



**ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE**
Auburn University & Alabama Cooperative Extension System



Community Questions

Engaging Citizens to Address Community Concerns

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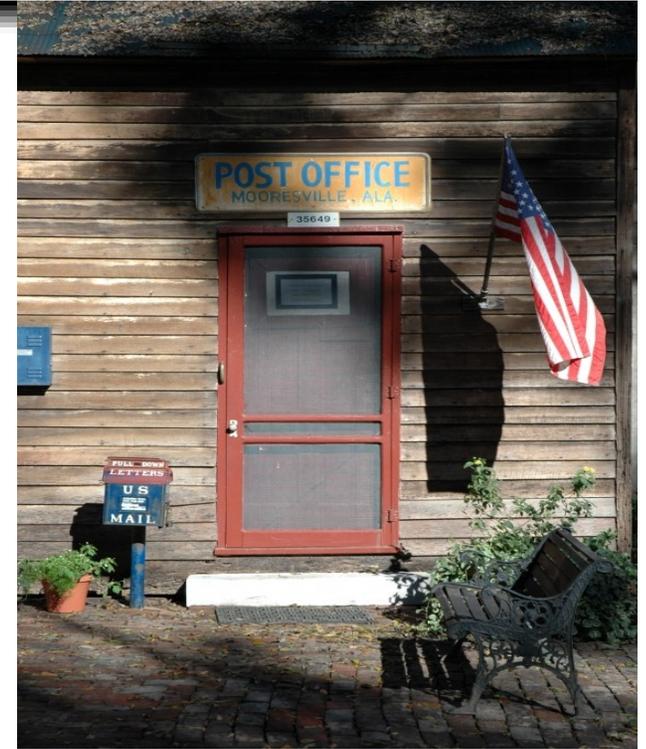
AU ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE: BROAD VIEW OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Core Economic Development Activities:

- ❑ Business Recruitment and Attraction
- ❑ Business Retention and Expansion
- ❑ Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development
- ❑ Commercial/Retail Development
- ❑ Tourism and Retiree Attraction
- ❑ **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

A STRONG ECONOMY REQUIRES A STRONG COMMUNITY.

Economic development requires
a foundation upon which to build.



- ❑ **Physical Infrastructure:** Roads, water, gas, electricity, sewers, and telecommunications are necessary for economic growth.
- ❑ **Human Infrastructure:** An educated and skilled workforce.
- ❑ **Civic Infrastructure:** Strong local leadership, vital community institutions, public involvement, and a community mindset of pride and optimism.

WELCOME
TO
UNIONTOWN



“What stands out in the high-achieving community is not so much the characteristics of the leaders as their number. . . The high-achieving community had ten times more people providing leadership than communities of comparable size. This [high-achieving] community is “leaderful”; that is, nearly everyone provides some measure of initiative. And its leaders function, not as gatekeepers, but as door-openers, bent on widening participation.”

- Dr. David Mathews, President of the Kettering Foundation

2006

Economic & Community Development Institute

	Agriculture & Natural Resources	4-H and Youth Development	Family and Consumer Sciences	Economic & Community Development
Regional Agents	48	27	37	0
County Agents	12.5	7.5	4	0
State Specialists & Non-Merged Faculty	19	12.5	6	4
Academic Departments	40	0	3	0
Total FTEs	119.5 (54%)	47 (21%)	50 (23%)	4 (2%)

The traditional model (of university interaction with community)

- ❑ Views citizen (and communities) as
 - ✓ consumer of services
 - ✓ customers who need assisting, informing, or educating
- ❑ University as “**Experts and Educators**”
- ❑ University has an arsenal of projects and programs that can be employed to solve community problems (often defined by someone from the university).
- ❑ University “experts” go into a community to solve local problems, extending the knowledge and resources of the university to inform, assist, and educate.
- ❑ There is a one-way, producer-consumer, relationship.

“Your Experts for Life”

Engaged University Model

- ❑ Many communities are not really looking for assistance, service, or education, but **how to come together**.
- ❑ Many university outreach “experts” know how to implement their programs, but they don’t know much about people coming together as communities.
- ❑ Citizens seen as producers and creators of their own fate, having important local knowledge and expertise, and an economic resource.

