this cost in your budget.

Food Supplies

Assuming that you will have a pot-luck supper on Friday and a brown bag lunch or fund-raiser lunch on Saturday, you will still need to provide the beverages, paper plates, cups and flatware for supper and pastries and coffee/tea for the coffee breaks. You may also want to buy food to supplement the pot luck, or you may decide to provide pizza or some food for lunch. You may choose to ask for donations from local restaurants, or this may be one of your direct costs.

Site Fees

There may be a rental cost for the space you use or a charge for having janitorial or security services. You may also need to rent chairs, tables or other items.

Printing

This will include the cost of producing your invitation, response, follow-up and thank you letters and the final report (which typically runs 70-90 pages and should be copied in sufficient quantities for each participant and distribution to other key individuals). It will also include the cost for envelopes, return address stamp or labels, and mailing labels if you use these. You will probably also want to make copies of an attractive poster to put up around the town, as well as

flyers to distribute through local establishments. If you use the work of a local artist on your poster, you may want to include the cost of color copying.

In addition you will need to budget for copying the training materials for the small group facilitators (typically 30 copies of each of approximately 15 pages).

Postage

You may want to mail individual invitations to each member of the community or to a representative sampling, if this is the best way to get the word out in your area. You may also wish to mail out the final report, or at least a postcard notifying participants when it is available.

Advertising and Promotion

In addition to printed invitations, posters and flyers, you might want to consider running display advertisements in local newspapers or putting spots on local radio. Ask if you can get a discount for being a not-for-profit event.

Equipment

You will need the use of a microphone and sound system throughout the Forum. The people using the microphone will be moving around from easel to easel in front of the room, so it is best if the microphone is either cordless or has an extra-long cord. In addition, you may need a LCD projector, overhead projector or slide projector for the presentation of local data on the first evening, depending on the preference of the presenter/s.

Facilitation Supplies

You will need the use of ten easels for the small-group sessions during Forum. In addition you may want other easels for displaying maps or other materials. Your local school may have a supply of easels, but avoid the short ones in the kindergarten room if possible. You can also check with your advisor as they may have access to easels through their organization. Alternately, you may simply tape paper to walls, though this works less efficiently. In addition you will need to procure the following, which allows supplies for each of the ten groups plus some extra for the large group facilitation and back-up:

- ◆ 12 easel pads or the equivalent in rolls of paper
- ◆ 40 plus fat-tipped, water-soluble markers in a range of colors, with at least three different colors per group. Easy-to read colors include black, blue, brown, purple, and green. Avoid orange and pink if possible except as highlight colors—difficult to read from a distance.
- ◆ 12 rolls of masking tape
- ◆ 10 pads of sticky notes, roughly 3 x 3 inches
- ◆ 30 two-pocket folders for training the local facilitators
- ◆ Colorful dot stickers (5 for each Forum participant)
- ◆ Other facilitation supplies as needed
- ◆ Name tags

Possible Sources For Supplies Within the Community

You may not need to purchase or even rent all of the supplies you will need for the Forum. You may be able to get supplies donated or loaned to your group. Consider asking local organizations if you can borrow such supplies as microphone and speakers, easels and flip charts, etc. You may wish to contact your local schools, governmental organizations, churches, arts organizations, and businesses. Consider asking local stores and businesses to donate supplies such as paper plates, markers, easel pads, etc. Local restaurants and stores may be willing to contribute parts of the meals, or provide food and beverages for one of the breaks. Local printers may be willing to donate the printing of the handouts and/or final report for Forum.



3—Promotion and Logistics



Every Steering Committee chooses to address the tasks of organizing a Vision to Action Forum differently. Some prefer to gather regularly for check-ins while others prefer to carry out the tasks through sub-committees, meeting less regularly to coordinate. Each chooses to add different special touches from historical exhibits, map displays, and children's art, to lunch provided from local farms, baking of regional specialties and displays of local products to music by the local seniors band or a local story teller. However you choose to work, this section offers some tips on carrying out the work of the Steering Committee most successfully.

Tips for Choosing A Date and Location for Your Forum

Choosing a date and a location are generally done simultaneously, since each decision depends on the availability of the other. You may wish to make a list of your preferred dates and locations, prioritize them, and then research which preferred dates and sites match.

Date

Experience has shown that holding a Forum on a Friday evening and all day the following Saturday is the best combination to get the most participants. When you are selecting the dates for your Forum, keep the following tips in mind:

We recommend planning your Forum three months in advance. (See “Timeline”) June, July and August are the most challenging times to get people to come to a Forum, while September through April (except December) are better times, because they minimize conflicts with local activities and summer vacations. May can also work well, if the local economy isn’t strongly agricultural. Similarly, if you start planning your Forum in the spring, you may have difficulty getting your Steering Committee together over the summer. Summer is a wonderful time to promote the Forum informally through personal contacts; then, you may wish to incorporate extra time in the fall to gear up before the event.

Additional considerations in selecting a date:

- ◆ Can all Steering Committee members make it?
- ◆ Will the chosen date allow enough time for planning and publicity?
- ◆ Is it close to a holiday (including religious holy days)?
- ◆ Is there another event in town that may offer competition? (Be sure to check with other organizations in town about potential conflicts--for example, fairs or festivals, school events or graduations, important sporting events, etc.)
- ◆ Do you have a seasonal population (summer people/winter people etc.) that should be included?
- ◆ Does the local economy depend on seasonal activities such as farming or peak tourist times that would preclude good attendance during particular months?
- ◆ Is bad weather likely to hinder participation?
- ◆ Are many people in your town away during certain parts of the year on vacation?

Location

Because of the need for a large gathering space, as well as smaller break-out rooms, most towns choose their school as the site for the Forum. The large-group sessions can take place in the cafeteria or gym (preferably one with access to a kitchen), and classrooms

can be used as the small-group rooms. However, Forums have also been successfully conducted in community center buildings, town halls, churches, libraries, and other public spaces, using adjoining community buildings and even nearby homes for break-out spaces.

You will need to make an educated guess about how many attendees to expect, so you can make your plans for seating, etc. Experience has shown that most Forum organizers underestimate participation and are pleasantly surprised by the number of attendees. You may revise your count once responses start to come in from your invitations.

Considerations in selecting a site:

- ◆ Is it available on at least one of your preferred dates?
- ◆ Does it have one room large enough for all participants to gather?
- ◆ Are there at least ten spaces (break-out rooms) for the small groups to meet? (Two of the small groups can usually meet in separate corners of the large room. Too many small groups meeting all at once in a large room, however, is likely to create too much noise for anyone to hear.)
- ◆ Is handicapped accessible (the large room, bathrooms, and at least 2-3 break-out rooms)?
- ◆ Are there kitchen facilities?
- ◆ If people will drive to the event, is there parking? If needed, is the site near public transportation?
- ◆ Do most people know where it is?
- ◆ Is there a fee for use of the space (including janitorial fees), and if so, can you afford it?
- ◆ Is it heated or cooled as needed?
- ◆ Will you be able to get in early to set up and stay late to clean up?

Tips for Fundraising

When soliciting funds or materials, keep in mind that you may be the first or only contact an individual or group has with the Vision to Action Forum idea. Be prepared to be a positive and well-informed “ambassador” for the Forum, describing the Forum and explaining its purpose. Be sure to invite them to participate through attending the event, in addition to supporting it financially.

Those doing fundraising have an especially important responsibility to stay in close contact with the rest of the Steering Committee. In particular: the Treasurer (so the flow of money and resources is carefully tracked); the Food committee (so you coordinate who is soliciting food/resources from which restaurants/businesses--you don't want to ask the same business twice!); and Secretary, Publicity Committee and Program Committee (to ensure that the Secretary can write thank-you notes to contributors, and to ensure that your list of everyone who has made a contribution to the Forum is acknowledged in the Forum materials).

Should We Charge a Fee for Participating in the Forum?

We strongly advise against collecting money from Forum participants. You do not want to limit people's participation based on their economic means, and even a small amount of money would be prohibitive for some.

Raising Funds

Communities have found a number of other creative ways to raise money to cover Forum costs. Just a few ideas for raising funds are listed below.

Municipal Support

Your municipality may be a good source of funds to help cover the basic costs associated with conducting a Forum. Consider making a formal presentation and request to your local officials, and be prepared with materials to answer any questions they may have about the purpose and planned outcomes of the Forum.

Local Non-Government Organization (NGOs)

Some NGOs have allocated funds to support various local events. Inquire with group leaders, and again, be prepared with materials to answer questions about the Forum.

Local Businesses

Local businesses are an important source of support for many Forums. Consider soliciting cash contributions, as well as resources--for example, food and supplies from stores and restaurants, or copying services from a local printing center (or any business with copying capabilities). One town with a particularly high number of restaurants even furnished an entire Forum meal with dishes contributed by different restaurants--a great

showcase for the chefs, and a delicious treat! Let businesses know that their names will be mentioned in Forum literature and at the event (and then be sure to do so).

Local Professionals

Concerned that their town's small businesses and restaurants had been overly solicited for donations, one town successfully identified an untapped resource: its local lawyers! The town's legal firms were asked to sponsor the Forum breaks; a small card next to the snack area thanked each firm by name. Similarly, you might solicit realtors, banks, consulting firms, and other professionals in your town, as well as area artists and craftspeople.

Philanthropists

In some communities, local individuals have anonymously covered the majority of the cost of a Forum, freeing up the Steering Committee to focus on logistics and promotion. You can make these requests of civic-minded individuals through a letter and follow-up phone call or visit. In addition, you may wish to solicit support from people who are associated with your community but who now live abroad. If they have family or other connections to your community, you may wish to contact them via a person directly connected to them. Be sure the person communicating with them is well-versed in the goals of the Forum and its purpose in building your community, and can present the project enthusiastically.

Sell Forum-Related Products

Some towns' committees have produced and sold a product to raise funds for the Forum. One town produced and sold a town phone/contact directory, complete with advertisements from local businesses, before the event. Another town turned the event logo (designed by a local silk-screen artist) into notecards and sold them at a table set up in front of the general store for the four Saturdays before the event. Both products not only raised funds for the Forum, but also served to raise public awareness about the event.

Raffles and Drawings

Raffles and drawings have been used successfully to raise money for Forums. You may ask local businesses and artisans to donate goods, services, or gift certificates. And don't overlook the skills of Steering Committee members and other citizens--a fresh home-baked pie, a homemade quilt, or an evening of baby-sitting are terrific prizes! Selling the raffle tickets ahead of time helps to publicize the Forum. If you think it will boost participation, you can even make the rule that participants must be present at the drawing (at the end of the Forum) to win.

Silent Auctions

Another way to present the same prizes is a silent auction. Arrange the items on tables in a room near where the Forum is taking place, with a piece of paper and pencil next to each item. During meals and breaks, participants can write down their name and the amount of money they bid next to each item (you may start each item with a minimum bid). As time passes, items may receive increasing bids, and people may even get in

“bidding wars” on the most appealing items. Close the bidding at a pre-arranged time, with a “last call for bidding” just beforehand. The highest (most recent) bidder gets to take home each item.

Grants

Although it takes more lead-time, some towns have successfully written and received grants to support their Forum efforts. Inquire within your Steering Committee members and local officials about possible grant sources; they may know of some great local contacts.

Tips for Forum Promotion and Publicity

Creating a Forum Identity

One of the keys to a successful Forum is creating its own identity. Below are some ideas for creating an identity for your Forum:

“Name The Forum”

Many communities simply refer to their event as the "(Municipality's Name) Forum," which is straight-forward and effective. However, if your group is feeling creative, you may wish to create a special name that is unique to your town. The name should be something catchy and meaningful that is likely to appeal to a cross-section of area residents. Although those in charge of publicity may suggest ideas for a name, the name should be decided on by the full Steering Committee before being used in any publicity.

Forum Logo

Some communities develop a logo for their Forum. The logo is used on all promotional material and invitations, and becomes a recognizable symbol for all involved. You may wish to choose a graphic symbol, or use a simple illustration by a local artist that reflects the unique personality of your area. Although you can certainly hold a Forum without a logo, developing a graphic symbol can be an excellent way to involve local artists in the Forum. The logo can be printed on all flyers, posters, and even name tags. Posters can even be made and sold as a fund-raiser.

Getting the Word Out

Obviously, the invitation that asks citizens to attend is the keystone to Forum publicity, and the people doing the publicity need to coordinate closely with those in charge of creating the invitation. In addition, however, it is critical that citizens hear about the Forum from a number of other sources. Publicity professionals refer to the “Rule of Three”--most people must hear about an event three times before it makes its way onto their calendar!

Try using a combination of these techniques to ensure great participation:

- ◆ Prepare posters (with logo, if you have one) and post them throughout town. Be sure posters have date, time, place, and contact information. Consider working with youth or civic organizations to distribute them.
- ◆ Make “hand-bills”--mini-posters the size of 1/4-piece of paper--and place small stacks of them for people to pick up from the counter at local stores, the post office, etc.

- ◆ Print notices in local publications (church, civic groups, etc.). Don't forget small newsletters, such as those that schools may send home with students for parents to read.
- ◆ Call the local newspapers and arrange a meeting with their editor to explain the Forum and request an editorial on the event. Offer their reporters fact sheets with all the information they need to prepare a story on the Forum prior to the event, providing them with the names and phone numbers of other Steering Committee members so the reporters can shape the story themselves if they wish. Also, encourage them to attend the Forum itself.
- ◆ Try to get spots for Steering Committee members on the radio.
- ◆ Prepare and distribute announcements to be used by radio stations. If you're not sure what format your radio station prefers, phone them and ask.
- ◆ During the months and weeks leading up to the Forum, have a variety of steering Committee members send letters to newspapers encouraging people to get involved and to attend
- ◆ Speak at meetings of local organizations (Rotary, sports groups, gardening groups, and other clubs) to explain the purpose of the Forum and encourage people to attend. If Steering Committee members belong to these groups, have them accompany you (or give the presentation themselves), since we all tend to be more accepting of information presented by people we know.
- ◆ Several towns have created lapel pins or colorful buttons to publicize their event.
- ◆ Personal contacts are the most important of all! Make sure every Steering Committee member invites family, friends, neighbors and colleagues. Challenge each member to give you a list of ten (or more!) people whom they have personally spoken with about the event.

Remember: Try to describe the event in as positive a way as possible. People don't need to see participation in the Forum as a difficult duty or responsibility—the Forum is a fun and exciting local gathering. The Forum is truly a celebration, designed to inspire a vision of the possibilities for the future and action steps to get there.

Tips for Invitations and Programs

Invitation Design

Not only do you want to make sure that everyone in your town hears about the Forum, you want them to feel welcome and excited to be part of the celebration! You don't have to be an artist to create the invitation to the Forum. You do, however, need to remember to include the following information:

What is a Vision to Action Forum ?

You can use language from the materials provided, or personalize the description to fit your municipality's goals.

Who is invited?

The whole town! (Or community, or neighborhood, or county or all three towns, or whatever boundaries you have set.) If you are particularly welcoming seasonal residents or local business owners who aren't residents or other special populations, you might want to say so, or indicate this in a cover letter targeted to these populations.

When will the Forum take place?

The Forum is a one and one-half day event--list the dates, as well as the beginning and ending times for the Day 1 evening session and the Day 2 session.

Where will the Forum happen?

List the name of the building, street address, and, if there are people who don't know where it is, provide directions.

How to RSVP

Provide a form asking for name(s), number of persons attending, address, phone, e-mail, and any other information you may need. (For example, you may want to ask which meals people will attend; check with the Steering Committee members in charge of food to see if they need to know this information. Also, you may ask whether people will need child care or transportation; check with the Steering Committee members who are in charge of these issues.) Be sure to tell people where to mail this form. You may also wish to offer the option of e-mailing or phoning in the registration information, or dropping off their form in a box you provide at the local store or other central location.

How to Get More Information

List the Forum Chair(s) or other contact people from the Steering Committee, with their phone numbers.

Additional Design Tips

- ◆ List the names of all Steering Committee members on the invitation. Ideally, almost everyone who receives an invitation will know someone listed on the Steering Committee; this will give people a sense of connection to the event, and increase the chances that they will attend.
- ◆ Be sure to coordinate with the Steering Committee members in charge of publicity. They may be creating a logo or other artwork that will make the invitation special.
- ◆ If you will be mailing the invitation, be sure that you include a return address on the mailing panel.

