



## To Ensure Success, Involve Others from the Beginning

The Community Energy Opportunity Finder highlights projects that will increase local energy efficiency, and helps you identify opportunities for renewable energy. It can also help you develop persuasive information of the value of these projects.

As you gain more knowledge about the many benefits of efficiency and renewable energy, it is wise to keep in mind that others in your community probably will not have this information. In fact, many people in the community, including influential leaders, may have never heard of these ideas. As a result, they may have little enthusiasm for the projects you support. Worse, they may regard your ideas as a threat to their initiatives.

If you can implement your projects without support from these people, or even in the face of their opposition, then it's possible that their opinions won't affect your initiatives. But in most cases, broader community support is needed—to secure funding and endorsements, or to avoid damaging opposition. And even if broader support is not needed to get your projects moving, it may be needed for later initiatives. Being part of a community requires that you consider long-term repercussions.

So, what should be done? You could wait until you choose your projects, then try to convince others that they're a good idea. This approach may work with people who know and trust you. But every community has its share of controversy, which tends to create anger and jealousy that remains beneath the surface until the next disagreement erupts. It's a rare individual who is involved in community activities without becoming the focus of others' hostility. So, relying on your power of persuasion is risky.

You don't want your project initiatives to be the next community controversy. You want projects that local leaders support. Your best bet is to involve key leaders to work collaboratively as team members or as advisors. You can fully inform these advisors before you get started as to why you're pursuing these ideas. Also, as you become better informed through use of the Energy Finder, you can keep them informed. Most important: Seek their advice whenever communicating with them.

### ***Crucial Point***

Advisors will find the information far more compelling when they discover it along with you, rather than from you. They will hear you when they know you're hearing them, and support you when you support them.

You need to achieve a balance: enough team members to do the work and ensure project success, while keeping the team to a manageable size. Twelve is probably the maximum workable team size. Therefore, you'll need plenty of advisors to ensure success while keeping the team manageable.

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### ***Who To Involve? Who Are Leaders?***

Leaders are individuals who inspire or mobilize others to get something done. Think back over the last several years: When a community problem came up, who was there to help find solutions? Many leaders don't think of themselves as such. When you ask, they may say, "Me? Are you kidding? I'm just working with my neighbors to get the speed limit reduced," or, "I'm just a business person who talks to a few people about getting the community moving." These people are leaders, regardless of whether they think of themselves as such.

Some are in obvious leadership positions, such as elected government officials and chamber of commerce members, as well as leaders of civic, cultural, ethnic, religious, and neighborhood organizations. Others may lead groups that aren't formally organized. Some may not lead groups at all, yet are widely recognized within certain segments of the community. They may simply be individuals who are respected by the community at large.

Some people are opinion leaders. They are so respected or feared that, when they offer their opinion on an issue, others who may have disagreed take a second look at their own point of view.

### ***Established Leaders***

Some people are virtually always involved in community and economic development. Easy to find, they're often the community's most powerful members:

- Government officials
- Business people
- Labor leaders
- Chamber of commerce members
- Realtors
- Real-estate developers
- Newspaper editors and publishers
- Industry representatives
- Political party representatives
- Service group leaders

Many of these people are experienced in dealing with development issues and have plenty of ideas. Many have access to and knowledge of sources of capital. A few are "gatekeepers"—people who can open or close the "gate" to people and resources. For example, the town manager is often the gatekeeper to the town council. The person in charge of a regional development agency often keeps one of the gates to state resources.

Such leaders are often accustomed to getting their way. Some may not be thrilled with this bottom-up approach, and may be inclined to oppose your effort if they feel threatened by it. Yet, whatever their interests, they're important players who you may need.

### ***Frequently Overlooked Leaders***

Many community segments have historically been kept on the fringes of decision making, or allowed only token representation. Yet many members of these groups have valuable knowledge and experience quite

different from those who usually make the community's development decisions. Many have creative new ideas. And, despite frequent assumptions to the contrary, they're often concerned with issues that have a direct bearing on development. Here's a partial list (you'll probably be able to think of others):

- Women
- Minorities
- Retirees
- Young people
- Teachers
- Health and social-service professionals
- Religious leaders
- Newcomers
- Loggers, fishermen, and miners
- Farmers and ranchers
- Environmentalists
- Neighborhood activists
- Laborers
- Artists and craftspeople

### ***How to Involve Others***

Once you've identified who you'd like to involve as team members and as advisors, you'll need to contact them. The effective way to get people to actually participate is to contact them personally. In most cases written invitations are a waste of time, or a formality that's unnecessary in this situation.

One person shouldn't make all the contacts; try to distribute the work among team members. Review each name on your list of leaders and determine who on the team is most likely to successfully recruit that person. Where possible, assign contacts to team members who have a good relationship with the person to be contacted.

