

Sustainable Community Development Step 3: Create a Community Vision and Develop a Roadmap¹

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Overview

This document presents information on developing a design to create a sustainable community. The design process, also known as a charrette, is divided into three parts. This document also includes a community planning visioning exercise.

Create a Community Vision and Develop a Roadmap

True participative development involves diverse stakeholders with varying perceptions, motivations and values. Creating a sustainable community must therefore begin with participants asking themselves which values are shared and which are central to the community's cultural identity.

A charrette is a collaborative design process used in community visioning to promote dialogue, identify problems and needs, share ideas, and develop innovative, sustainable solutions. This process often involves a series of public workshops, focus groups, community inventories and project design sessions used to reach participant consensus on a plan for the future. Charrettes are often a highly structured and facilitated process. While charrettes can be any length of time, keep in mind the size of the group and the time and staff requirements needed. It may be best to

begin a complex sustainability project with at least a 3-day program to encourage a fully collaborative effort.

Charrettes are typically completed in three-steps. First, a steering committee determines the primary focus of the charrette, identifies issues, and works with charrette facilitators. The second step involves the charrette itself, whereby participants establish a shared community vision. Finally, a post-charrette step consists of the formal documentation of the participants' findings and often includes the preparation of a presentation delivered to all community members.

While the nature of the visioning exercises will vary for each community, it is important to ask people what they like about their community, what they do not like, and why. Ask participants to envision their ideal community in order to tease out community values. Additionally, ask stakeholders what legacy they want to leave their children.

Community Planning Visioning Exercise

During the charrette, a facilitator often asks participants to close their eyes and imagine they are walking through their neighborhood as it should be fifteen years into the future. What do they see? What do the buildings look like? Where do people gather? How do they make decisions? What are they eating? Where are they working? How are

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they traveling? What is happening on the street? Where is the center of the neighborhood? How does green space and water fit into the picture? What do you see when you walk around after dark? People record their visions in written or pictorial form—in diagrams, sketches, models, photographic montages, and in written briefs. Sometimes a professional illustrator helps turn mental images into drawings of the city that people can extend and modify.

It helps to be visual in your visioning process. Include graphics and computer models, when feasible, to allow participants to visualize the community's future potential. For instance, in Chattanooga, Tennessee, visualization tools such as impact and land use spatial analysis and GIS assist communities in decision-making and community planning. Statewide networks of cooperative Extension personnel can typically provide access to these techniques.

Utilize visioning strategies that are culturally and language appropriate to your community. Consider literacy levels, social norms regarding gender, age, race, and class, or other factors that may inhibit full participation in visioning exercises. Involve the community's young members in the visioning process, as the economic, social, and environmental viability of our communities are dependent on the education, leadership, and commitment toward sustainability of our youth. This may require separate gatherings of youth and adults to allow the community's youth to express their interests more freely. The goal of a visioning exercise is not to find the majority opinion, but rather to create a vision that reflects the interests of the diverse groups within the community.

Once a vision is created, commit a vision statement to paper to formalize the results. A vision statement can serve as a reminder of the project's purpose, helping to keep it on track. Vision statements can be in graphic form as photos, maps, or other images, or can consist of a list of ideas. Sustainable Seattle's vision, as reflected in their mission statement, is "to protect and improve our long-term health and vitality by applying sustainability to the links between economic prosperity, environmental vitality and social equity."

Thereafter, develop an action plan for realizing that vision. Action plans should specify goals and objectives and set time frames for achieving each. Goals are generally articulated in terms of who will do what for what purpose. Goals must be clearly stated and specify what the result of the project will be. Objectives are measurable and state how it will be determined if goals are achieved. Meaningful objectives state who is involved, what the desired outcomes

are, how progress is measured, and what the time frame is for the outcome to occur. A goal and objective worksheet can assist you in this process. (See Table 1.)

Estimate financial costs and resource needs. Identify issues, concerns, and limitations, and assign responsibilities. Good action plans are specific, understandable, realistic, and agreed upon by all members of the project team.

Table 1. Goals and Objectives Worksheet.

<p>Directions: In the space provided, write your goal. Then for each objective write who is involved; what the desired outcomes are; how progress will be measured; and when the outcome will occur. Then put the pieces together into a sentence. Use a new worksheet for each goal.</p>
<p>Goal:</p>
<p>Objective 1:</p> <p>Who:</p> <p>What:</p> <p>How:</p> <p>When:</p> <p>Written Objective:</p>
<p>Objective 2:</p> <p>Who:</p> <p>What:</p> <p>How:</p> <p>When:</p> <p>Written Objective:</p>
<p>Objective 3:</p> <p>Who:</p> <p>What:</p> <p>How:</p> <p>When:</p> <p>Written Objective:</p>