Invitation Distribution Tips

Although inviting a whole community to an event can seem like a daunting task, groups have come up with a variety of creative methods for getting the word out.

- ◆ **Invite the Whole Town:** How can you make sure every citizen truly feels invited? Most importantly, the posters, handbills and other outreach done by those in charge of publicity should be varied enough to reach all sectors of town. In addition, you can target invitations using a number of methods.
- ◆ Consider using existing mailing lists from key town organizations (civic groups, clubs, etc.) Again, pay attention to make sure you're getting a wide mix of townspeople.
- ◆ Leave small stacks of invitations out in public places--the store counter, the post office, etc.--so that everyone has a chance to pick one up.
- ◆ **Personalize Your Invitations:** The size of your municipality's population will make a big difference in how personal you can make your invitations.

In small towns, we suggest that the Steering Committee set aside an evening to address an invitation to each resident. Supply food and beverages, and the addressing gathering turns into a party! Once the invitations are addressed or labeled, pass them around. Each Steering Committee member can hand-write a note on any invitation going to a friend, family member, neighbor, colleague, or passing acquaintance. Simply adding the personalized "John--we hope to see you there!" with a Steering Committee member's signature can make the difference between the recipient recycling the invitation, and posting it on his bulletin board as a reminder.

If, at the end of your "addressing party" there are invitations that no one has personalized, the Chair(s) can add a personal note, simply writing as one area resident to another, "We hope you'll turn out for this historic event!" with their signature.

In larger municipalities, hand-writing a note on every invitation may not be possible. In this case, consider developing a selected list to personalize with your Steering

Committee. Have each member suggest twenty names (or more) of people s/he would be willing to personalize an invitation to. Make sure your list is broad-based and inclusive. (And you can still have a party with your Steering Committee to hand-write the notes!)

Follow Up with a Phone Call

Having each Steering Committee member take responsibility for making a follow-up phone call to their list of twenty people enormously increases the likelihood that the recipients will attend.

You can start your phone call by asking whether the person has received the Forum invitation. Be prepared to offer a brief, positive description of the Forum and its goals. And most importantly, explain to the invitee personally why their participation is important. For example, “It is really important to get a participation from teachers,” or “We really want to make sure that the voice of the northern section of town is heard.”

About Program Materials

When participants arrive at the Forum, it is important that they have access to the agenda, so they know what to expect. Some groups simply make a large poster outlining the agenda for event.. Others choose to print up a program for each participant with the agenda on it.

If you choose to make program hand-outs, you may wish to include additional materials. Some of the ideas other Forum coordinators have used in the past include:

- ◆ A map of the building in which the Forum is being held, if rooms are far apart or the lay-out is confusing
- ◆ A welcoming note from the Steering Committee, including a full list of the Steering Committee members
- ◆ A list of acknowledgments to show which area businesses and individuals contributed resources or time to the Forum
- ◆ A map of the municipality
- ◆ Census data, charts and graphs, or other information that might be referred to during Friday evening’s presentation
- ◆ A list of committees, programs, and resources now existing in town
- ◆ Blank note pads and pencils for note-taking.

Tips for Food Logistics

Good food is a wonderful way to lubricate good conversation and meals and snacks are at the heart of the Vision to Action Forum. During the course of the Forum you will need to arrange food for dinner, morning coffee and refreshments, lunch and two snack breaks. There are lots of ways to go about this that build community as well as feeding the crowd. These include highlighting local restaurants

Day 1

Dinner

Some towns have arranged “pot-luck” dinners where everyone brings food to share. Participants are requested to bring a dish--main course, salad/vegetable, or dessert--to share. You may wish to make sure the Steering Committee brings a range of substantial items (casseroles, hearty salads, etc.) to ensure a good basis for your pot-luck meal, but in general, citizens like to show off for their neighbors and bring excellent dishes. Alternatively, you can arrange for donations from local restaurants, or provide a prepared meal.

You will need to explore the Forum site to see what resources are already there. Ideally, the event will happen in a community center that has an oven, refrigerators, etc. to keep food hot or cold. It may even have coffee makers and other food-service needs. Plan your meal according to the resources available.

You will need to provide plates, napkins, utensils, serving utensils, and beverages. You may be able to get paper plates, plastic forks, napkins, beverages, etc. donated by local stores.

A typical beverage service with coffee (regular and decaffeinated), tea, and soda and/or juice works fine; add other beverages as the season and your ambition dictate.

Day 2

Morning coffee and refreshments

Plan to have coffee and hot water for tea when people arrive in the morning. Baked goods will be welcome first thing as well. (You can often get these donated.)

Mid-morning break

You can offer a similar array of beverages and baked goods (supplementing with fruit and/or juice if you wish) for the mid-morning break.

Lunch

Saturday noon can be a simple bring-your-own lunch, a fully catered meal, or something in-between. What you choose will depend on your resources.

Many towns engage a local civic group to supply the lunch as a fund-raiser; the Forum collects an order form and a small amount of money from each participant and turns it over directly to the group supplying the food. Citizens tend to feel better about paying for lunch if they know the proceeds are going to a local cause; however, you may also wish to offer the bring-your-own lunch option in addition, so that cash won't stand in the way of anyone's participation.

If you choose a "bring-your-own" lunch, remember to mention it in the invitation, and be sure to remind people on the evening before to bring their lunch the next day. You can supplement the picnic by offering hot soup if your Forum is during a cold season, or fruit salad if it is hot; or you may wish to offer a dessert.

You may be successful in getting local restaurants, shops, or other businesses to donate the food necessary to make up enough lunches for the full group. (It is especially helpful if employees living in your community do the asking!) Several small towns have successfully solicited contributions from restaurants in nearby larger towns by offering to recognize and thank them at the Forum; some towns have even put an attractive label with the restaurant's name on each dish.

Some Steering Committees have enough energy and coordination to make the lunch themselves (soup and sandwiches works fine), repaying volunteers for materials out of the Forum budget.

Afternoon food for breaks

Supply at least hot and cold drinks, and if possible, something to eat as well. You may want to celebrate the season by providing ice cream in warm weather, apples in the fall, or other seasonal options.

Supplies Needed for Meals and Snacks

Dinner-sized plates

Napkins

Small plates for breaks, if needed

Forks and spoons

Hot cups

Cold cups

Coffee stirrers

Coffee (regular and decaffeinated)

Tea

Cream and sugar (sugar substitute may also be appreciated)

Coffee urns (at least one for regular coffee, one for decaffeinated, and one for tea water)

Cold drinks (soda, juice, bottled water, etc.)

Tips for Data Gathering and Presentation

Many towns choose to offer historical and background information about their town at the beginning of the Forum. These presentations should be brief and visually attractive--focusing primarily on what is special about your community. If possible, it is helpful to accompany such a presentation with visual aids--charts and graphs in overhead projector format, maps, slides of historical photos, etc.

It is important to resist the temptation to build this into a longer presentation! Keep it to just 30 minutes, so that the focus of the event is on participant interaction, not "listening to the experts." Also, we advise that the presenter either be an outsider or someone local who is regarded as neutral. Otherwise, participants could view the presentations as "propaganda" and question the neutrality of the event.

You may choose to present one (or some combination) of the following types of information:

Demographic Data

Demographic data may be available for your area on a range of topics from a number of sources. It is useful to present a variety of data, including statistics on population, employment, social and cultural trends, environmental issues, and economic factors. With luck, you will come across facts that are intriguing, revealing, or unique to your community. It can also be interesting to compare statistics over time (for example, compare 1970 data to 1990 and 2000 data). It can also be interesting to compare data about your area to neighboring areas, or to neighboring countries.

Information on Local Trends

Some places track interesting trends, such as school enrollment data, voting records, or even recycling data. Community plans and special community reports may feature introductory essays that offer useful factual overviews to draw from. Your municipal offices or regional offices may also have maps available that show revealing changes, such as in population growth or land use and development patterns.

Historical Information

Your community may have a historical society or club, with members who are happy to offer a 5-10-minute (or longer!) presentation on the history of the area, including historical land use, past economic pursuits, local customs, etc. This historical perspective not only enriches residents' connection to their town, it can also offer a useful and exciting basis from which to launch today's plans. Again, however, make sure that presenters know you only want a brief presentation.

Tips for Selecting Small-Group Facilitators

While someone from outside the community will be serving as the lead facilitator, it's important to note that many of the most significant conversations will happen in the small groups, which will be facilitated by local volunteers. Finding the right people in town to serve as small-group facilitators and recorders will make a big difference in the success of the Forum. Facilitating a group is different from running a meeting--a facilitator is less of a "leader" than an encouraging "coach." The Forum asks a lot of its small-group facilitators, since it is especially challenging to facilitate a discussion neutrally when one has a personal interest in the outcome. Although the 20 people you find will go through a facilitator training process, it is still important to start with people who have the qualities that make a good facilitator.

Good facilitators are:

- ◆ Excellent listeners and observers
- ◆ Comfortable in front of groups
- ◆ Credible and diplomatic
- ◆ Respectful and open to others' ideas
- ◆ Not coming in with a personal "agenda"--have little or no investment in the outcome of a decision, or, if they do, can override it in the interests of neutral facilitation
- ◆ Able to understand the importance of their different roles, and manage them
- ◆ Skilled at drawing out people's thoughts and getting input from all group members
- ◆ Able to see problems/issues from many perspectives
- ◆ Effective at analyzing and synthesizing issues
- ◆ Adept at diagnosing--and at intervening when faced with--ineffective or inappropriate participant behaviors
- ◆ Able to accept feedback or criticism without reacting defensively
- ◆ Sensitive, warm, enthusiastic, and relaxed
- ◆ Able to remain positive and energetic for an extended period

◆ Patient

Although any person may be a good facilitator, you might start by asking people who may have developed some of these skills in their working lives such as citizens whom you know have facilitation experience, teachers and other educators, clergy and reporters. Also consider using teens/youth as facilitators or facilitation support.

What will facilitators and recorders be asked to do?

Small-group facilitators will work in pairs, with one person serving as facilitator and one as recorder at any given time. (They can trade off frequently, or they can choose to stick with one role or the other.) Some people make the mistake of assuming that being the recorder is the “easier” role; however, good recorders need to have the same qualities as good facilitators, and must be just as active listeners and synthesizers in their work. In addition, it helps if they can write quickly!

Small group facilitators will:

- ◆ Attend a facilitator training session, scheduled in the weeks before the Forum
- ◆ Become familiar with the Forum agenda and materials (handed out and explained during facilitator training)
- ◆ Attend both days of the Forum
- ◆ Either facilitate (lead the group through discussion exercises) or record (keep running notes of the discussion with magic markers on a flip-chart) small-group discussions at the Forum. Facilitators will be asked to do this for between one and three discussions, each approximately 60 to 90 minutes long, with groups that are likely to be between 8-15 people. Discussion topics and agendas are thoroughly explained during the facilitator training

Tips About Site Set-Up

Visit the site well in advance of the event to be sure that the spaces will work well for your needs. The essentials include:

- ◆ One large presentation room with enough chairs for all attendees.
- ◆ The ability to hear and to be heard in this room is very important! Some large rooms tend to produce echoes. Be sure to get a good microphone (cordless or with very long cord) and sound system.
- ◆ Meal facilities, and room for everyone to have dinner
- ◆ Ten break-out areas with seating. Ideally these will be separate rooms, but circles of chairs in the corners of the larger meeting room can work well, too.
- ◆ Entry and restroom access for the handicapped
- ◆ Access to parking or public transportation for everyone

Dinner Area

Some Forums use the same room for their dinner and their large group presentation. If you will do this, be sure you have clean-up crews ready to clear tables and re-arrange chairs as necessary so that the transition can be done efficiently. Make sure you have enough chairs and tables for all participants. Also be sure you understand all of the details regarding use of kitchen facilities, and make sure that the people in charge of the food are clear on any rules the site may have.

Large-Group Presentation Room

Set up one room that will seat all participants. Set up chairs in rows, auditorium-style, facing the front. If possible, put the chairs in curving rows (semi-circles facing the front) to allow participants to see each other and interact. This room needs a microphone in the front--either cordless, or with a very long cord. If your community chooses to present data on Friday night, check with the presenters about whether they will need an overhead projector, slide projector, LCD projector, screen, etc. If so, these will be set up in this room.

Small-Group Break-Out Rooms

Set up ten smaller “break-out” rooms which will, together, accommodate all participants. Thus, each room should have enough chairs to seat one-tenth of the participants you expect. For example, if you expect 150 people at the Forum, each break-out room should have at least 15 chairs available. Each room should have a pad of large paper (flip chart) and easel if possible. If easels are not available, flip chart paper can be taped to the wall. Ideally, the easel should be near a wall, so that recorders can tear off sheets of paper and

tape them on the wall where all participants can see them. In each break-out room, set up chairs in a semi-circle facing the easel. All participants should be able to make eye contact with the facilitator and with each other, and should be close enough to the facilitator and to each other to be heard in a conversational tone.

Make a sign to number each break out room (1 through 10) and attach it to the door or wall outside the area.

Set-Up and Clean-Up Crews

Arrange in advance to have a number of volunteers who will arrive early to help with set-up, and/or stay late to help with clean-up. Members of the Steering Committee should be willing to help with this, especially if you are organized and assign them to a specific task. You may wish to solicit the energetic help of the youth participants. Make a list of all of the tasks that need doing, so that when people ask “What can I do?” you can give them a clearly defined job for example, “Set up these easels in these rooms”. Be sure that you thank these helpers in person, and perhaps in the event program.

Additional Site Questions

A few other things you may want to consider as you work on organizing the logistics of the site include:

- ◆ If people will drive to the event, is it clear where people should park, or do you need to put up signs? If necessary, you may also wish to put up signs directing people to public transportation.
- ◆ Is it clear where people should enter the building, or do you need to put up signs?
- ◆ Are the handicapped entrance and restrooms clearly marked?
- ◆ Are there enough chairs to seat the full group in the large room, and the small groups in the break-out spaces? (If you are using a grade school, consider substituting adult-sized chairs in the kindergarten and early elementary classrooms)
- ◆ Does the kitchen facility have a sink and refrigerator? Can you reheat things in the oven or on a stove? Will you be allowed to keep your food and supplies in the kitchen, and is there sufficient space to do so?
- ◆ Are there trash barrels and bags available?
- ◆ What items should be separated for recycling, and are there well-marked containers for these items?
- ◆ Will you need extension cords for coffee urns or for any sound equipment?
- ◆ Where are the light switches, and how is the heating or cooling adjusted (if no custodian will be available to take care of these things)? Be sure to find out whether the heat is on an automatic timer. If so, find out how to override it.
- ◆ How much clean-up is expected of your group? If you will have to clean up yourselves, do you have access to brooms, trash/recycling disposal, etc.?

On the day of the Forum--Last Minute Reminders

- ◆ Have you put up a poster or sign at the entrance to the building indicating that the Forum will occur here today?

- ◆ Have you conducted a walk-through of the building prior to the Forum to make sure everything is properly arranged?
- ◆ Have you confirmed your arrangements with set-up and clean-up crews?

Tips for Child Care and Transportation

Offering child care and transportation may make it possible for some people to participate who otherwise would not be able to. Coordinate with the people making the invitation to make sure there is a check-off box to see how much interest there is in these services. Make sure the people putting together the posters, press releases, and other publicity mention that these services are available.

Child Care

You may wish to contract with a local day-care provider for these services. Alternately, you may ask a church group, or another local organization to provide child care.

Ideally, you can provide child care in a spare room at the Forum site (some schools even have early education rooms with toys, playground equipment, etc.) which allows parents to check in on children periodically. Some communities have allowed the children use of the gym while adults are busy in small-group sessions.

Consider providing a TV/VCR, some pillows or cushions, and a child-appropriate movie for relaxing entertainment Friday evening, or to break up the day for the kids on Saturday.

Transportation

Elderly people may especially appreciate a ride, in particular if they are coming alone, or if the weather is questionable. Your Steering Committee members, with the help of a few additional volunteers, will probably be able to provide the necessary transportation on a one-on-one basis, if you match them up with neighbors in need. You can also match those needing rides with others from their part of town who have let you know that they are coming.

