

3.5 Start a Community Visioning Process

Instructions:

- **What:** This is a significant undertaking, but, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, quite essential to design your community's roadmap to prosperity.
- **Why:** To create a single vision moving forward so that your community is working together to build a community where you are all thriving.
- **Who:** The short answer is everyone.

Community Visioning Scope:

The following are recommended orders-of-operation to start your community visioning process.

- Determine Approach:**
 - Blue Sky
 - Grounded
 - Hybrid
- Identifying who must be “at the table.”** All citizens should be given a chance to voice their opinion, but typically a list of community leaders and stakeholder organizations (usually several dozen) who will act as advocates for the process should be compiled. Names on the list should be balanced and reflect the socio-economic composition of the community.
- Designate the lead organization.** While the steering committee described below has the ultimate responsibility for the planning and visioning project, the administrative responsibility must lie with some entity or organization in the community such as an economic development organization, county or municipal government, non-profit community organization, or similar entity.
- Design the process.** Identify the components of the process and how to accomplish them. Establish the committees required to carry out the process. The most important committee is the coordinating or steering committee composed of 10 to 15 representative members of the community to establish and supervise the visioning and planning process. Other committees typically include an outreach committee responsible for informing citizens of the process and soliciting their input and assistance where necessary, and a research committee to perform the situation analysis and other information tasks shown in the box including gathering public input from surveys, focus groups, interviews and other channels. The visioning and strategic planning committees often grow out of the community action groups described in the introduction toolbox.
- Set the project timetable.**
- Staff the project.** Ensure that the necessary personnel resources are available to complete the project, including staff and volunteers including committee members.

Strategic Planning for Economic Development

The completed visioning process, along with the components that preceded it and upon which the vision was based (public input, SWOT analysis –including data analysis and internal and external assessment), and the prioritized prosperous community components map, all feed into developing a strategic plan for community and economic development. An outline of the strategic planning process is shown below.

Basic Principles

1. Must be undertaken and viewed as a true community-wide initiative and not any particular organization.
2. Everyone in our community – governments, organizations and individuals – should feel like they had a chance to participate and provide input.
3. Process and plan should be a public-private initiative and should be clearly communicated to the public, with regular updates. Transparency is critical.

Building Blocks

- Steering Committee** (up to 10 persons) to oversee the process with representatives from community government, development organizations, and the private sector.
- Advisory Group** (20-25 persons) composed of representatives from major stakeholders: the community, all local governments, education, and key community organizations to maintain transparency and communication.
- Staff and resources** to complete the project.

Initial Decisions and Actions

- Obtain approval from the leadership with initial funding commitment; solicit funding partners (local governments, businesses, etc.).
- Announce the project emphasizing the following: (customize as needed)
 - It will be a true community-wide effort and everyone will have a chance to provide input and ideas.
 - It is not just about more jobs, it is about creating better jobs, higher incomes and a prosperous future for our children so they can stay or return. The future will either happen “to” us or “for” us!
- Decide on hiring an outside consultant, completing internally, or a combination of the two. Either way, funding will have to be secured.
- Identify and secure Steering Committee members.

Components of Plan

- Statement of current situation:** demographic and economic conditions and trends.
- SWOT analysis:** economic development strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and how to build on strengths and address weaknesses.
- Vision statement** for community and economic development – a consensus based on public input and assessment of current situation.
 - What do we want our community to “look like” in 5, 10, 15 years?
 - What kind of community and economic development will support that vision?
 - How fast or how slow do we want to grow?
- Statement of community and economic development goals** (general) and objectives for each goal (more specific) based on vision, with specific action steps to attain each objective. Form working committees to formulate action steps to address objectives.
- Marketing plan** recommending best ways to promote the our community to achieve vision, goals and objectives. Includes:
 - Industry development (goods and service producing), tourism, and how the two can work together.
 - Branding and external messaging for our community.
 - “Target” industries.
 - Recommended marketing actions with budget.
 - Responsibilities for marketing actions.
- Implementation schedule and milestones** with regular progress assessments and course corrections. Budgets for future plan “tweaks.”

Examples of community strategic plans include:

- City of Fort Collins, Colorado:
<https://www.fcgov.com/citymanager/pdf/strategic-plan-2015.pdf>
- City of Ft. Worth, Texas:
<https://www.fortworthtexas.gov/departments/ecodev/edplan>
- City of Alameda, California:
<https://www.alamedaca.gov/files/content/public/departments/community-development/edsp-2018.pdf>

As you can see from these examples, the structure and focus of strategic plans varies from community to community. Using this worksheet and examples as guides, your community just needs to find its own “style.” There is no fixed template, and if there were it would inhibit individuality and creativity in community and economic development strategic planning.