

# Implementation Guide Series Involving the Community

## Inside:

Your small group of volunteers has a community betterment project in mind, You've thought about it, talked about it, and maybe even have begun charting an action plan on how to achieve your goal. Now it is necessary to communicate your message to the larger community to gain community support. This guide offers some suggestions for how to get your town to rally around your project.



# Community

## Why is community support important?

The project you are working on has a greater chance for success if there is local enthusiasm and support beyond your small, dedicated group of volunteers. This enthusiasm could translate into assistance with everything from funding to assistance installing and maintaining the project. Enthusiasm is contagious, too, and could lead to other projects that will further enhance your community.

## Identify the right people for the job

The first thing you need to do is assess the talents and skills of the people you already have on board.

- Who is organized, can keep track of all the components of the projects, and can provide overall coordination?
- Who is comfortable speaking to groups or the media about the project's goals and needs?
- Who is comfortable approaching individuals and organizations for funding support?
- Who is skilled at writing and can draft press releases and publicity materials?
- Who is detail-oriented and can track contributions, send thank you notes, and file financial reports?

While there may be somebody who can perform many of these tasks by him- or herself, it usually is more beneficial to spread the work among many people. This helps to minimize "volunteer burnout" and associates the project with the whole community rather than as one person's pet project. Also, spreading knowledge of the project among many people helps others know what needs to be completed in case someone can no longer assist with the projects.

## Identify stakeholders

Once you know the strengths of your own group of volunteers, you need to identify who else in town you need to be talking to. Who are the people who own the land your group wants to put a sign on or use for a pocket park? Who are the adjacent landowners and what are their concerns? What city leaders need to be consulted or involved in the project? Who are the millionaires next door or the local-kid-who-made-good who can be solicited for funding assistance? Remember the power of personal discussion. It is important that all these individuals are approached directly and early rather than finding out through the rumor mill.

## Have a clear project/need in mind, plan of action and positive outlook

If you want the community to get behind your project, you have to be clear about the who, what, when, why, and how of the project.

- **Who needs to be involved with the project?** There are two types of people to approach to be involved with your project: those who want to plan and/or provide financial support and those who want to supply the labor or equipment needed. Be sure to let potential supporters know your needs and welcome any and all support and assistance they can give. Also, if your project involves city property or resources, you should have a person from the city staff closely involved with the planning and implementation. At the very least, you should have someone serve as a liaison to the municipal government.

- **What do you want to achieve?** Be clear about the specifics of what you want to accomplish with the project. Have a clear goal in mind. Don't just say, "We want to beautify the entrance way into town." Be able to explain what your beautification plan involves. Do you have a sign or design for one? Do you have a location identified for the sign? Do you have a planting plan? Have you identified who will be responsible for maintenance of this area? If you'd like people to help answer these questions, let them know. But if you are approaching someone for financial or labor support, these questions probably should be answered already.



Identify community volunteers who bring a variety of skills to the project.

- **When do you plan to complete the project?** If you are approaching people to work on your project, they will need to know how long it will take before they commit the time and energy. Also, if your group is applying for grant funding, you will need to have a time line identified for completion.
- **Why is the project important to the community?** What is it about the project that will benefit the community? Will the project more clearly identify where the town line is located? Will it screen or enhance an area that has suffered neglect or abuse over the years? Will it soften the appearance of the industrial park?
- **How do you plan to complete the project?** Be prepared to explain your plan of action to a potential volunteer or donor. The more answers to the questions posed in this guide sheet that you have answered, the more likely someone will feel you are organized and capable of completing a project.



*Include a variety of community members in planning projects.*

## Play to your strengths- fun way to fund raise

There are many grant programs out there, if you just know where to look. But don't overlook the best source of funding you have available - your own community. Everyone is inclined to give to a worthy cause close to their home, even if you think everyone is tapped out because of other worthy local causes that have sought their financial assistance. With a little planning and creativity, you can make local fund raising painless... and even fun! There are the old tried and true fund raisers such as bake sales, car washes and raffles. But you can get even more creative than that! Some communities have hosted card tournaments, community-wide sales drives and auctions. One community even rehabilitated an old house and sold it for a profit. All or part of the proceeds from all these examples were put to community betterment projects.

## Power to the press!

Word of mouth is especially powerful, particularly in small communities. But don't overlook the printed word. Local newspapers, newsletters, church bulletins, and local access TV all are ready and willing to publicize local events. Regional press outlets also could be interested in covering your project, particularly if you can identify the right angle- is there a human interest element, a quirky twist, an emotionally moving background story?

Finally, the more sophisticated technology gets, the easier it is to produce quality posters and signs. Find someone who can produce an appealing poster and hang it up on store bulletin boards, in the windows of storefronts (this could be a great use of empty storefronts!), and at other community gathering places, Just remember to ask permission and to take the sign down when the project or event is completed!

## Say thank you... and celebrate!

By the time your project is completed, or even along the way, many people will likely be involved. Be sure to thank them for all their work, enthusiasm, patients, contributions...anything and everything it took to successfully complete the project. A thank you could be as simple as a written note, or it could be as public as a notice in the newspaper, or as festive as a "Project Completion" party! Be sure to thank yourself, too, for sticking with it and leaving a legacy for coming generations!



rev 6/2020



## About Trees Forever

*Our mission – to plant and care for trees and the environment by empowering people, building community, and promoting stewardship – is fulfilled through cutting-edge programs and innovative practices. Through these, our trained and experienced staff has assisted community leaders and landowners across Iowa and Illinois with thousands of planting projects. Each year, on average, we work with and engage more than 7000 volunteers who give generously of their time and talents. To date, they have helped us plant more than 3 million trees and shrubs throughout Iowa and Illinois.*