Tips for Involving Young People

A town's young people are one of the most difficult groups to get involved in a Forum. Young people today are enormously active, with school, as well as homework, sports, and many other after-school activities filling most of their waking moments. However, towns that have been successful in getting youth involvement report that it is well worth the effort. Young people offer a fresh and important perspective, and their participation is a constant reminder to help participants keep the town's future clearly in mind.

Some communities have arranged for a "Youth Facilitator" role. Teens are trained along with the adult facilitators, and then are teamed with an adult to facilitate a small-group session. These teen partners observe and, in many cases, serve as recorder or facilitator for a period of time. The Youth Facilitators not only can be helpful assistants to the adult facilitators, their presence can also raise the awareness of all participants of the abilities of the young people in town. (In some cases, adult partners say that the youth facilitators' skills exceed their own!) And of course, this is an important step in training the active citizens and leaders of tomorrow.

You may wish to enlist local school teachers (social studies, art, and other disciplines) in helping to engage students' creativity in thinking about your community and its future. Several towns have featured children's artwork, including displays of children's paintings of their favorite places in town, and/or what they think the town will look like in the future.

Tips for Participation of Local Officials

It is important for the Steering Committee to include local officials in the Forum, and to solicit information from officials to make sure that the Forum will be useful to them. However, you need to strike a delicate balance between meeting municipal needs and allowing citizens to express all ideas freely at the Forum. A few tips for doing so are listed here.

Start Early

Call the mayor and other key municipal officials early in your planning process, and arrange to make a presentation to the officials about the Forum. If possible, bring along a variety of Steering Committee members to show that the project has broad-based interest and support. Be prepared to answer specific questions about timelines, costs, and projected outcomes. Ask the officials how you can help make the Forum useful to their needs.

You may wish to request that a municipal official serve on your Steering Committee. Alternately, you can offer to give them regular updates on the Forum planning process. Be sure to emphasize that you hope they will attend the Forum.

Maintain a Broad Focus

Remind officials that although they may be tempted to narrow the focus of the Forum onto a particular issue in town (for example, a particular land use question) it is important that the Forum address all community issues. This broad-based beginning allows citizens of all interest areas to feel included. In addition, many issues are surprisingly inter-related—soliciting information on the arts, for example, might offer new information on how the local park can be put to best use.

Encourage a Low Profile

Remind the officials that while their participation in the event is very valuable to you, some citizens may be intimidated by their presence. Thus, you respectfully request that they keep their participation discreet, both during the organizing of the Forum and at the event itself. Not having the officials dominating the discussion at center-stage will encourage a more open discussion of town issues, and makes it more likely that new people will engage in local issues. .

Additional tips for involving local officials

- ◆ Remember that some elected and appointed officials may initially feel threatened by a Forum. Let officials know that the event is not intended to undermine their power, but to support the municipality in its efforts--to add to the pool of new ideas, new energy, and new volunteers.
- ◆ Explain to officials that the Forum will give them the benefit of hearing a wide variety of views and ideas--particularly refreshing because they are expressed in a non-political, non-polarized setting.

- ◆ Let officials know that once the Forum is completed and projects are launched, citizens may come to them with projects that need their cooperation and support. For this reason, it will be especially helpful if they participated in and understand the process that created the projects.

Other Key People to Involve

Business People

Your committee can also work to get the involvement of local business leaders. Use similar techniques as described above to explain the purpose and proposed outcomes of the Forum. Explain that it is important for the business community's views to be included in these discussions. (Involving the business community is different from the work of soliciting funding or resource support from local businesses. However, you should be sure to speak with the fund-raising committee to be sure you coordinate on these visits.)

Resource People

Your group may engage the Steering Committee in a discussion of what projects areas are likely to come out of the Forum event. Then, you can make a list of people who might be able to help these projects once they are selected. For example, if you know your municipality has consistently expressed a need for a recreation area, and you feel it is likely that this is likely to come up on the list of final projects, you could invite a person or people who know something about this issue--people who work for a regional recreation agency, or funders who might be likely to support such a project. Be careful, however! Be sure that these "resource people" know that they are being invited only to observe, and not to participate, give a speech, or otherwise affect the outcome of the Forum. Remind them that you have no way of knowing for sure whether their topic will actually come up as a priority. You are simply inviting them to see the Forum so that they can understand the discussions leading up to the selected projects, and can be better informed if a project in their interest area is chosen.

Tips for Registration

Before the Forum

After the Forum invitations have been mailed out, it is important to monitor the responses to see whether a broad range of citizens is signing up. Are you getting registrations from all geographic areas of town? Are you receiving registrations from both the old and the young, long-time residents and newcomers, people of diverse economic backgrounds, etc.? If you sense a gap in registrations, work with the rest of the Steering Committee to make follow-up phone calls to encourage attendance from groups you haven't heard from.

At the Forum

On the days of the Forum, including both the evening of Day 1 and on Day 2, arrive early and set up a table to greet participants. Supplies you will need include:

- ◆ Name tags for all participants. (You will need enough for both days, since participants are unlikely to remember to bring back their name tag the second day.)
- ◆ A sign-in roster (one for each day) so you have the names and addresses of all participants
- ◆ Agenda for the two-days--either a large poster displayed in an obvious location, or, if the Invitation/Programs Committee chooses to make written materials for each participants, a stack of these programs.

After the Forum

After the Forum, remember to give the registration sign-in lists to the people who will be producing the Forum Report. Lists for both days are important, since there may be a few people who will only attend one of the sessions.

Additional Registration Ideas

Some towns have welcomed participants with additional materials or interactive displays that helped create a positive spirit for the event. Use your creativity! For example:

Maps

In one town, organizers created a wall-sized map of the town. Participants placed a dot on the map showing their home, revealing the diverse geographic attendance at the Forum. Another town took the map idea even further: as participants came in, they posed for an instant photo (Polaroid or digital). The photo was placed on the border of the map, and participants ran a piece of yarn from their photo to the location on the map where their home was. The map was a focus of attention during all of the breaks, with neighbors gathering around to meet neighbors they may not have known before.

Local Organizations

In several towns, the local Historical Societies have set up a booth at the Forum. After registering, participants took a moment to admire historic photos and artifacts on display.

Exhibits

Several towns have featured children's artwork depicting special places in town, or their vision for the town's future--also a great way to involve youth in the Forum !

Ice Breaker Games

Consider a "scavenger hunt," where each participant is supplied with a list of questions to find the answers to during Forum breaks. You can even offer prize to those who complete all of the answers. Questions might include interesting facts about the town that may be included in presentations; or they could focus on discovering the names of Forum participants with certain traits, such as:

- Find a person who has lived in town for over 50 years;*
- Find a person who has lived in town for under one year;*
- Find a person who attended local schools;*
- Find a person whose family has lived in town for over 3 generations;*
- Find a person who has hiked to a local peak or visited a historic site;*
- etc.*



4—For the Advisor and Lead Facilitator



This section of the manual is for the use of the Advisor and Lead Facilitator, providing you with the information you need to support the Steering Committee in their work and to lead the facilitation of the Vision to Action Forum.

Supporting the Steering Committee

Depending on who initiates the process in the community, you may be involved in presenting the Forum process to local officials and a group of residents to gain their support for the idea. If so, be prepared to:

- ◆ Make it clear that this event will be run by community members and is intended to support the work of local officials, rather than adding to it
- ◆ Offer examples of concrete outcomes from other communities
- ◆ Be clear about the budgetary expectations and time requirements.

Present the Vision to Action process to local community leaders and residents, returning as often as needed to build a critical mass of people interested in moving forward with planning an event

Advise core local organizers on the establishment of a diverse and functional Steering Committee

Attend the first few Steering Committee meetings to help establish roles and to ensure clarity about organizational tasks

Attend other Steering Committee meetings upon request, including the last meeting before the event.

Attend the Forum and offer logistical and other support as needed.

Attend de-briefing meetings and Advise the Steering Committee about developing the report, supporting action committees and planning a follow-up event.

Training the Local Facilitators

While you will be acting as lead facilitator for all the plenary sessions, and will be present for trouble-shooting throughout the event, it's important to note that typically the most important and heart-felt conversations of the Forum will take place in the three small group sessions during the course of the Forum. It is here, away from the larger crowd, that participants are more likely to feel free to dig into key issues and express themselves openly, so high quality, sensitive and neutral facilitation of these sessions is critical.

You will have four sessions to work with the local facilitators to provide the training they need to lead these sessions. While many may have prior facilitation experience, many won't, and all will be taking a risk by putting themselves in front of their neighbors in such an intimidating role. We find that the tension in these training sessions is often palpable, as participants work to gain the knowledge, skills and confidence they will need to perform their role.

Local Facilitator Training Sessions		
<i>Session</i>	<i>When</i>	<i>Duration</i>
<i>Main Training</i> Facilitation skills, overview of agenda, role of small group facilitators	An evening sometime during the weeks preceding the Forum	3 hours, including dinner or dessert
<i>Final Check</i> Distribution of materials, final questions	Friday Evening, 5:00	1/2 hour
<i>Saturday Training</i> De-brief and process, training in impact-feasibility method	Saturday Morning, 8:00	1 hour
<i>Mid-Day Check-In</i> Debrief, plans for final session	Last part of lunch Break on Saturday	15 minutes

Main Training

Welcome and Introductions

Have each group member introduce themselves: say their name and something about themselves in relationship to the community. Note that these introductions are not only for our information tonight. This is also a model. We'll be using this introduction

technique in every group you facilitate during the Forum. Because the groups of participants will change, you will do introductions in all of the small-groups. Introductions are not just a polite formality. They help people to know each other and to begin to build a web of positive community relationships that is an important goal of the Forum.

Overview of Training

Distribute facilitation team training folders

What is Participatory Planning?

Present the goals and outcomes based on the “Vision to Action Forum: Questions and Answers” and briefly review this hand-out with the group. When you get to the section offering examples of the types of projects that have come out of Forums, people may want more examples. Here are more projects that municipalities have done based on the results of a Forum:

- ◆ Began a community newsletter focused on positive local news of the community
- ◆ Cleaned up local park to make it more attractive to families
- ◆ Published a map of all local walking trails in municipality
- ◆ Initiated economic development group which attracted new businesses to community
- ◆ Brought together successful owners of large businesses to offer guidance and training to new owners of small businesses
- ◆ And many more.

Note that these Forums help create the basis for community philanthropy and the creation of community foundations. When people work together to identify local needs, they are more likely to help create solutions via volunteerism as well as philanthropy. The Forum helps identify local issues and needs that are important to citizens personally, and offers a sense of hope and empowerment. When local needs are well thought out by diverse participants, they are much more compelling to funders.

Briefly go over the agenda of the one and a half-day Forum. Note that you will go over the specifics in detail later.

Role of Facilitation Team

Explain that the small group facilitators and scribes will be working in teams of two, and will facilitate/record three small-group sessions during the 1 1/2 day period. They can rely on their partners to help keep each other in line, and manage their roles.

The small-group facilitator and scribe are the heart and soul of the Forum. Forum participants repeatedly tell us that the best ideas of the event come out of the small groups. Thus, it is critical that these teams work together effectively.

In these teams of two, one person serves as Facilitator, and one as Scribe. They may choose to maintain one role for all three small-group sessions, or they may wish to trade roles periodically--it's up to each individual team to manage.

Go over the following hand-outs with the group. Try not to simply read aloud, but also add your own stories or examples to make them come alive.

- ◆ “Facilitation Skills”
- ◆ “The Special Role of the Participant-Facilitator”
- ◆ “Scribe Skills”

Drawing from Your Own Meeting Experience

Lead the group in the following activity: “Meetings from Heaven, Meetings from Hell.”

Divide the group into two groups. Note that everyone has been to good and bad meetings. Ask the members of the first group to think about a really good meeting they have been to. What were some of the elements that made the meeting productive, efficient, comfortable, inspiring, even fun? Ask this group to make a list of these items. Have one person act as the Scribe and write down everyone's ideas on a large sheet of paper (flip chart).

Ask the members of the second group to think about a really terrible meeting they have been to. What were some of the elements that made the meeting unproductive, inefficient, uncomfortable, boring, or frustrating? Ask this group to make a list of these items. Have one person act as the Scribe and write down everyone's ideas on a large sheet of paper (flip chart).

Once the groups are done, come back to the full circle and ask the groups to report on their lists. Now, address some of the key elements of the lists. Based on the facilitation hand-outs, offer specific suggestions on how a good facilitator can turn a “Meeting from Hell” into a “Meeting From Heaven.” Note that their packets contain a great deal of information and suggestions for how to be effective facilitators and scribes.

Detailed Review of Friday Evening Agenda and Facilitation Tasks

Using your Lead Facilitator's Agenda as a guide, go over Friday's agenda in detail, particularly explaining the following parts of the Forum event:

- ◆ Leading participants to individual rooms. Explain the use of large number cards.
- ◆ Introductions. Remember that these are done all three sessions.
- ◆ List strengths of local community relative to topic area. Note that groups may be tempted to veer off and talk about another issue area entirely. It is the facilitation team's job to keep the focus on your topic area.
- ◆ List weaknesses about local community relative to topic area.

- ◆ Vision for the future of local community relative to topic area. This is “blue sky” positive dreaming of the future. Don’t worry about the feasibility or cost at this point.
- ◆ Five key issues of local community relative to topic area. Remind the group that “issues” are not “solutions.” If anything, they are closer to “challenges”--that is, areas that need attention. Remind them that it is common for groups to want to jump right away to solutions. However, facilitators must be disciplined: we will get better solutions on Saturday if we do a good job defining the issues on Friday night.

Note that we will not go over the Saturday portion of the agenda tonight. It will be fresher in everyone’s mind if we wait until the Saturday training to do that. Remind people that it is critical that Small-Group Facilitators and Scribes NOT use the materials designed for use on Saturday (such as Impact Feasibility Grids and sticky post-it notes) until that time.

Assign Facilitation Team Partners and Initial Topics

Assign each person a partner. (If you wish, you can ask if people want to choose their own partners; or you can make an educated guess as to who would complement each other’s skills.) Assign each team one of the ten Component topics. (Again, you can ask people to choose their topics, or you make the decision yourself can assign them.)

Role-Play (Activity)

Now, people will get a chance to try out facilitation. Ask for 6-7 volunteers for this role-play. (You may not get any! In which case, you will have to specifically choose people to participate.)

Place the chairs in a circle, with a flip-chart or sheets of paper at the front of the group, so that everyone can see. Place the volunteers in chairs in a smaller circle around the flip-chart.

Give each of the volunteers one of the following roles to act out:

- ◆ Facilitator
- ◆ Scribe
- ◆ Quiet shy person who is reluctant to say anything
- ◆ Earnest person who is trying to make a contribution and support the facilitator
- ◆ Polite, talkative person who has extremely unpopular views--makes suggestions that are completely out of line with the rest of the group’s interests
- ◆ Aggressive, dominating, negative person who doesn’t want to be here but his wife made him come.

Describe the scenario:

It is Friday night, and you are in your small group. You have just gone around and done the introductions, and have introduced your topic. You are the group focusing on

economics. You are now about to make a list of the “Strengths” of the community in this area.

Ask the volunteers to go ahead and act out this scenario.

As they do so, encourage the “audience” to take notes. You (lead facilitator) should also take notes.

Things you can privately look for during the scenario:

- ◆ Is the scribe remembering to take notes? If so, are they accurate representations of what the speakers said?
- ◆ Is the Facilitator remaining neutral? Listen for “leading questions” or arguing with participants
- ◆ Is there a fear of silence? That is, does the Facilitator chatter to fill the silence?
- ◆ Is the Scribe writing everything? (Even if someone makes a joke comment, it should be recorded--these ideas can spur other creative ideas)
- ◆ Did the shy person ever talk?
- ◆ Did the loud person dominate?
- ◆ Other observations

Let the scenario go for five minutes or so--long enough for the group to get a taste of the problems they might run into, but not so long that it is tedious. Note that many participants find this task difficult or embarrassing, so keep the atmosphere light.

Thank the participants for their work. Ask them to describe how it felt to play their various roles. Were there things that surprised them? Things they wished they’d done differently?

Now, ask the audience what they noticed about the scenario. Add your own comments (if they have not already been noted by others). Ask what the group thinks could have been done to alleviate the problems the group had. Offer your own suggestions.

Homework Assignment

Ask the group to go home and familiarize themselves with the contents of their packets.