University as “Connector and Catalyst”

Civic Engagement Strategies

- ❑ Strategic Planning
- ❑ Asset Mapping
- ❑ Deliberative Forums
- ❑ Study Circles
- ❑ Roundtable Discussions
- ❑ Community Improvement Projects
- ❑ Town Meetings



Citizens at Work

Engaging for Prosperous Communities

- *A working group organized by the Kettering Foundation with representatives from:*
 - ✓ *Auburn University Economic & Community Development Institute*
 - ✓ *International Institute for Sustained Dialogue*
 - ✓ *Kettering Foundation*
 - ✓ *National Civic League*
 - ✓ *New Mexico First*
 - ✓ *Southern Growth Policies Board*
 - ✓ *University of Tennessee-Chattanooga*
 - ✓ *West Virginia Center for Public Life.*

- *The group developed the following “insights” based on the group’s collective experiences in engaging citizens.*

INSIGHTS

- ❑ Citizens must be engaged if communities are to solve their most difficult problems.
 - ✓ *Engage citizens to address community problems.*
- ❑ Citizens often think about problems differently than institutions or professionals.
 - ✓ *Recognize the limits of professional expertise.*
- ❑ People become engaged only around issues or problems that are of particular interest or concern to them.
 - ✓ *Start with what people care about.*
- ❑ Citizen engagement – and governance – is a skill learned only by practice.
 - ✓ *Establish structures that sustain engagement.*

- ❑ It's often most effective to engage citizens within the organizations and networks they are already a part of; we don't have to start from scratch.
 - ✓ *Engage existing networks.*
- ❑ Networks and connections between organizations can multiply the power of civic initiatives and make them truly community-wide, or “public.”
 - ✓ *Connect existing networks and stakeholders.*
- ❑ When a group of people comes together for a community conversation, there will be tensions between goals, ideas, and values.
 - ✓ *Recognize and value tensions.*

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS:

ENGAGING CITIZENS TO ADDRESS COMMUNITY CONCERNS

What is the Problem?

More Questions

- ❑ What concerns you most about the (economic) state of our community?
- ❑ How does this affect you / your family / your neighbors?
- ❑ What have you heard in others' statements that differ significantly from yours?
Can you begin to understand why they feel the way that they do?
- ❑ What have you heard in others' stories that resonate with your experience?
- ❑ Do you see themes recurring in many comments?
- ❑ What are you beginning to see as the real causes of this problem?
- ❑ When people in the community talk about this issue, what do they say?
- ❑ Would anyone like to venture a view of the problem that might capture what we've been saying? What do we really need to zero in on? What IS the problem?
- ❑ What are the potential consequences of NOT addressing the problem? If this problem were solved, how would the community be different?

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

If THAT is the problem, what are the ways to deal with it?

More Questions

- ❑ What are your thoughts about possible approaches to tackling this problem?
- ❑ As we look at the list, what seems valuable that each approach is trying to protect? Do other approaches seem designed to protect the same or similar interest held valuable? Can these perhaps be combined?
- ❑ Can we bring these approaches down to three or four that seem to have priority?
- ❑ Talking about the approaches one by one:
 - ✓ Do you think the approach is feasible?
 - ✓ Who might support it? What would be their reasons for doing so?
 - ✓ Who might oppose it? Why?
 - ✓ What might be the consequences, both positive and negative, should this approach be fully realized?
 - ✓ What might we have to give up in order to realize this approach? Are we prepared to accept the trade-offs necessary to realize this approach?
- ❑ Is there one approach that might be tried first?

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

How can WE take action to address the problem?

More Questions

- ❑ Who is not at the table that we need? What persons or groups should we approach to share our ideas?
- ❑ What resources do we have to address the problem? What resources do we need?
- ❑ How can we build on the work of organizations that are already involved in this issue in the community? How can we build connections and encourage communication between these organizations?
- ❑ What benefits, if any, do you think the community could gain from working on this issue with neighboring communities? What assets or resources might we combine? What barriers or challenges might have to be overcome?

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

How can WE take action to address the problem? (continued)

More Questions

- ❑ What are the obstacles to moving in the direction we want to pursue? What steps can overcome the obstacles? Who can take those steps? Who will do what?
- ❑ How can we sequence those steps so they support each other?
- ❑ What is an appropriate timeline for action? How will we monitor progress?
- ❑ What is one step that we could take in the next 60 days to take action on this issue in the community? What is one step that you are willing to take personally?
- ❑ What role will this group play in the process? How often should we meet?

Reflections about Community Questions

- ❑ As a result of this process, are you thinking differently about:
 - ✓ The ability of citizens to make a difference in this community?
 - ✓ The ways that political leaders, leaders of community institutions, and professionals view community problems versus how other citizens see these problems?
 - ✓ The way that political and other institutional leaders involve (or don't involve) citizens in the decisions they make?
 - ✓ The point of view of those with whom you disagree?
 - ✓ New ways in which collective decision-making like this might be used in the community (city government, schools, churches, etc.)?
 - ✓ Opportunities to connect organizations in the community who may not be working together currently?

Reflections about Community Questions

- ❑ How do you plan to share what you've learned with groups in which you are involved? Do you see new ways for these groups to become more involved in community life?
- ❑ What would our community look like if more people were productively engaged in public issues and public life?
- ❑ What questions are you leaving with?



Community Forum

Building a Competitive Workforce: *Making Choices for Your Community*

Southern Growth Policies Board



www.southern.org

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

-- Margaret Mead



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