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Rural and Economic Development Programs  
**Social and Economic Education for Development**

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**A Community Planning Process**  
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**Goals of a Community Planning Process**

- ▶ To develop long range community planning based on consensually defined goals and objectives.
- ▶ To increase the collaboration and mutually-supportive activities of existing community groups and agencies.
- ▶ To expand the participation base in community affairs, activities, and groups so that more of a broader range of community residents become active in community life.
- ▶ To stimulate the creativity of citizens and local leaders as it applies to enhancing community well-being.

**The Stages of a Community Planning Process**

**Community Visioning**

*The purpose of a community visioning process is to maximize the opportunities for community residents to participate in the development of a vision for a common tomorrow, and to expand what residents see as possible alternative futures by offering a vehicle for the creative thoughts of all citizens to be expressed.* This is accomplished by asking local citizens to volunteer to guide community discussions exploring their concerns about the community's heritage, ways to enhance the quality of life, and a vision for the future. Community organizations are contacted and asked to host a visioning forum, and individuals are sought to guide forum discussions in their homes or neighborhoods. Every effort is made to ensure that no matter where in the county someone lives, they have an opportunity to become part of a discussion about the future. An executive summary is developed, identifying key themes to emerge from the forums and this summary of the results of the visioning process is presented to local officials, community organizations, and all residents in the community.

In places that have completed a community visioning process, local civic organizations, churches, the schools, youth groups, political organizations, volunteer fire departments, and social service agencies, as well as individual citizens have hosted forums. On average 35 to 45 forums are held involving 300 to 450 community residents.

**Community Goal Setting**

*The purpose of community goal setting is to translate the ideas generated during the visioning process into community goals that will contribute to building the desired tomorrow. During this stage, small working groups critically examine the visions of the future in light of the community's resources and strengths in order to assess whether they translate into reachable goals.* This stage begins with a

review of the visions of the desired tomorrow generated by citizens during the community forums and restating these as goals for action. This may occur within working groups that are focused on particular aspects of community life (e.g., economic development, infrastructure and capital improvements, recreation, land use planning) or may be done by a single working group. Defining working goals will require attaching priorities to the list of goals or visions, because it is not possible to do everything, and some goals may require actions or resources that are beyond the ability of one community. There are different factors that may influence the priority setting: the types and amounts of resources required or their source (e.g., grants, local tax revenues), the time frame required for accomplishing the goal, or an assessment of the forces within the community that increase the likelihood of achieving a particular goal (driving forces) as well as the forces within the community that decrease the chances of success (restraining forces). A report on the final priority listing of goals should be presented to citizens, community organizations, and local government officials. At this time, some working groups have found it useful to have local government (e.g., county Fiscal Court, City Council) formally endorse the goals and request that an action plan be submitted for their consideration.

### **Community Action Planning**

*The purpose of community action planning is two-fold. First, to develop a set of objectives or tactics for each goal which, if completed, will lead to the achievement of the goal. Second, to identify the specific resources that must be mobilized in implementing the objectives; to specify a time frame for action for each objective; and, to designate individuals, groups, or organizations who will provide leadership in accomplishing the objectives.* During this stage, the specific actions necessary to make the goals a reality are outlined in detail. The objectives reflect the working groups' earlier analyses of driving and restraining forces and what actions and resources are necessary to strengthen the driving forces and minimize the restraining forces. The objectives identify the resources that must be mobilized to move the community forward as well as the collaborative or cooperative relationships among groups, agencies, or organizations in the community that must be developed or strengthened for success.

The most critical part of action planning is assigning specific individuals, organizations, or groups responsibility for leadership in accomplishing specific objectives. Research and common sense tell us that when everybody is responsible, nobody is responsible, so it is important to encourage ownership on the part of local government, community agencies, civic organizations, or individuals for completing specific objectives. Furthermore, the objectives involve short- and long-term actions in recognition of the fact that achieving a desired community involves the accumulation of planned actions over time. The final aspect of the action plan is the development of a mechanism for monitoring progress and re-evaluating the goals and objectives in light of changing circumstances.

The community action plan is then submitted to the community and local government officials for review, comment, and eventually endorsement. It is important that local government publicly affirm its commitment to the community action plan and that citizens have opportunities to review and comment on the action plan.