Ask them in particular to read the hand-outs on facilitation/scribe skills:

- ◆ “Facilitation Skills”
- ◆ “Helpful Hints For Effective Facilitation”
- ◆ “Brainstorming: A Technique for Creative Thinking”
- ◆ “Active Listening: An Art for Facilitators and Scribes”
- ◆ “The Special Role of the Participant-Facilitator”
- ◆ “Scribe Skills”
- ◆ “Helpful Hints For Being an Effective Scribe”
- ◆ “Using Questions to Facilitate A Discussion”
- ◆ “Additional Techniques for Facilitating Troublesome Situations”

Remind them to bring their packets with them to the Forum!

Final Check

Questions

Answer any questions that small-group facilitators may have developed since the training.

Review of Friday evening small group agendas

Review the agenda for the next small-group session (the 8:15-9:30 session) in detail. Be sure all small-group facilitators know which number and which topic group they are leading and who their co-facilitator is. Be sure that they are comfortable with the agenda and know exactly what they should do during this time.

Distribution of facilitation materials

If you did not do so at the Facilitator Training, pass out Small Group Facilitators' packets. Go over the contents of the packets and make sure everything is understood. Remind them not to use the materials (such as the sticky notes) until they are specifically called for in the instructions. Discussion on some of the contents (such as questions about the "Impact-Feasibility Grid") should be postponed until tomorrow, when this group meets to discuss the session in which those techniques/tools will be used. Tonight, you should focus on questions that have to do with tonight's small-group session.

Reminders

Remind the facilitators of the following:

- ◆ During the small-group sessions, you (the lead facilitator) will be travelling from room to room to make sure that the groups are the roughly the right size and that the sessions are going smoothly. Assure the facilitators that when you step into the room, this isn't a sign of a problem--you are just "visiting." However, if there is a problem and they need to consult you at this time, they can.
- ◆ After the gathering breaks into small groups at 8:15 tonight, we will not be reconvening into a large group until the morning. So tell the small-group facilitators to remember: they are the last "leaders" that participants will see tonight, so they should be upbeat, smile, and be sure to remind people to come back for breakfast and the rest of the meeting in the morning.
- ◆ Small-group facilitators will have a special meeting in the morning at 8:00 a.m. to go over the day's agenda.
- ◆ Small-group facilitators should bring their facilitators' packets with them tomorrow. We'll be using all of the materials in them.

Room Check

Encourage small-group facilitators to go explore the building now and find the location that their small group will be meeting in tonight. This is their opportunity to check the location and set-up of individual rooms before supper. Note that they may not have the same room they are using tonight for tomorrow's groups, so it is a good idea for everyone to have a general idea of where all the rooms are.

Saturday Training

Welcome them back, and ask them how everything went for them on Friday night. People may wish to tell stories about a particularly fun or difficult part of their facilitation work. They may ask questions or discuss problems they had. You should add any observations or advice you may have based on Friday night's small group sessions.

Be sure to leave time, however, to train for this morning's session.

Review tasks for Saturday Morning Small Groups. Remind facilitators and scribes specifically about each of the following agenda items for the morning session:

- Introductions and Sign-In Sheets
- Clarify goal and objectives for group
- List possible citizen action steps
- Prioritize action steps using impact/feasibility grid. (At this point, you should bring out a simple grid, stand up, and once again physically demonstrate how to use this tool.)
- Choose three proposed actions to bring back to full group

Make sure everyone has their packets and materials. Answer any questions they may have.

Facilitating the Forum

As Lead Facilitator, you will be responsible for the overall tone and progress of the Forum. Since this is such an organic and essentially unpredictable event, you will need to be constantly “on”, aware of the mood of the group, side conversations and flow, watching and listening for nuance and trouble-shooting as necessary. In addition, you will be responsible for facilitating several tone-setting and transitional moments during the event. Below are directions and some tips for facilitating these areas.

Welcome / Introductory Speech

What follows is a sample “script” for the introductory speech given by the Lead Facilitator during the Friday evening 6:15 pm full-group welcome. Draw from it or adapt it to fit your location and your own personal style.

“Welcome!

Thank you for coming. We have a wonderful, diverse attendance tonight.

I want to start by affirming that you made the right decision to come out to our meeting tonight.

It will be a positive event for the community--we will be looking at today’s issues, as well as planning for the future.

It will also be a positive event for each of you. We hope we will strengthen the community bonds between the many diverse residents in our community. We often don’t know other people in our own community--because they live in a different neighborhood, or they are a different age, or work in a different field. So we hope you will take the opportunity to make new friends at this event.

You may mention here some unique and special things you enjoy about this community.

This event has been in the planning stages for many months, and I want to thank the many people who have worked hard to make it happen. I’d like the Steering Committee to stand up.

Applause.

Tonight and tomorrow, we will be receiving the help of a number of residents who will be acting as small-group facilitators and scribes. They’ll be working hard, and we want to support them. Facilitators and scribes, please stand up.

Applause.

So, exactly what is a Vision to Action Forum? Let me tell you a little bit about its origins and our goals.

Here, you may draw a description from the “Question and Answer” sheet.

When we say we want to strengthen community, we mean we want to make this a more thriving and vital community. This means economic growth. This also means making this a place where your kids want to stay when they’re grown. We hope to increase the citizens’ capacity to solve their own problems. And we hope to increase what political scientists now call “social capital.”

Social capital means those little networks that exist between neighbors in a healthy community--the ones that create a sense of trust and communication.

Suppose there is a person you know because you volunteered together to build a playground for the school. Now suppose that this person stands up at a meeting and says something you disagree with. If you never knew this person, you would probably say, “Oh, he’s just an idiot” and ignore what he said. But if you respected the work he did on the volunteer project, you might listen a little more open-mindedly and say, “Let me try to find the kernel of truth in what he is saying.”

Social capital also means increasing the number of people you can ask for help or advice. There is a sense of “reciprocity” in towns with high social capital--that is, I will always tow my neighbor out when he’s driven into the ditch, because I know that someday it might be me in that ditch, and he’ll do the same for me.

Offer some more specific examples of why you feel the Forum will be helpful to this community.

Now, I’d like to offer a very brief overview of the schedule:

- ◆ *Tonight, we will do a few activities as a whole group.*
- ◆ *Then we we’ll break into smaller discussion groups on the ten “components” of a healthy community. Everyone will be assigned a group tonight--participants won’t be able to choose their topics. (But don’t worry, tomorrow you can choose your topic!) By the end of the evening, we will have named the 50 key issues facing our community.*
- ◆ *Tomorrow we will look at the critical issues that you came up with tonight, and refine our list down to between 6-10.*
- ◆ *Then, we will break up into small groups again. In the small groups, we’ll work to define the issues, look at the feasibility of different solutions, and then each group*

will propose three solutions or “projects” we can take on in the future. So before lunch, we will have an array of exciting projects to choose from.

- ◆ *After lunch we will hear reports on these projects from the small groups.*
- ◆ *Then we will take a straw poll on which projects we feel are most exciting and most needed. Via this process, we will choose the projects that we’d like to move forward with first.*
- ◆ *Then we in small groups, we will discuss how we can make the projects work--potential obstacles to success, other potential participants who aren’t here, resources we’ll need, and a date, place and action step for the next meeting.*

After the Forum is done, we will have three things:

1) We will have launched several new concrete initiatives that the whole group is personally “invested” in. These will be part of a common vision for a vital economy that’s an appropriate scale for your community and for a healthy environment and strong local culture.

2) A Report on the Forum. It won’t be an analysis, but will capture the thoughts and rich discussions we had during the Forum. This way, you can re-visit your thinking whenever you want. Other towns that have done Forums find these reports very useful--it won’t just sit on your bookshelf.

3) Friendships! This is the least tangible but perhaps most important part of the Forum--you will meet people you never knew, and start to strengthen “social capital”--those bonds that build community and allow good things to happen here.

“Who Is Here?”

“Who is here?” is intended to be a fun activity to help people “warm up” and get in the mood to participate in this public event. These questions are intended to give people a sense of the exciting diversity and breadth of experience brought by the citizens attending the Forum. Please note, however: if there are any questions in this list that you feel may be embarrassing or uncomfortable for the people in your area, delete them. Replace them with questions that you think work better for your group. Before the activity starts, you should probably interview one of the Steering Committee members to find out a basic list of the outside communities where most people work and the names of the main newspaper/s, radio stations, local newsletters and other sources of local information

Here’s how to do this activity:

Explain to participants that you will ask a series of questions, and that if they can answer “yes” to any of them, they should stand up. Participants may be inclined to raise their

hand rather than stand up--remind them that you really do mean "stand up" so they can see each other. We sometimes joke that people are sleepy after their meal and the speeches, and this activity will wake them up!

Ask the following series of questions. After you ask each question, wait for people to stand. As soon as everyone looks around and can see who is standing, thank them. Make encouraging comments such as, "Welcome! So glad you can be here!" Then ask them to be seated again. Move quickly on the next question. Once people get used to the process, it should go fairly quickly, so there is no waiting between questions.

How long have you lived in this community?

- ◆ Stand up if you have lived here less than one year.
- ◆ Stand up if you have lived here between one and five years.
- ◆ Between five and ten years?
- ◆ Between ten and fifteen years?
- ◆ Between 15 and 20 years?
- ◆ Between 20 and 30 years?
- ◆ More than 30 years? (At this point, encourage the group will often applaud the older generation. Thank them for coming out and showing their commitment to the future.)

Now let's talk about education.

- ◆ Stand up if you have children in the local schools.
- ◆ Stand up if you have grandchildren in the local schools.
- ◆ Stand up if you have had children or grandchildren in the schools in the past.
- ◆ Stand up if you are a product of the local schools (attended them when you were young).
- ◆ Stand up if you are currently a student in the local schools.

Where do people work?

Stand up if your main paid or volunteer job is

- ◆ Homemaker or retired
- ◆ Home business
- ◆ For the local government or school
- ◆ For a local business in the community
- ◆ In ... list the four to six surrounding communities where people are likely to be employed.
- ◆ If there is a distant place to which a number of people likely commute such as the state capital, list that as well (and suggest they hook up to carpool!)

Where is the principal output of your work focused?

Tell people to listen to the whole list then choose one. This can be for either their paid or volunteer work and the point is to determine who benefits or where the products they make are principally used.

- ◆ Local
- ◆ County or borough (if appropriate)

- ◆ State or province
- ◆ Region (if appropriate)
- ◆ National
- ◆ International

What is your favorite type of recreation?

List a variety of activities people like in your area, including outdoor recreation, the arts, and other activities. Be sure your list is broadly inclusive--something for everyone!

Where do you get your local news?

List a variety of places that people are likely to get news about local—not national or international—happenings. These may include the following list. Be creative and a little bit playful in listing the “real” sources of news--for instance, in one neighborhood, the best source of news may be the talkative woman who owns the local candy store!

- ◆ Local newspaper/s—list them by name
- ◆ Radio—list the call numbers
- ◆ Posters / bulletin boards
- ◆ Organizational newsletters—name a few key ones
- ◆ Police scanner
- ◆ Gossiping at the local post office or store—“word of mouth”

Thank everyone for participating. Make encouraging remarks about what an interesting place you live in, and what exciting diversity and breadth of experience the Forum attendees have.

Mosaic and Vision

This is another lively and fun activity that gets people talking about what it is like to live here--what they like, what they don't like, and what they wish for.

Before the activity, be sure that you have two scribes and two tapers ready. The scribes write the words as you tell them to (see below). The tapers tear off the pages of flip charts as soon as they are filled, and tape them to the walls in full view. Remind the scribes that they should label each page with the title of the activity, either “Today” or “Future.”

Here's how to do this activity:

Explain that you would like to create a grand list of words or short phrases that describe what it is like to live here in your community today.

Explain that there are no wrong answers to this question--people can just shout out the first thing that comes to their head. This is not a time for speeches, however--only single words or short phrases. There will be no critiquing of anyone's responses. If someone

disagrees with something, they can simply add the word that they think is more fitting. Remind people that after all, many things about a community can be true at once: it can be beautiful and ugly, exciting and boring. Then, begin.

Ideally, people will shout out their ideas approximately one at a time. However, if it gets too noisy and people are shouting at once, you may ask people to raise their hands and you can call on them individually.

As the group calls out their descriptive words or phrases, you (lead facilitator) repeat each item you hear into the microphone so that everyone can hear it. Then, you will have two scribes, (each with his or her own flip chart), who will alternate writing down the words. You should indicate which scribe should write each word.

For example, suppose your two scribes are named Peter and Katherine. If someone shouts out, “Our community has no activities for youth!” you would say into the microphone, “No activities for youth. Katherine.” Then someone shouts out, “We have a beautiful Community Hall!” you would say into the microphone, “Beautiful Community Hall. Peter.”

As you go along in this activity, there may be silences when you wonder whether the group has come to the end of its list. It’s best to just stand there and act comfortable with the silence and wait for the good ideas that will come out of it. You can also gently suggest categories that may not have been mentioned or fully explored. For example, have people described:

- ◆ Natural resources and outdoor beauty?
- ◆ Recreational activities?
- ◆ Historic buildings and other significant heritage?
- ◆ Activities for youth and the elderly?
- ◆ Businesses?
- ◆ Any unique government programs?
- ◆ Educational opportunities?
- ◆ The arts?
- ◆ Religious and spiritual connections?
- ◆ Festivals and traditions?

Keep going until you think that most of the ideas have been voiced, and energy is just beginning to wane. Say “Any last ideas before we finish?” This may spur a few more ideas. Compliment the group for a wide-ranging and creative list.

Now, explain that you will repeat the activity, except you will be generating a list of words or phrases to describe your community as you would like to see it in the future. Tell people not to worry about money or politics too much--this is wishful, positive, “blue sky” visioning--what are some of the wonderful things they would like to be able to see or experience in the coming years?

Go through the activity as above. You may be surprised how many words or phrases are repeated from the first activity--there are things that people love about home and don't want to change!

At the end of the activity, thank the group, and again, compliment the group for a wide-ranging and creative list that you hope has opened everyone's minds to new ideas and viewpoints. Remind them that these lists are intended to be a launching point for the discussions you will have tonight and tomorrow. Tell them that the list will be posted throughout the evening, and will appear word-for-word in the Forum Report, to remind them of their thoughts.

Presentation of Community Profile Components

Explain to people that at this point, we will be breaking up into small groups.

Explain that participants will not be able to choose their group--they will be assigned a group. You can jokingly remind them that right now, they are probably sitting next to someone they know. If they are sitting next to their husband or wife, then there is a good chance that that person has already had the full benefit of hearing their opinions over the years. Therefore, we will split the groups up so everyone can hear fresh ideas.

Tell people not to worry if they get assigned to a topic that they feel they know nothing about. In fact, the only reason people will be allowed to switch groups is if they are, in fact, an "expert" on the topic they are assigned to! (It is better if the small groups do not have "experts," as people tend to defer to experts, and new and creative ideas may not get expressed.) The idea in these groups is that as citizens, we are all "experts" on what it is like for us to live here, and we want to generate ideas from citizens on how their community works for them.

Now, briefly describe the ten topics (one sentence for each category).

1. Effective Community Leadership
2. Informed Citizen Participation
3. Positive Inter-Group Relations
4. Vibrant Arts and Cultural Heritage
5. High Quality Educational Opportunities for All Ages
6. Adequate Physical Infrastructure (roads, public buildings, etc.)
7. Equitable and Adequate Social Services
8. High Quality Environment and Natural Resources
9. Strong and Stable Local Economy
10. Planned Growth and Development

Explain that participants' job for this evening in their small groups will be to look at your community's:

- ◆ Strengths in this category—both internal strengths and external opportunities they see on the horizon
- ◆ Problems in this category—both internal weak areas and external threats
- ◆ Vision for the future--positive, “blue sky” ideas for the community regarding this topic
- ◆ Five key issues--based on these observations, your group will define the five key issues your community is facing regarding this topic. (These are not “solutions”--we will work on those tomorrow!)

Remind people that while they are in the small groups, they should focus their discussion on the topic area they have been assigned, and not be tempted to stray into other topic areas. They will get a chance to address other issues tomorrow.

Tell participants that while in their small groups, we ask them to keep three things in mind tonight:

Keep an eye on your Small-Group Facilitators

They have been trained, and are doing as good a job as possible. However, they have a difficult job of “wearing two hats at once”--they have the dual role of objective facilitator and interested citizen. They will occasionally share their ideas, but they will be working to keep these roles separate. In addition, help them keep the discussion on topic, and on schedule. Please be supportive and helpful of your facilitator.