Recruiting people isn't everyone's cup of tea. Some of your team may be very comfortable crunching numbers, but uncomfortable recruiting. Team members should pick the task with which they are most comfortable.

Call or visit contacts, whichever is most comfortable and convenient. Create a positive overall impression of the team's work. Make it clear that this effort is an opportunity for positive change. Describe the Energy Finder and how you'll use it. Indicate the kinds of projects you might discover using the Energy Finder, being clear that they are only examples. Your intention shouldn't be to persuade people to do what you want, that is, participate on the team or as an advisor. Frame your message in terms of how this effort will result in what they want. To determine what they want, you'll probably need to ask and to listen closely. Also, ask contacts who else they think should be involved.

### ***Three Good Reasons for Involving Others***

1. Community residents get behind decisions they had a part in creating. Think about your own experience: When you collaborate with others to make a decision, you "own" it and are more likely to support it.
2. Resulting decisions are based on a wider range of community experience and wisdom. Diverse people bring forth more and different ideas, offering more options to choose from.
3. Collaboration builds community leadership. It offers traditional leaders a more effective means to seek solutions to community problems, and it opens the leadership door to new people.

## ***The Power of Community***

Community is the foundation for local success. Many local development projects are successful precisely because, its proponents worked together for the common good. The notion of community can be romantic—volunteers working together to strengthen the community. But it's also practical. You don't have to feel warm and fuzzy about everyone in your community to understand that you have a common future, and that sometimes differences must be set aside to get a job done. Such an attitude is just as important today as it was in the old days when, more out of hard-headed necessity than any sense of romance, neighbors worked with neighbors to raise a barn. They knew they'd need that neighbor's help the next time there was a big project on their land. A successful local economy in today's volatile world requires at least as much attention to neighborliness. Community inhabitants must work with one another whether or not they like or agree with one another.

Collaborative decision-making is the basis for rebuilding trust and respect that may have been marred by years of wear and tear; it's a way to replace boring or painful meetings with fun and creative ones; it's the vehicle by which people who have been ignored can finally fully participate. Collaboration makes it possible to discuss innovative ideas in a place that might otherwise be closed to all but conventional wisdom.

The fabric of any community is strengthened by improving and more tightly weaving each thread. The better the weave, the less stress and wear is felt by each individual thread. A strong community fabric will support your effort to bring success to your community. Genuinely collaborative decision-making will tighten the weave and increase your potential for success.

## ***Modern Barriers to Good Community Decisions***

Communities face an increasing number of tough decisions and divisive forces at a time when community spirit and traditional forms of participation are declining. Several major barriers to community decision-making have emerged in the past generation:

### **Decisions are Tougher**

Not long ago, local leaders focused most of their attention on which road to pave next, when to replace the old water line, or who would fix the church roof. Today, they may have to decide if a rich wetlands is more important than a housing project for local families. They could be asked if a proposed rural subdivision will provide a net gain to local tax coffers. They're supposed to know if heavy metals left on an old industrial site will contaminate the wells of nearby homes.

An increasing number of decisions demand a breadth of technical expertise that only a genius could hope to possess. Local leaders seldom have the knowledge required to answer many technical questions or the money to hire adequate technical advice. The normal response is to avoid the decision, deny the problem, or blame someone else (the government is at the top of the current blame list). Of one thing local leaders can be certain: whatever they do, someone will blame them.

### **Decisions are Coming Faster**

Rapid expansion of a community increases the rate at which difficult decisions confront it. Local officials feel increasingly like the ball in a pinball machine careening out of control from one tough choice to the next. Planning-commission agendas are backed up six months or more. Almost as soon as one tough decision is made, it's negated by some thing unanticipated. Even communities that aren't expanding are profoundly influenced by the fast-changing world around them. The normal response: avoid, deny, and blame.

### **Participation is Down**

Nationwide, participation in traditional community organizations is declining measurably.

Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam notes that membership in such old standbys as churches and bowling leagues has declined 25 percent in the past 25 years. Regardless of age, income, or race, we're not working together and talking with one another the way we used to. After church or while our teammates were bowling, we used to talk about the school bond issue or the city council's current quandary. Through these informal contacts we informed ourselves, formulated decisions, and came up with solutions to community problems. Despite a recent upsurge in new kinds of community-building efforts, too many of us, tired from working too many hours, tend to stay home and watch TV instead of communicating with our fellow citizens.