Keep an eye on the Scribe

It is your job as a participant to make sure that your wonderful ideas are truly expressed on the flip charts. If the Scribe does not write down your words to your satisfaction, speak out and help him or her to make it better. The flip chart will serve as the “memory” of this event, and everything that is recorded will go into the Forum Report.

Keep in Mind Other Community Members

Keep in mind the faces of other people in your community who are not here tonight. Speak for them as well. These may include the faces of future generations--we hope that we are creating a sustainable, long-term legacy for the future.

Tell people that you will not be meeting back as a full group again until tomorrow morning, so here are a few last reminders:

- ◆ Don't forget to pick up your pot-luck dish before you leave tonight if you brought one and your child if you have one in child care!
- ◆ Reminders about tomorrow's lunch (if necessary)
- ◆ Wear comfortable clothes tomorrow
- ◆ Reminders of what time the event starts in the morning (including coffee/food)
- ◆ Remind small-group facilitators where and when to meet in the morning
- ◆ In the morning, we will see a full array of the community's 50 key issues!

At this point, you want all participants randomly divided into ten groups of roughly equal number. Do this by starting at one end of the first row and asking the person to start counting out loud: “one.” The next person counts “two,” and so on up to ten. Then, the next person starts again with “one.” Keep going until everyone in the room has a number. Remind people to remember their numbers! This will be the number of the small group to which they are assigned for this evening. Note: Small group facilitators should NOT take a number in this process! They have already been assigned group numbers during the Facilitator Training.

Small-group facilitators now will stand and hold their large number cards over their heads. Participants should find the facilitator who holds the number of their group, and follow this facilitator to the room they’ll be meeting in.

Lead Facilitator’s Role During Small Group Sessions

If anyone comes up to you and asks if they can switch groups, ask them why. If it is because they want to be with a friend or because there is a topic they are especially interested in, gently explain that the purpose of this activity is to meet new people and discuss topics that are new to them, so you hope they will stick with the group they are assigned. Remind them that tomorrow, they will be able to choose which group they will be in. However, if they are an “expert” on a particular topic, and got assigned to the group addressing that topic, then they should switch to another topic.

Walk from room to room and, as unobtrusively as possible, make silent visits to each room to make sure that everything is going smoothly. First, make sure that each group is roughly the same size. In the unlikely event that there has been a mix-up and one group is significantly larger than another (for example, one group has twelve people and another only has two) you may wish to step in and ask for a few volunteers from the larger group to switch to the smaller group.

As the time goes on, make sure that each group is roughly on schedule and moving through the agenda smoothly. Give each group a ten minute warning and then another at about two minutes. As groups wind down, help facilitators to gather up and label their flip charts and to move their report-out sheet and easel into the main room.

Previewing the Issues Lists

After the small groups meet on Friday evening, although it is time for everyone else to leave, your work is not yet done. This is a critical time for you during the Forum. If you are a “night person,” you can do the following work Friday evening. If you think more clearly in the early morning, you can get up early and do it on Saturday morning before everyone arrives. Ideally, you can enlist the help of Steering Committee members or other interested participants to help you think through this process. But ultimately, coming up with a draft is your responsibility.

Look at the array of 50 “key issues” on the ten flip charts. Now, begin your own list of “themes” you see running through these ten lists. (Keep your own notes--do not write on the flip charts!) For example, you may see one item saying “The people involved in local concerts don’t communicate with the people involved in theater.” You may see another that says, “The municipal officials need to tell people about what they are doing.” You might make a category called “Communication” and put both of these items in this category.

Or, you might see an item that says, “Youth have nothing to do,” another that says “Teenage vandalism,” another that says “Need more recreational facilities,” and another that says “Young people need a gathering place.” You might make a category called “Options for Youth.”

As you continue to add to, revise and refine your list, you will consider many options for how to clump these items. It is a difficult task--really a form of art!--but you will gain tremendous insights into the issues of the community. Carefully read and re-read the 10 flip charts until you have put all 50 items under a category, with possibly a few out-liers. You will probably end up with between 7 and 10 categories. You may

On a fresh piece of flip chart paper (or several pieces if necessary), make a list of the 7-10 categories you have come up with. Ideally, in small writing you will list under each category the items that you “collected” pertaining to that category.

Key Issues Selection

Briefly welcome everyone back to the Forum. Compliment them on their hard work last night, and note that you have seen interesting themes running throughout the 10 flip charts. Explain that now each small group will have their volunteer come up and describe their key issues. Note that you hope that people will listen for commonalties and themes among the 50 issues.

Encourage the speakers to take their full five minutes (although not more) to explain how their group came up with the issues they decided upon. Invite a representative of each group to come up in numerical order and be sure to introduce themselves before their presentation. Lead the audience in applauding for each speaker.

Following the presentations, explain that the group’s collective job now is to find the 7-10 themes running through these 50 key issues. Explain that you (and other Steering Committee members) have made a draft list of these themes; however, emphasize that this is only a beginning, and you are sure that the group will make changes to your draft list.

Show the group the flip-chart list you have made, and go over it with them.

Ask people to examine your draft, and ask themselves:

- ◆ Is there an important theme that is missing?
- ◆ Are there themes that aren't important enough to merit the attention of the whole group?
- ◆ Have we misunderstood the meaning of any of these issues?
- ◆ Can we combine any of these themes?

Ask people to raise their hands and offer changes. Listen carefully to each suggestion and work to incorporate the person's suggestion into the list. You may end up eliminating items, adding to the list, or combining items. If there is disagreement in the group, try to gauge the feeling of the group, and look for a consensus.

This is probably the trickiest work you will do as lead facilitator. Trying to hear everyone's concerns and meet the competing needs of a large group, and do so while on your feet, is extremely difficult. However, your hard work now will pay off! If you pay attention and get general agreement now, the rest of the Forum will follow much more smoothly.

Individual Selection of Key Issue

Once you have general agreement on the 7-10 themes, give each theme a number. Now, ask each participant mentally to make a selection of their first and second choice of theme: that is, which topic would they like to work on this morning?

Ask the small-group facilitator/scribes to come to the front of the room, and via a quick, quiet discussion, assign a pair of them to each of the 7-10 topic areas. (If you have fewer than 10 topic areas, you will need to ask for some volunteers *not* to work as facilitator/scribes anymore, and to join the Forum as participants.) Now, assign each pair of small-group facilitator/scribes a part of the room to stand in. (For example, Group 1 can stand in one corner, Group 2 in the center of the left wall, Group 3 in the next corner, etc.) If possible, they should hold up the large, brightly colored number card for their group.

Now, ask participants to get up and walk to the group that they would like to participate in this morning. Once everyone has gone to the group they have chosen, look around and see if there are any groups that are extremely large or small. If so, ask if anyone is willing to move from a large group to a smaller group.

Ideally, you will be able to get at least 5 people in each group. However, if any group is so small that you do not think it will be able to work effectively, suggest to the full group that perhaps there is not enough interest in this topic to warrant a group. If no one objects, then dissolve this group and have its members switch to their second choice.

Explain that at 10:45, after the break, each small group will go with its facilitator/scribes to one of the break-out rooms (Group 1 goes to Room 1, etc.) to work on this issue. After the small group work, we'll have lunch, and then in the afternoon we will get to vote on the solutions we have generated.

Project Selection—Straw Poll

Welcome everyone back from lunch. Explain that now, the spokespeople will report from the small groups. Afterwards, we will use a dot-sticker process to get a sense from the full group on where our priorities lie.

Tell the group that they should listen carefully to the small group reports, with the following things in mind:

- ◆ A lot of work has gone into these ideas, and we can assume that every one of them is a worthwhile project. Therefore, every one of them will appear in the Forum Report.
- ◆ In order to prioritize which projects your community will take on first, listen carefully and think about which of the projects that you feel there is currently energy in the community to achieve, and for which the timing is now appropriate.
- ◆ Consider whether there is overlap or repetition among the projects. Can we combine any of these together?

Invite the small-group spokespeople make their presentations for up to five minutes.

After the presentations, ask the full group: Are there any projects that can be combined? If you have noticed obvious examples of overlap, you can start by suggesting them. Only make changes if both of the groups that created the items agree to it! However, if people are resistant, you can remind the group that if you combine items, those items are likely to get more “dots” than if they were kept separate.

Once everyone is satisfied with the options, explain the dot-sticker procedure. Explain that this is a form of “polling” the group for its current feelings. Every participant will get five dot-stickers. Each person will use their stickers to indicate which projects they feel are most appropriate to move forward on now. If you feel strongly about a particular project, you may put two of your dots on that project, but you may use *no more than two dots for any single project*.

Hand out the dots, and invite people to come to the front of the room and put the stickers on. When you are sure everyone has put their stickers up, you can go through and count how many dots are on each item. Write the total in each box

(Note: An alternative method is to use “weighted dots” in which each participants gets a strip with three different colored dots on it, say red, green and yellow. They use the red

for their highest priority, the green for their second highest priority and the yellow for their third highest priority. The result is a strong visual representation of both the range of people's interests, and where their passions lie. If you choose to offer the group a numerical result in addition to the visual result, count the reds as three points, the greens as two and the yellows as one point.)

At this point, tell the group that we have now gathered some data about where the immediate interests of the group lie and we now need to make some decisions about which projects to proceed with. You will need to use your judgment about how many projects to encourage the group to pick depending on the strength of the numbers in each and on the number of projects you judge to be sustainable in this community. You can open these questions to the group, thinking out loud with them so they can see your reasoning and influence it. To decide, ask yourself the following questions:

- ◆ How many participants are there here today? How many would be in each small group, if you had (for example) 4, 5, 6, or 7 groups? How many groups should there be in order for each group to have enough participants--expertise and energy--to move forward? In other words, how many projects do you believe your community support at this time?
- ◆ Is there an obvious break-off point in the dot-voting? For example, are there 5 projects that received many, many dots each, and then 5 more "second-tier" projects that each received only a few dots? Perhaps this is a natural clumping that has occurred.

We find that it works best if you suggest an outcome then give the group time to process and refine it and come to consensus. The group is generally eager to come to closure and get moving on the action projects as this point so don't allow the discussion to go on too long. Remind people again that all of these projects are important--they are all "winners"--and they will all be recorded in the Forum Report. Many communities have gone back to the Report after they have completed the first projects, and selected additional projects from this list to work on.

Occasionally, there will be someone who is so enamored of their pet project that they will say, "I don't care if it only got a few dots! I am going to do this project myself! Who wants to join me!" Although this is rare, this is the kind of enthusiasm that is likely to get a project completed, so don't discourage this person or tiny group!

Ask everyone to think about which of the now-selected projects they would like to work on for the afternoon. During the break, have the Small-Group Facilitators/Scribes come to the front of the room and decide together who would like to facilitate which small groups. Again, depending on the number of projects you have selected, you may need to ask for some volunteers *not* to work as facilitator/scribes anymore, and to join the Forum as participants.

After the break is over, explain that now we will break up into small “committees for the afternoon.” Ask people for the next 45 minutes to give one of these projects their best brain-power. Explain that they will be discussing:

- ◆ Existing initiatives in this project area
- ◆ Potential obstacles to the project’s success, and solutions
- ◆ Resources and contacts the project will need to move forward.

Explain that the full group will meet back one more time together after the small groups to learn about what each group did. Then, we will adjourn on time at 3:30 sharp.

As you did this morning, assign each pair of small-group facilitator/scribes a part of the room to stand in. (For example, Group 1 can stand in one corner, Group 2 in the center of the left wall, Group 3 in the next corner, etc.) If possible, they should hold up the large, brightly colored number card for their group. In addition to a number, remind people of the title of the group: “Group One, working on Transportation Issues, will meet in the far left corner.”

Now, ask participants to get up and walk to the group that they would like to participate in this morning. Once everyone has gone to the group they have chosen, look around and see if there are any groups that are extremely large or small. If so, ask if anyone is willing to move from a large group to a smaller group.

Ideally, you will be able to get at least 5 people in each group. However, if any group is so small that you do not think it will be able to work effectively, suggest to the full group that even though this topic got a lot of votes, perhaps there is not enough interest in this topic to warrant a group. (This is a sign of a project that everyone wants to *have done*, but no one wants to *do themselves*. Although the Forum participants may not be able to move forward on this project, remind participants that the fact that this item got a lot of votes is still very significant; their opinions will still be valuable to local elected officials and philanthropists.) If no one objects, then dissolve this group and have its members switch to their second choice.

Closing Session

Invite each group to come up and do a one-minute report on what their first action step will be, and the next date they will meet. Make sure they also have a “contact person” listed, with phone number or e-mail. Make sure each group has posted this information prominently.

Explain that the Steering Committee will make sure that these results are publicized and will be finding a way for the groups to be supported as they move forward with their work. Depending on what you have planned for follow-up, invite a member of each committee to join this newly re-formatted Steering Committee and announce the date of your de-briefing meeting and, if known, your follow-up gathering in six months. Explain how participants can get a copy of the Report when it is done. Make any final thank-yous.

Thank the group enthusiastically for its hard work!

Lead Facilitator Materials List

Here is a list of the materials you should be sure to bring with you, both to the Small-Group Facilitator Training and to the Forum itself.

- ◆ Annotated Agenda
- ◆ A funny hat (to demonstrate facilitators' use of hats to change roles)
- ◆ A sample of several flip chart pages, folded and labeled with a small group record sheet
- ◆ Four black wide-tipped markers
- ◆ Ten - twelve wide-tipped markers of other colors
- ◆ Two rolls of masking tape
- ◆ Several packages of sticky notes
- ◆ Extra copies of the small group records, the ground rules and the small-group facilitator's agenda
- ◆ Sheets of sticky dots, enough to cut into strips of five per forum participant, or if they are multi-colored, enough for each participant to have a strip of three different colored dots, with each strip containing the same three colors, for example red, blue and yellow.



5—Facilitation Materials



This section contains materials to be used in training local facilitators. Each section can be copied on a separate page or pages. These can be distributed together as hand-outs at the training sessions.

Vision to Action Forum

Small-Group Facilitators' Annotated Agenda

Note: This version of the agenda is annotated for the small-group facilitators, and includes notes for them on how to run small-group sessions.

Friday Evening

3:30 *Set -up*
(Facilitators and Steering Committee Members)

5:00 *Small Group Facilitators Team Meeting (Led by lead facilitator)*
Review of Friday evening small group agendas
Questions
Distribution of facilitation materials
Opportunity to check out location and set-up of individual rooms before supper

Remember:

After the gathering breaks into small groups at 8:15, we will not be reconvening until the morning. So remember: you are the last “leader” that participants will see tonight. So be upbeat, smile, and be sure to remind people to come back for breakfast and the rest of the meeting in the morning.

Small-group facilitators will have a special meeting in the morning at 8:00 a.m. to go over the day’s agenda.

5:30 *Sign-In, Pot-Luck Supper*

6:15 *Welcome -- Full Group*
Origins of Vision to Action Forum
Introduction to BAPF, ANEI, QLF, and of the NSO and COs
Overview of Participatory Planning Process
Who is here? -- Icebreaker

6:45 *Mosaic and Vision -- Full Group*
What is our town like now?
What do we want our town to be like in the future?

7:15 *How Does Your Community Compare? -- Full Group*
Presentation of comparative data

7:45 *Presentation of Community Profile Components--Full Group*
1. Effective Community Leadership
2. Informed Citizen Participation
3. Positive Inter-Group Relations

4. Vibrant Arts and Cultural Heritage
5. High Quality Educational Opportunities for All Ages
6. Adequate Physical Infrastructure (roads, public buildings, etc.)
7. Equitable and Adequate Social Services
8. High Quality Environment and Natural Resources
9. Strong and Stable Local Economy
10. Planned Growth and Development

8:00 *Break into Small Groups*

The Lead Facilitator will ask participants to “count off” to find out which group they will be in. DO NOT participate in this counting off. If you are sitting in the rows while this is going on, just pass when it comes to your turn. You should have been assigned a group number and topic for your small group--this is the number you will have.

At this time, stand and hold your large number cards over your heads. Participants should find the facilitator who holds the number of their group. Lead your group to your room using your number card, and post your card on the door.

8:15 *Small Group Discussions of Components--Small groups*

8:15--Introductions --Once seated in a circle in your room, have each group member introduce him or herself, giving their name and something about themselves in relationship to the town. (We’ll repeat this at every small-group meeting. This helps us meet people and build community.)

Sign-in Sheet -- While you're doing the introductions, also pass around the sign-in sheet for each person to write their name and phone number. Be sure your name and your small-group topic name and number are on it.

Ground Rules -- Either pass out copies of the small group “ground rules” or post a large copy. Take a moment to go over these with the group, and ask if there are any questions or additions. Ask for people’s compliance with these rules for the duration of the event.

Administration -- If needed, collect any last minute lunch order forms.

Topic Sheets -- Point out the sheets which define the topic your small group will be discussing. You can either read one aloud yourself, ask a group member to read it aloud, or give everyone a minute to read it silently to themselves. Explain that the questions are just to spark us to think about the topic broadly; we aren't really going to answer them all.

8:30--Strengths -- Briefly explain the brainstorming process, emphasizing that this is a time for new ideas and not critique. Ask the group to brainstorm about the strengths of the community in your component area. Write their ideas down on a

sheet of flip chart paper labeled "Strengths" at the top. If you need to, go onto additional sheets, but remember to label every new sheet ("Strengths"). If someone mentions a weakness during this time, write it down on a new page labeled "Weaknesses," but don't let the conversation get distracted--draw the conversation back to strengths.

8:45--Weaknesses -- Follow the same procedure with weaknesses.

9:00--Future --Brainstorm a list what you would like to see in the future within this topic area.

9:15--Key Issues --Put down your markers and have everyone sit back and read all the sheets you've come up with so far with an eye for trends or overarching themes. Now discuss: What are the 5 key issues with regard to this topic in our town today? Work with the group to come to consensus on the list of 5 issues, and write the list on the flip chart.

Spokesperson--Identify someone from your group willing to give a five minute presentation to the full group Saturday morning explaining your five key issues. This person should not be you or your partner-facilitator--the goal is to give new people a chance to take on leadership roles.

Report-back Sheet--Copy the 5 key issues from your "sloppy copy" onto a "neat sheet" which is formatted as below. Leave this final sheet with the five key issues on the easel, and return the easel to the main meeting room. Line it up in order with the other easels in preparation for Saturday's session.

Notes--Take your notes off the wall (folding in the tape so they don't all stick to each other!) Lay them all on top of each other in a stack and fold them together in quarters. Tape your sign-in sheet on the outside and give this packet to the lead facilitator.

9:30--Send people home with a warm, friendly "See you tomorrow at 9:00!"

Remember!

Identify a spokesperson to present your group's five issues Saturday morning.

Bring your folded packet of notes to the lead facilitator, with the sign-in sheet taped to the outside.

Leave your last "neat sheet" listing the five key issues on the easel and bring your easel to the main meeting room for Saturday's session.

9:30 Formal Adjournment

Saturday

8:00 *Small Group Facilitators' Team Meeting*

De-brief from Friday night and review Saturday morning agenda
Review Saturday morning procedures, especially Impact/Feasibility Grid

8:45 *Breakfast, Coffee and Check-in*

9:00 *Small Group Reports*

Each of the small groups report to the large group, five minutes each.

9:50 *Selection of Key Issues*

Discussion to refine list of 50 Key Issues down to about ten based on consensus.

10:25 *Individual Selection of Key Issue*

Participants select small group/issue to work on.

10:30 *Break*

10:45 *Small Groups Meet for Key Issue Discussion*

(Led by small group facilitators)

10:45 Introductions and Sign-in Same process as in last night's small groups: Have each group member introduce themselves, giving their name and something about themselves in relationship to the town. While you're doing the introductions, also pass around the sign-in sheet for each person to write their name and phone number. Be sure your name and your small-group topic name and number are on it.

11:00 Define problem and goals Ask the group to define exactly what the problem or opportunity is that they feel they are addressing. To be sure that everyone is thinking about the same issue, ask them to identify general, broad goals they hope to accomplish. (Note: people may want to start solving the problem immediately. but keep them focused on defining the problem first.)

11:15 Identify potential projects/solutions Lead a brainstorm about all the possible concrete ways a group of citizens could work to solve this problem. Encourage them to think widely. The Scribe should write all the ideas down on sheets of easel paper. At the same time, ask a participant in your group to write each idea down on a post-it sticky note using a marker (abbreviations are okay).

11:40 Impact/Feasibility Grid Draw a grid on your easel pad (like the one described on the Impact/Feasibility Grid handout). Lead the group in evaluate each of the potential projects one by one, by placing the post-it sticky note in the appropriate square of the grid. Point out to the group that they can be changed,

clustered or otherwise manipulated to come up with the most accurate representation of the group's priorities.

12:00 Select Projects Based on this evaluation work with the grid, as a group select three projects to bring to the full group. Remind your group that you want projects that are specific enough for citizens to be able to take on and do, and challenging and important enough to make a real difference to the community.

Write these three projects on your easel, leaving room on the left for votes. Bring your easel back to the main room and place it in numerical order with the others.

Spokesperson Identify a lively spokesperson for your group to present the three ideas after lunch.

Notes Fold your notes into a packet as before and give them to the lead facilitator.

Remember!

Identify a lively spokesperson for your group.
Bring your folded packet of notes to Delia, with the sign-in sheet taped to the outside.
Write your three ideas neatly, leaving room for votes (see above), bring easel back to main room.

12:15 Lunch

1:00 Report Back from Small Groups

2:00 Voting

Which project do you think we should move forward on?
Which is the most important project for our town right now?

2:15 Break

Individual Selection of Project Development Groups

Facilitators come to the front of the room and decide together who would like to facilitate which small groups

2:30 Project Development - Small groups (Led by Small Group Facilitators)

2:30 Introductions Same process as in previous small groups: Have each group member introduce themselves, giving their name and something about themselves in relationship to the town. While you're doing the introductions, also pass around the sign-in sheet for each person to write their name and phone number. Be sure your name and your small-group topic name and number are on it.

2:45 Goals and Objectives Lead a discussion of your goals and objectives for this project.

Remind the group that Goals are broad and over-arching--they are likely to answer the question "Why?"

Objectives are specific and measurable, and should answer the question "How?")

3:00 Planning Conduct a brief discussion covering some of the following areas, focusing on those most relevant to your project:

Existing initiatives--related activities currently going on in town or nearby.

Potential obstacles/solutions--brainstorm obstacles and solutions for each obstacle.

Leadership--who should be part of the group who isn't here, who are potential leaders?

Resources needed--financial, materials, people.

Action steps--what needs to be done to make this project happen?

Timeline--when do things need to be done by?

First step--find someone to take one action which they can report on at the next meeting.

3:45 Next meeting--Choose a tentative date, time and place for the next meeting, as well as a convenor to make the phone calls and confirm the place.

Spokesperson--Find a spokesperson to make a one minute presentation

Report-out sheet--Write your next meeting time and place and your convenor's phone number/contact information on an easel sheet.

Notes--Fold up as before, attach sign-in sheet and give the packet to Lead Facilitator.

Remember! Before you leave the room:

Identify a convenor for the next meeting.

Select a tentative time and place for next meeting.

Identify one person to take one action step for the next meeting.

Identify spokesperson for one-minute report to full group.

Write time/place of next meeting and contact person on easel and bring it back to main room.

Give packet of notes/sign-in sheet to the lead facilitator.

4:00 Where Do We Go From Here? - Full group

- One minute report from each small group on what they plan to do and the next date they will meet.
- How to communicate with each other and the community.
- Next steps.

Vision to Action Forum

Ten Components of a Healthy Community

Drawing on the work of The National Civic League, the Cooperative Extension System, Tufts University's Center for Environmental Management and other groups, we have identified the following list of ten key qualities that help a community work well now and sustain cultural, economic and environmental health and vitality for the long-term future. These qualities fall in to the overlapping areas of civic infrastructure, community infrastructure, environment and economy. They are described in more detail below, and are accompanied by suggested questions for generating discussion specific to your towns.

1. Effective Community Leadership
2. Informed Citizen Participation
3. Strong Social Capital
4. Vibrant Arts, Cultural Heritage and Recreation
5. High Quality Educational Opportunities for All Ages
6. Adequate Physical Infrastructure
7. Equitable and Adequate Social Services
8. High Quality Environment and Natural Resources
9. Strong and Stable Local Economy
10. Planned Growth and Development

1. Effective Community Leadership

The public, private and non-governmental organizations sectors must all develop leaders who can cooperate with each other in enhancing the long-term future of the community. Leadership must be responsive, honest, efficient, enlightened, fair and accountable. Leaders should be representative of their community, and should have both a grasp of the community's problems and the ability to envision an economically secure, environmentally sound and socially viable future. Leaders should be attuned to the potential to exploit opportunities and to solve problems of the community by cooperating with other neighboring communities.

- Is there active leadership in all three sectors of the community: public, private and non-governmental organizations?
- Do leaders seek out the interests and ideas of local citizens?
- Do they represent diverse community interests (age and gender groups, length of time they have resided in the community, etc.)
- Do leaders demonstrate knowledge, accountability, professionalism, and innovation?
- Is leadership results-oriented?
- Are leaders willing to take appropriate risks?

- Do leaders demonstrate long-range (20+ years) thinking? Do they understand the impacts of their actions on the long term health and vitality of the community?
- Are leaders willing to consider and utilize alternative methods for delivering services, and to undertake regional solutions where appropriate?
- Do all three sectors actively recruit, train and empower new leaders?
- Do leaders have a common forum to discuss issues with other leaders in the region? How do region-wide policy conflicts get resolved?

2. Informed Citizen Participation

If a community is to be strong, citizens must participate through voting in local elections, serving on government boards, attending public hearings and being active in civic and non-governmental organizations. Philanthropy and volunteerism are very important elements in meeting community needs. All citizens need to develop knowledge and skills to contribute to community life. All sectors within a community--private, public and non-governmental organizations--must each take responsibility for the community's civic education and generate and share information with the public. Sharing in problem solving and planning together for the future increases pride in the community and can result in an ethic of giving and sharing as a way of life.

- Do citizens know how the system works?
- Is it easy for newcomers to learn how to get involved in the community?
- How do people find out what is going on in the community?
- What is the level of volunteerism and philanthropy in the community? Which are the best areas and which are the weaker areas?
- Do citizens volunteer to serve on local boards and committees?
- Is participation pro-active or reactive?
- Do civic organizations and local businesses actively contribute to community functions?
- Do citizens have the information they need to make good decisions?
- Is there both adequate and balanced media coverage of local events and issues?
- How well do local committees and boards communicate with each other and the public and with other boards and committees throughout the region?
- Do civic education efforts involve the entire community?

3. Strong Social Capital

A community is made up of many different people with different interests, experiences and backgrounds. These characteristics may divide a community into natural groups but there must be communication and cooperation among them if the community is to work well. Increasing social complexity present challenges to reaching consensus or resolving conflicts but also provide opportunities for cultural enrichment. As disagreements arise, neutral forums and processes are needed where all opinions can be heard and consensus encouraged. In addition, diverse formal and informal cultural, recreational, social and

civic opportunities are needed to increase communication and understanding of different perspectives among groups and within the community as a whole.

- How much communication is there among diverse interest groups in the community?
- Are such groups involved in identifying community goals and in resolving community issues?
- Do all groups have the skills to become involved in the community?
- Do formal and informal forums exist for sharing ideas and resolving public issues?
- Are collective decisions which represent broad input reached and implemented?
- Do groups cooperate in resolving broad disputes?
- Does the community deal with critical issues before they become crises? How is this done?
- How would you define the self-image of the community? Is it a positive one?
- Are there ample opportunities for people to come together informally to share ideas, such as sports clubs, cafés, choirs and parks?

4. Vibrant Arts, Cultural Heritage and Recreation

The cultural life of a community can be a strong source of pride for citizens. Arts, theater, local festivals and celebrations all reflect and build a community's positive sense of itself and strengthen the fabric of all social interactions within the community. Provision of opportunities for healthful, satisfying, positive recreation and leisure time activities serving all groups and interests in the community can help to define the character and general ambiance of a community and can help to build respect, cooperation and neighborliness.

- What is the community's self image?
- What ways does the community celebrate itself?
- What are the special cultural centers, events and festivals within the community?
- Are these events well known within the community? Outside the community?
- Does the community preserve and enhance what is special and unique about its cultural heritage?
- Are children encouraged to participate in cultural events?
- Are citizens part of larger regional cultural events?
- Are there suitable recreation programs for all groups, young and old, athletic and non-athletic, outdoor and indoor?
- Are there publicly accessible outdoor parks and recreation areas?

5. High Quality Educational Opportunities for All Ages

All citizens have a need for the education of their children. In addition, life-long learning opportunities for adults can help increase the capacity of the local work force and contribute to a positive quality of life. Things like pre-school programs, after-school

extracurricular youth programs, professional and technological training and leisure time heritage, arts and crafts programs help to strengthen the social foundations of a community.

- What schools and other public educational facilities exist in the community?
- What educational facilities or services are needed?
- Are educational opportunities provided equitably?
- Are school programs adequate for the community's needs?
- Is school planning forward thinking and open to regional solutions?
- Does the towns have a plan for financing the maintenance, expansion and replacement of its public schools and social service facilities?
- Are public educational facilities and buildings such as schools and parks adequate for our needs. Are they accessible to people with disabilities? Are they energy efficient?
- Are appropriate physical connections being made, such as public transportation between housing and schools?

6. Adequate Physical Infrastructure

Public buildings, schools, sidewalks, sewers, roads, and the public water supply--are basic to the existence of a community. They absorb most municipal dollars and sharply influence the community's quality of life.

- What roads, buildings and other public facilities exist in the community?
- What facilities or services are needed?
- Are public water sources protected?
- How does the community handle disposal of its wastes?
- Does the community address storm water runoff and toxic water pollutants?
- Does the town have a plan for financing the maintenance, expansion and replacement of its public facilities? Is it open to regional solutions for future infrastructural needs?
- Is there adequate housing available for elderly or disabled individuals? For people of lower income?
- Are public buildings such as schools and town hall adequate for our needs. Are they accessible to people with disabilities? Are they energy efficient?
- Are officials professional and entrepreneurial in meeting public facility needs?
- Are appropriate physical connections being made, such as public transportation between housing and job (or shopping) sites?

7. Equitable and Adequate Social Services

Local residents have a need for decent food, clothing, shelter, and social services. Although some needs are met by local, state, and federal programs, caring communities still keep a neighborly eye on fellow citizens. Community vitality benefits from youth services, affordable and decent housing, after-school extracurricular youth programs, preventative health and substance abuse and other programs that serve social needs.

- What services does the community provide to its neediest citizens?
- Are social services provided equitably?
- Does the community, through its schools or other programs, offer counseling on parenting or family relationships?
- What local or regional programs or services are offered? What are needed? Are these services adequate? Are they well utilized? Under-utilized?
- Does local government address qualitative concerns about service?
- Does government consider and utilize alternative methods of service delivery?
- Is there adequate housing available for elderly or disabled individuals? For people of lower income?

8. High Quality Environment and Natural Resources

Natural resources are materials from nature that maintain and enhance a community. This includes food, fuel, and materials used in everyday life. The natural assets of a community also include the places of natural beauty and the working landscapes that contribute significantly to the quality of life of the residents and help determine a community's personality such as streams, rivers, forests, walking trails, working farms, clear air, pastures and open space. A sustainable community attempts to balance the rate at which renewable resources are consumed with the rate at which they are renewed. Dependence on nonrenewable resources is minimized as much as is feasible. A sustainable community attempts to rely on local sources of food and materials and also attempts to reduce the amount of waste and emissions produced by increasing energy efficiency, and tries to minimize the effect of wastes that are created.

- What are your community's special water and land assets?
- Is there broad community interest and participation in maintaining these?
- Are water supplies sufficient and are they used efficiently? Are they protected?
- What percent of the energy used by the community is renewable versus nonrenewable?
- What opportunities exist for local sources of renewable energy?
- What problems are associated with existing patterns of energy use?
- Do energy conservation programs exist within the community?
- To what extent does the local community rely on local sources of food, fuel, and materials?
- How does the community handle disposal of its wastes?
- What percent of waste generated is recyclable and recycled?
- What opportunities exist for reducing that amount of waste generated to begin with?
- Does the community address storm water runoff and toxic water pollutants?

9. Strong and Stable Local Economy

The need to maintain flourishing workplaces is of great importance to communities. A sustainable community includes a variety of businesses, industries, and institutions which are environmentally sound, financially viable, provide reasonable wages and benefits to workers, and provides those workers with opportunities to develop their skills through training, education, and other forms of assistance to prepare for the community's future needs. Government, businesses and public service organizations are all important in attracting new investment and in developing new businesses that suit the character of the community.

- What types of businesses, industries and institutions make up the economic base of the community? of the region?
- How diverse is the economic base? Is one sector or one employer dominant or is there a wide variety of sectors and employers?
- Are the existing businesses environmentally sound?
- Are there locally available education opportunities to provide residents with skills that match the needs of local businesses?
- What business services are lacking in the community?
- What types of jobs are available to residents in terms of security, wage levels, skill levels, and benefits?
- Do wages allow the majority of the population to enjoy a reasonable lifestyle?
- What can be done to improve the economic climate of the community?

10. Planned Growth and Development

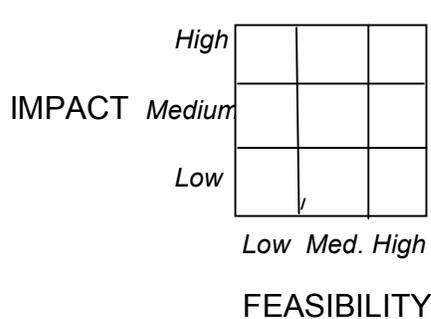
Regulations and affect how a towns develops. They are meant to be a tool, not a set of restrictions. With them, you can guide how and where housing is developed, how and where commercial districts are developed and expanded, how the towns center is utilized. These are all important topics when trying to allow for growth while maintaining the positive characteristics of the community.

- How do our regulations successfully guide how our housing is laid out?
- Is the density and placement of housing in keeping with the character we want to preserve?
- Are there parts of the towns that should be encouraged to be duplicated?
- Does it encourage open space in ways that we want? In ways that are beneficial to preserving the character of the towns?
- Do our methods of housing development and subdivision of land encourage patterns of transportation that seem in character with what we want for our towns?
- Is our business district successful? Does it provide for a sense of community? Is that needed? Does it provide for our community in the ways that we want?
- Does it encourage patterns of transportation that are in character with what we want?
- Are our business districts appropriately placed? Are they an appropriate size?
- Do we want the old center of towns to remain an active and pivotal center of towns?

Impact-Feasibility Grid

The Impact-Feasibility Grid is a tool that we use in the Vision-to-Action forums that can be very helpful in leading the SEED Team through a decision-making process about possible projects or other issues. First lead the group in a brainstorm of a list of possible action steps. Record each on the flip chart and ask a group member to, simultaneously, record each idea on an individual sticky note, using a fat marker and abbreviating as necessary.

Draw a large box filling up one page of flip chart paper. Draw two vertical lines and two horizontal lines inside it, so that it is divided into nine equal-sized boxes, making a grid.



Label the left side of the box “Impact” and mark the bottom square “low” , the middle “medium” and the top “high.”

Label the bottom axis of the box “Feasibility” Mark the left square “low,” the middle “medium” and the right square “high.”

Use the sticky “post-it” notes you just generated, and guide the participants in deciding which of the nine boxes each belongs in.

For each project, ask:

- What will be the impact of the project? In other words, How much will it matter?
- What is the feasibility of the project? In other words, How possible is it in our community?

When considering “**Impact**,” (how much each potential project will matter in your community), consider a range of benefits including social, economic and environmental.

When considering “**Feasibility**” (how possible a potential project is in your community), consider the following areas (not every area applies to every project):

Financial

- ◆ grant writing skills
- ◆ public funds available
- ◆ private donations possible

Human Resources

- ◆ leadership capacity
- ◆ citizen support
- ◆ regional or state political support
- ◆ clear, effective organizational structure
- ◆ interest/cooperation from neighboring communities

Infrastructure

- ◆ communications capacity
- ◆ education or communication network
- ◆ other needed resources

2. The purpose of completing this grid is to make the group's thinking visible. After completing it, encourage the group to stand back and look it, questioning their assumptions and moving any post-its in light of the new thinking. Questions you might pose to the group include:

- ◆ Now that we've put all the possible projects up there and you can see them in comparison to each other, are there any that you think should be moved?
- ◆ Are there ways that we could change or combine any of these ideas which would move them to a more positive position on the grid?
- ◆ Are any of these especially time sensitive?

3. Select the top few projects, considering those which will have the highest impact and are the most possible to accomplish, and those which for other reasons seem important to pursue now.

Ground Rules for Small-Group Discussions

Please remember to:

- ◆ Be respectful and courteous. Use good manners.
- ◆ Speak one at a time. Allow others to talk without interruptions (except the Facilitator who may interrupt to keep the conversation on track.)
- ◆ Don't criticize others' contributions.
- ◆ Focus on the issues; don't personalize discussions.
- ◆ It's OK to "pass" if you're not ready to speak.
- ◆ It's fine to build or add onto someone else's idea--you're collaborating.
- ◆ Be concise. Try to edit and limit your comments so all will have a chance to speak.
- ◆ Check to be sure that the Scribe has written your ideas accurately.

Vision to Action Forum Small Group Record Sheet

Check one:

- Friday Evening
- Saturday Morning
- Saturday Afternoon

Topic Name/Number _____

Facilitator/Scribe _____

Participants' Name

Telephone Number/E-Mail

Facilitation Skills

The following is basic information about group facilitation skills. If you have had any experience with facilitating, you may already be familiar with some of this information. Creativity and group involvement often hinge on a safe, secure, non-judgmental environment. It is the facilitator's role to create this environment. Here are some ideas to assist you.

Your Presence as a Facilitator

- ◆ Act in a respectful manner.
- ◆ Listen actively and well, with genuine interest and an openness to others' ideas.
- ◆ Act warm, positive and enthusiastic.
- ◆ Remember that your facial expressions and body posture tell a story; keep an open, positive expression and pose, and make eye contact with participants.
- ◆ Be relaxed. (Wear clothes you feel comfortable in, and comfortable shoes.)

Your Role as a Facilitator

- ◆ Work as a team with your Scribe, and support each other's efforts
- ◆ Help participants feel comfortable, welcome, and included.
- ◆ Involve everyone--balance the group's participation.
- ◆ Enable the sharing of ideas among group members.
- ◆ Seek diversity--welcome different opinions
- ◆ Recognize the validity of all points of view (this is especially difficult, but vital, when you privately disagree with the speaker).
- ◆ Act non-judgmental--treat group members' ideas without bias (positive or negative)
- ◆ Do not criticize or praise any particular idea
- ◆ Draw people's thoughts out
- ◆ Try not to single anyone out or embarrass anyone

- ◆ Listen actively--show interest in everyone's statements and opinions.
- ◆ Manage the process--focus and re-focus the conversation to the tasks at hand.
- ◆ Stay on schedule. Ensure high priority tasks are met.

Your Tasks as a Facilitator

Focus on the Content

- ◆ Start by being sure everyone is clear about what the task is you're setting out as a group to do.
- ◆ Gently but continually focus and re-focus the discussion to keep people on the subject
- ◆ Ensure that the Scribe records people's thoughts as you heard them, capturing the detail of each person's comments. If in doubt, check with the speaker to see if the Scribe heard/wrote it appropriately and accurately.
- ◆ Ensure that the Scribe writes down the key points of each person's contribution. This reinforces their sense of being heard and valued and increases the chances that their ideas will be used in the planning process.

Guide the Process

- ◆ Clearly understand the agenda and the expectations of each small-group process, so those expectations will be met.
- ◆ Know the time and your agenda and honor them both. You might want to assign a timekeeper from within your group. The lead facilitator should also be keeping time and reminding each small group of the time constraints.
- ◆ Let your group know the agenda and the priorities for the group, and be sure they understand the process you will use, so that they may work with and not against you.
- ◆ Make sure people understand and agree with the "ground rules" for small group behavior, and then, when necessary, gently remind people to abide by them
- ◆ Only speak as much as is absolutely necessary. A facilitator is not a performer, but a servant to the group. Ideally, you will be "invisible," just guiding the process, so that the focus will be on the content of the discussion, not on you.
- ◆ Keep control of the group in a subtle way. Let conversations flow, but within the boundaries, so you stay on the topic.
- ◆ Stay aware of the energy level of the group. Watch for such non-verbal clues as facial expressions, posture, involvement, tone of voice, and respond to these clues appropriately.
- ◆ During discussion portions of the event, help the group to come to agreement when possible, and have all conclusions truly reflect the consensus of the group, and not simply the majority opinion. (Note: consensus and agreement are goals of

the discussion portions of the Forum, but are not elements of the Brainstorming sessions.)

- ◆ Relax and enjoy the people and the process.

Helpful Hints For Effective Facilitation

Hints for Facilitators on Presenting Material

Remain Neutral about the Material

The facilitator should never be an advocate for a project or point of view.

Help the Group to Understand

Remember, you have been preparing in advance for this session. This is their first opportunity to listen to and understand the concepts.

Be prepared

A group will respond positively if it is clear that you understand the material and can deal with it with skill and confidence

Don't Play the "Expert"

Let the group know that your job as facilitator is to moderate and guide the discussion, not to lead them to any pre-established conclusion. You have no more "correct answers" than they do.

Hints for Facilitators on Encouraging Involvement

Bring enthusiasm with you

Prepare for facilitating by doing activities that energize you beforehand--for example, before facilitating a Forum, play ball with your children, sing along with your favorite song, exercise, enjoy a cup of coffee--whatever makes you feel positive and energetic.

Make sure you are involved

If you are enthusiastic and involved in the process, it is more likely that participants will be too.

Remain Neutral about the Material, but Positive about the Process

Although you must remain neutral about the material--the facilitator should never be an advocate for a project or point of view--you should exude confidence about the process. Assure people that their hard work will pay off.

De-Personalize the Issues

Avoid referring to concepts as belonging to the person who suggested them. Once they are on the flip chart, they belong to the full group, and everyone should feel free to add to them. Keep the focus on the exchange of ideas and not on the people.

Welcome Variety, Diversity, Disagreement

Some of the best projects come when two seemingly opposite concepts come together into a new idea.

Let Ideas Grow

As a facilitator, your role is to assist the sharing/growing process. As the group tests their ideas, bouncing them off each other, they will refine and develop their ideas. An idea that started out plain and simple can become vibrant and creative with discussion and input from the full group.

Be Positive, Appreciative, and Accepting

Thank people for sharing their thoughts or feelings with the group. More than anything else, this encourages involvement.

Brainstorming: A Technique for Creative Thinking

Why brainstorm?

Brainstorming provides a creative jump-start to any phase of collaborative planning and implementation. It is not simply designed to create a list--it is a technique intended to generate new ideas through creative group interaction.

Any complex planning or problem-solving process such as the Vision to Action Forum requires an alternating pattern of divergence and convergence of ideas. Think of it as breathing in, and then out. First, all possible alternatives are examined (brainstorming step); then, some are chosen (discussion and “narrowing down” step). For each idea chosen, all possible components or strategies are identified (another brainstorming step); from those, a few are prioritized for action. Alternating the creative, open-ended generation of ideas with a structured narrowing down of options ensures that all of the group’s energy and inspiration gets channeled into action.

How do you brainstorm?

In brainstorming, the group participants are asked a specific, open-ended question. Then, participants respond, and the Scribe carefully records all of the ideas (see “Your Role as Scribe”) on a large flip chart or “group memory.” The Facilitator prompts the group to make sure that the ideas keep coming, and that the group members follow good “brainstorming etiquette” (see below).

There are several techniques for getting the ideas out. Among the most commonly used:

“Shout it out”

This is the least structured form of brainstorming. In this technique, the question is posed by the Facilitator, and then participants are simply asked to shout out the word or idea that comes to them in response to the question. Ideally, group members responses “pop” out like popcorn, with some ideas building on the idea before it. These ideas are recorded on the flip chart by the Scribe. If the ideas come too quickly, it is the Facilitator’s job to ask the group to pause for a moment so the Scribe can catch up.

“Round Robin”

In this technique, the question is posed by the Facilitator, and then participants are asked to “silently brainstorm” their answers by writing them on their own private notepad or piece of paper. Once enough time has elapsed so that everyone’s writing seems to be slowing down, ask each participant in turn to offer one of their answers. Tell them to offer only ideas that have not yet been said. The Scribe records these on the flip chart. Once you have gone around the circle once and everyone has said one idea, go around again and ask if there are additional, new ideas that no one has said yet. (People are allowed to continue to add to their personal list during the process.) If a person has an

idea to add, they add it when it is their turn. If all of the ideas on a person's list have already been said, they can "pass" and move on to the next person.

Brainstorming Etiquette

The Facilitator's and Scribe's behavior are critical in helping the participants feel safe and willing to share their ideas. Here are a few points for leading a brainstorming session.

Facilitator

- ◆ **Refrain from comment or elaboration.** Not only should the Facilitator not comment, she or he will need to remind all participants not to comment on or critique ideas. If an idea seems vague or mysterious, ask the participant to say more about it or to give an example.
- ◆ **Accommodate different personality styles.** Be fair to all participants.
- ◆ **Welcome the wild and crazy statements.** They typically loosen everyone up and frequently spark a whole new flurry of ideas. You may even ask, "What is the most outrageous answer you can think of?"
- ◆ **Encourage the group to "stretch" themselves with new ideas.** One way to do this is to count the participants and then say, "We have X number of people in this group, so we should be able to come up with 3X number of ideas." Most people will push themselves to come up with at least three ideas.
- ◆ **Encourage people to build on each other's ideas.** This isn't "stealing" an idea but adding to it--the more collaboration, the better.
- ◆ **Silence is okay.** Resist the temptation to jump in with an idea or comment of your own, and do not allow participants to fill the silence with idle chatter. If there is a silence, do not be too quick to assume that the group has run out of ideas. You might ask "What else?" to test for completion. Sometimes the best ideas come after a pause.

Scribe

- ◆ **Write down exactly what people say.** Do not re-word or "clean up" ideas. Include ideas that seem crazy or are expressed in unsophisticated language. This helps establish an atmosphere of acceptance.
- ◆ **Clarify if necessary.** With long or complicated statements, ask if what you've just written captures what the person said.
- ◆ **Keep up the pace.** Don't worry about spelling! And don't be so careful about handwriting that people's idea-generation is slowed down by your writing.

Remember!

- ◆ Go for as many ideas as possible
- ◆ Write everything down
- ◆ No one should criticize or analyze others' ideas
- ◆ No one should censor or edit themselves--there is no such thing as a "bad" idea in brainstorming
- ◆ Spelling doesn't count at this point
- ◆ Have fun!

Brainstorming is a way of working together to foster freedom of expression and almost guarantees equality among participants. Brainstorming accommodates differences of opinion, and it encourages creativity. Incorporating brainstorming into planning and decision-making helps citizens put these lofty ideals into daily practice.

(Adapted from "Brainstorming: A Technique of Creativity" by Judy Warriner Walke, NAPM Insights, 2/94.)

Active Listening: An Art for Facilitators and Scribes

About Active Listening

Active listening is a valuable skill in any friend, family member, or neighbor. It is also one of the most important tasks of a facilitator. Everyone needs to be heard. Too often in life, however, we only pretend to listen to the speaker; in fact we are just waiting for them to finish speaking, while we are thinking about what we plan to say next. At its best, active listening is a way of putting oneself in another's position, and seeing the world--if only for a moment--from that person's vantage point.

Some of the hallmarks of an active listener include:

- Staying engaged--not letting your mind wander
- Repeating back to the speaker what you actually heard them say (rather than what you may have wished they had said)
- Asking probing questions, and allowing the speaker to clarify and expand on thoughts when necessary
- Being supportive of the speaker's efforts to communicate (even if you don't agree with the point they are making)
- Being attuned to non-verbal communication (posture, gestures, facial expressions)
- Searching for underlying meaning
- Being encouraging and making the speaker feel comfortable expressing their thoughts
- Being non-judgmental

Benefits of active listening:

- Uncovers the speaker's deeper interests
- Permits the discovery of mutual interests that may be common to many
- Spurs creativity
- Changes the speaker as well as the listener

(Adapted from Lappé and DuBois, "The Quickening of America," Jossey-Bass, 1994.)

Hints on how a facilitator can listen actively:

Focus on Relevant Information

Focus your attention on the person who is speaking and listen carefully to what is being said. (This will not be easy, as the facilitator always has several things on their mind at one time.) As you listen, you will hear information which relates to the topic of your group discussion, and some which does not. Direct your responses to the "relevant" material. This will help you to deal with the irrelevant information by not calling attention to it.

Be Responsive

Listening responsively means reinforcing relevant information by asking further questions. See if you can get the person to express the feelings behind their thoughts.

Whenever you receive a contribution or response from a member, find something positive in it and respond.

If a statement is off the subject, don't blame the speaker. Keep the conversation moving by taking on the "burden of communication" on yourself, saying something like, "Perhaps I didn't make myself clear. Let me pose the question in another way."

Be Aware

Watch for and respond to both verbal and non-verbal feedback from the group. Attentiveness and active participation from the group mean you are on track. Vacant stares and/or restlessness mean that maybe you should change directions and re-focus.

Make certain that you understand a question or comment before responding to it or trying to move on. For example, you might say, "Phyllis, I think I understand your point. You are saying (X) is difficult for this community. Is that correct?"

The Special Role of the Participant-Facilitator

If you are a resident of the town whose Vision to Action Forum you will be serving as a small group facilitator, you will have some special considerations.

As an area resident and citizen, you should add your personal thoughts and opinions to the group discussions. If you voice your personal opinions while also serving as a facilitator, however, your credibility as an objective and fair facilitator will be jeopardized. After all, as a facilitator, your words might automatically (and unfairly) carry more weight because you are in a leadership position in the group. You need to be aware of this potential problem so that you can be an effective facilitator and at the same time participate in the group occasionally as an interested citizen. We encourage you to continue to participate in the conversation—community needs everyone’s ideas and your contributions are a valuable part of the discussion. The trick is to limit the quantity of your participation and to identify when you are speaking as a citizen rather than a facilitator or scribe.

Most of the time, you will be a facilitator, but occasionally, as a citizen of the community, you will want to add a personal comment to the discussion. Make it extremely clear to everyone which “role” you are playing at any given time.

Are you wearing your “Facilitator’s Hat”? It can be very helpful to use a real hat to indicate when you're in the facilitator role. You may choose to wear a real “facilitator’s hat” on your head when you are facilitating, and to take it off when you are stepping into your role as citizen. Alternately, you may pantomime taking your hat off and say, "I'd like to take off my facilitator's hat for a moment to comment on that..." Another option is to leave an empty chair in the circle and sit in it when you wish to step out of your facilitator or scribe role to speak. Or you can simply indicate with words when you are temporarily stepping out of your facilitator’s role.

Scribe Skills

Like the Facilitator, the Scribe is a neutral “servant” of the group. The role of the Scribe is to create a combined short-term and long-term “memory” for the group, by writing down in full view of the group the main points of what is said, using the words of the group members. Most of the time, participants should not be preoccupied by the process of recording--a record of the meeting just appears, thanks to the Scribe, in front of the meeting. A good recorder in no way inhibits or slows down the flow of the meeting.

The Scribe receives the same training as the Facilitators, and should be aware of all of the tasks Facilitators are undertaking. While your job as a Scribe may seem simple--to capture on paper what people say at the Forum--you are in fact a critical part of the facilitation team, and you must be attuned to the process 100% of the time.

A Good Scribe is Vital to the Success of the Forum because:

The flip-chart is the physical evidence of active listening

The Scribe’s work in accurately recording people’s thoughts is every participants’ key to feeling she or he was truly heard at the Forum.

The flip-chart helps participants engage more fully

Once a person’s idea is accurately recorded, the participant no longer has to hold that idea in his/her short-term memory--the person can relax and move on to new ideas.

The flip chart is the short-term “group memory”

The Scribe records ideas as they are generated. The group depends on you to record them accurately, so they can go back to the ideas--in a moment, or the next day--and use them.

The flip chart is the long-term “group memory”

The words on the flip charts will be typed up and will appear verbatim in the Forum Report. These reports are used months and even years later by citizens who want to “mine” the variety of ideas that were generated.

The flip chart provides a physical focus for the group

Rather than sitting in a closed circle around a table, channeling their energies toward each other, the participants sit in a semi-circle and automatically focus their attention on the problem as represented by the “group memory.”

The flip chart helps keep the discussion moving

Sometimes participants get so excited about their idea, they repeat it, re-phrase it, or won’t stop talking about it. In this situation, the Facilitator can say “Yes, it’s clear that you feel strongly about that. Have we captured your point here on the flip chart?” If the Scribe has done their job well, the speaker will see that his or her idea has been recorded, and the group can move on to the next topic.

The flip chart is an important equalizer

Once ideas have been put onto the flip chart, they become the property of the full group, not the special idea of one powerful person or another. This helps de-personalize the ideas and equalize everyone's participation.

Helpful Hints For Being an Effective Scribe

- ◆ You and the facilitator are a team. Your job is to support each other.
- ◆ Listen carefully and fully to the speakers.
- ◆ Record all ideas in the speakers' own words. Do not paraphrase or condense the idea unless the speaker approves.
- ◆ Don't worry about perfect spelling or beautiful handwriting; the important goal is to record the meaning of the speaker's statement accurately and legibly.
- ◆ During the brainstorming portion of the meeting, record all the ideas presented, even if they are in conflict with each other.
- ◆ Make sure that the record is neutral--be careful that you don't write some ideas bigger than others, or underline ideas
- ◆ If you don't understand what a person is saying, ask for clarification from the person making the comment.
- ◆ Encourage participants to review what you wrote, and to correct it when needed. If speakers ask you to change what you wrote to reflect their ideas more fully, accept the suggestions graciously and cheerfully, make the revisions, and thank them for helping to make sure the record is accurate.
- ◆ Remember if you want to add to the discussion, take off your "Scribe hat" and put on your "citizen's hat."
- ◆ Label and number your sheets during the meeting to make transcription easier.
- ◆ If needed, serve as a timekeeper to keep process on track.
- ◆ To make reading the flip chart easier for everyone in the room, switch pen colors every time there is a new idea. (You can alternate between two or more colors of pens). This avoids the "wallpaper" effect of all the ideas running together.
- ◆ Assist facilitator when needed. (Some facilitators need help and encouragement or a gentle reminder about their roles and responsibilities. Others may need help

getting started, getting out of a sticky situation, or help in pulling the meeting together. In some cases you may end up as both Scribe and Facilitator. Be prepared.)

(Adapted from Doyle and Strauss, “How to make Meetings Work,” Jove, 1976.)

Using Questions to Facilitate A Discussion

A good facilitator's rule is, "Never make a statement when you can ask a question instead."

Once you ask a question, remember that a group response to questions requires time for the members to think. So after you pose a question, pause for five seconds (which may seem like an eternity) and wait for someone to respond. Count silently to ten before asking a second or follow-up question.

Following are examples of some questions you might find useful in different situations:

There is a disagreement, or what you think is an incorrect or outrageous statement has been made:

"So, in your mind, one of the significant aspects is X. How do others see it?"

or

"Will you tell us, Sarah, in light of your experience, what your thought is? "

Someone says something that is unclear or could be misinterpreted:

"Could you say something more about that?"

or

"You mentioned that our most serious concern was (X). Let me ask you to say a little more about that."

or

"Doris, will you explain the reasons why you feel that idea is important? "

or

"Bill, will you show us how this might work by giving an example"

The group is straying off the subject:

"I'm getting the sense that we're getting off the topic right now. The question we're discussing is (X)."

or

"It seems that we have strayed off track. I suggest that we re-focus. "

or

"How about if we pick up the pace a bit . Let's go around the circle and hear from each of you with just a brief idea on (X).

or

"Why don't we stand up for a moment and stretch. "

or

"Will you help us, Jean, to review the points we've covered so far?"

or

"Would you help us classify these points, Harriet? What are some names of categories we can put our thoughts into so far? It will help us to organize our thinking."

Someone has been silent throughout the process:

"Mary, which of these do you think is the most serious concern?"

or

"Ed has indicated that his most serious concern is (X). Caroline, given your experience, what do you think?"

You are unclear about what has been said or what the point is:

"Tony, I think I understand your point. You are saying (X). Is that correct?"

or

"Mollie, can you tell us your point again? I want to be sure we record it exactly as you said it."

Someone makes the same point repeatedly, or won't stop talking about their idea:

“You feel strongly about this point, and I want to be sure we have captured it. Is this (point to flip chart where the person’s idea is written down) accurate wording for what you want to say?”

Additional Techniques for Facilitating Troublesome Situations

When people are holding side conversations instead of focusing on the main discussion:

You can continue your job as facilitator, but do so while moving closer to the people who are chatting. Since most people will be paying attention to you, the people having the side conversation will soon realize that people are looking at them, too. This may quiet them down without your actually having to embarrass them publicly.

When two people are talking at once:

The facilitator may need to act as a “traffic police,” and use the same gestures as one, but subtly. You may need to smile, put your hand up to stop one speaker, and point to the other speaker, saying “Okay, Mary, why don’t you go first, and then George, let’s hear from you next.”

If people have complaints about the process:

Sometimes people are afraid that the process outlined will not get the group where it wants to go. Usually, people have enough faith to keep going, and discover that the process works. If people’s complaints are actually interfering with the success of your discussion, however, you may want to take a break to discuss process. You may say, “Okay, let’s stop for a moment. My sense is that this process isn’t working for everyone. I would like to ask you, as facilitator, if you are willing to go on with this process for ten more minutes. Then we can stop and evaluate whether we’ve made progress.” Alternately, you can ask, “What do we need to do to be sure that you feel comfortable with this process?”

If someone is being disrespectful to others or to you:

Gently remind people about the “ground rules” that they have agreed to abide by in the discussion sessions. Say that you know that these are important discussions and tempers may flare, but that the process will succeed more quickly if we can put personal differences aside and focus on the ideas we share in common.

When someone insists on talking about something that is off the topic:

First, make sure you understand the point that the person is making. Then, if necessary, you can make a special page of flip-chart paper called “Other Issues.” Here, you can record ideas that may not belong under the categories you are now working with. You can tell the speaker, “We don’t want this idea to get lost. However, since it doesn’t specifically address the question we are working on now, we will record it on this other page, and make sure that it is included in the final record of the meeting.” Then, move the group back to the question at hand.

If someone is talking too much and dominating the discussion:

Walk up close to the speaker and, as they pause for breath, say, “Could I stop you for a moment and summarize what you have said? I want to be sure it is recorded, and tie it into the rest of the discussion.” (You have to have been listening carefully for this to work!)

or

“I feel that you’ve said a lot, and I just want to be sure to incorporate it all into our discussion. Can I ask you to stop for a moment and summarize your point in one sentence?”

Once the idea has been recorded, you can use the flip chart to remind the speaker, “Yes, I believe that you made that point, and it is recorded right here.”

When one person seems to want to sabotage the process with bad ideas:

If someone has bothered to participate in the Forum, you should assume that they are there to contribute. If you treat them respectfully, they are likely to participate more rationally. You might use words like, “Frederick, you seem to have a different perspective from the rest of the group on this question. Maybe you can articulate your top priorities, and then we can look for the places where we all do have commonalities, and we can go on from there.”

Remember:

No matter what happens, make an effort to remain positive, and try not to be defensive. Always assume that a participants’ comments are based on positive intentions. Everyone is here because they are interested and want to make a contribution. Vision to Action Forums are exciting processes and are be interesting to facilitate. So, relax and enjoy yourself!



6—Follow-Up



Wrap-Up Tasks

Press contact following the event

The day after the Forum, let the local media know what small-group projects came out of the Forum. Be sure that the dates and locations of follow-up meetings are publicized, along with contact information.

In addition, you may wish to send interested members of the media the full Forum Report when it is done.

Thank yous

Be sure that the Secretary is in touch with the people on the Steering Committee in charge of fundraising and food, to be sure that everyone who contributed time, money, food, or other resources to the Forum get thanked. Preferably, the Secretary (or someone the Secretary delegates) will individualize each thank-you note, and ideally, the thank-yous will be accompanied by a description of what was accomplished and what the next steps will be.

De-briefing session

Hold a final meeting of the Steering Committee soon after the Forum event, to celebrate your hard work, “de-brief” on the Forum, and discuss your observations. Also at this meeting, discuss and clarify the roles Steering Committee members would like to play in Forum follow-up.

Tips for Compiling the Forum Report

Why do a Report?

Whatever happens, be sure you have the means to create the report. It is the critical document that contains all of the work that went into the Forum. It records the important accomplishments of the Forum participants, shows the foundation of the successful projects that will come out of it, and will be an important document to refer to and use later.

What is the Report?

The Forum Report is a verbatim record of everything that was said and decided at your Forum event, as it was recorded on the flip-charts in each session. In order to respect the work that citizens put into the Forum, the report should not include anyone's interpretation of the event, nor should it offer prescriptive advice. It should simply offer a word-for-word transcription of the flip-chart notes, so that participants (as well as local citizens who did not attend) can return to the group's work and use it in future planning.

Who makes the Report?

Most communities can find a volunteer (the Secretary or some other volunteer) to type up the flip-chart notes. If you can not find a volunteer, consider setting aside money in your budget to hire a typist to transcribe the notes.

The person who types the report should be reminded to transcribe the notes exactly as they appear, and not to edit any of the notes (although correcting grammar and spelling is a good idea). Lists, sentence fragments, bulleted items, etc. are all to be expected, and should not be changed.

How does the Report get made?

The small-group facilitators are responsible for collecting the flip-charts from each session and turning them in to the Forum's Lead Facilitator. The Lead facilitator will check the flip-charts to make sure they are complete, and hand them over to the Steering Committee Secretary, who is in charge of typing (or arranging for the typing of) the flip-charts.

The typist should have a copy of the Forum agenda. This agenda can serve as the basis of the Table of Contents for the report, since all flip chart notes will be keyed to specific parts of the Forum. Once it is assembled, print out your report and carefully proof-read it. Have it copied. Printing on both sides of the page will save resources and money.

Who gets the Report?

You may mail a copy to every Forum participant, or mail them a postcard saying that it is ready and where they can pick it up. You may also put a small notice in local newspapers

or newsletters to let people know that the report is available. We also suggest you provide copies to:

- ◆ Local officials, boards and commissions
- ◆ Civic groups
- ◆ Libraries and municipal offices (for people to borrow)
- ◆ Newspaper and local media

When Should the Report be Finished?

The report should be finished as soon after the Forum as possible. Many of the working groups will want to use it as they launch into their tasks.

Additional Tips for the Forum Report

- ◆ Remember to collect any census data, historical presentations, or other information presented during the Friday night introduction. Including these presentations, with their charts, graphs, and photos, offers a nice introduction for the report.
- ◆ Photographs make a wonderful addition to the report. Consider asking one or more volunteers to bring cameras to the Forum, and take informal photos of the large-group sessions, small-group discussions, and meals. You may even wish to ask participants to pose for a group photo at the end of the Forum or during a break!
- ◆ Include a list that thanks the businesses, groups, or other people who contributed time, money, food, or other resources to the Forum.
- ◆ Be sure to include a list of the Steering Committee and of all Forum participants.

Follow-up Meetings

You may wish to schedule a follow-up “Forum Reunion” six months or a year after the Forum. This is an opportunity to check on the progress of the small groups, and make them accountable for the tasks they have taken on. However, the feeling of the event should be one of celebration--a “reunion” of the many people who worked on the Forum, and an opportunity to celebrate their successes.

Some communities have scheduled as many as two follow-up reunions per year for two years after the Forum. The brief verbal presentations from committees are succinct and informal, and the emphasis is on celebrating the work you have done, sharing some food and enjoying each other’s company.

One option is to ask the convenors / leaders who have emerged from the small project groups whether they would like to come together to plan the follow-up gathering. Ideally, these leaders will be meeting with the Chairs and/or Steering Committee members periodically to check in on each other’s progress.

Another option for organizing the reunion(s) is to give each of the Steering Committee sub-committees a task for the follow-up event. For example, the food group can be in charge of refreshments, another group can find the site, another can do the publicity, etc. Be sure that you invite local officials and the media, to show off your work.



7—Sample Materials





8—Sample Press Clips