### **Partisanship is Up**

During the same quarter-century there has been a marked increase in partisanship, factionalism, and special-interest rhetoric. Where once people wrangled over tough issues, then walked outside still good friends, now they leave angry and deeply divided. In many cases, single-issue groups are a reasonable reaction to poor treatment; people get fed up after years of being shut out of decision-making, and it should come as no surprise if they react tactlessly or show up with lawyers and demand that their position prevail. But when combined with the above trends, the result can be deep discord. Increasingly, community politics is "us" versus "them"—and if you're not with us, you must be one of them. Factionalism leads naturally to alienation, adding frustration and anger to the mix.

### ***Community Decisions—Top Down or Bottom Up?***

Faced with these challenges, community leaders attempt to make constructive decisions. Whether they're business people, religious leaders, elected officials, community organizers, labor leaders, human-service workers, or active citizens, they work long and hard to find solutions to community problems. But to their surprise and frustration, when they try to implement their solutions in a highly charged atmosphere, sparks fly. They run smack into resentment and resistance from the rest of the community—citizens who didn't have the opportunity, or didn't take the time, to participate in the long process of finding the solution.

Many frustrated leaders, sincere in the belief that they're acting in the public interest, react to criticism with anger. They may throw up their hands in despair or try to ram their ideas through to completion. But such top-down decision-making is likely to lead to failure or lingering resentment from the rest of the community, making the next problem even more difficult to solve. Token efforts to involve the public, which only amount to informing citizens after decisions have already made, don't work either. Citizens still feel left out; they feel no ownership in the decision.

However, in a small but increasing number of communities, the "movers and shakers" are working toward local decisions from the bottom up. Beginning in the early stages of an effort to solve a particular problem, this new breed of leaders involves citizens from all walks of life. As a result, citizens contribute constructive ideas and understand and support the eventual solution. Trust is born and nurtured.

When widely divergent interests, ages, temperaments, and histories are represented from the beginning, citizens become better informed about community issues. Participants have a chance to understand one another's concerns and appreciate the complexities of real-life community decision-making. They learn that solutions to community problems can't be found on bumper stickers.

The practical problem with this bottom-up approach is that it takes time. Most community leaders attend too many meetings already and can't bear the thought of more. But many leaders have found that the brawl that results from avoiding genuine public involvement takes even more time than a few meetings

that might lead to consensus. They're looking for methods to fully involve the community without the rancor often found at public hearings.

For collaboration to be effective, the people leading it must be genuinely committed to a bottom-up approach. They probably have their own ideas about what path the community should take or what kinds of initiative projects the community should pursue. But if they attempt to impose their notions on decision making, disaster is likely to result, no matter how well-meaning they are. Other participants will understand what's going on and will either drop out or disrupt the process. To generate projects that will work best, leaders must be willing to allow the process to lead to results supported by consensus of participants, even if those results are different from their own. (Consensus doesn't mean unanimous agreement—it means a decision that just about everyone can live with.)

### ***Collaboration Versus Cooperation***

Though local politics may never be a dream, it need not be a nightmare. An effective way to move toward constructive local politics is through collaborative problem-solving. "Wait a minute," you might say, "isn't that what Zorchton's Downtown Business Association tried to do?" Well, yes and no. The DBA president was headed in the right direction, but didn't go far enough. In effect, she asked for cooperation, not collaboration. Cooperation is working together to implement an idea that's already formulated. Collaboration starts much earlier: it's working together to create the idea in the first place. When people have a hand in creating an idea, they're far more likely to support it, or at least be willing to live with it. *Collaboration is people with different points of view and different skills working together to achieve mutual success.*

When one trusted friend seeks cooperation by asking another, "I've got this great idea, why don't you help me put it into action," the second friend will probably help. But if the same words are said by the leader of one group to a competing group's leader, the question may sound more like, "Why don't you come help us look good and get our goals accomplished." Though that's not what the Zorchton DBA meant, it's what ZEDA members, in their mistrust of the DBA, may have heard. It's no wonder they didn't show up for the meeting.

Collaboration is an easier, more reliable path to consensus. When community politics becomes more collaborative, it becomes more constructive, less messy, and more comfortable.

It's important to remember that collaboration is not an attempt to get others to do what you want. Rather, it offers a powerful means for citizens to get what they want by working with others. It's carefully designed to hear and respond to the needs of all participants.

### ***Putting Collaboration to Work***

Collaboration is a challenging art. It often means talking seriously with people you don't know, agree with, or even like. It means dealing with people you may fear or those you think have power over you. To make your collaborative efforts more successful (not to mention more fun and less stressful), review the following principles. They're guaranteed to help.

- Hear their concerns and ideas before telling them yours - In important discussions, many of us tend to blurt out our own ideas. But you're far more likely to be heard if you first listen to the ideas of others. Once they've said their piece, their minds are clear to hear your ideas.
- Understand their interests before describing yours - Look for the interests, fears, and values that underlie the things they're saying. Repeat what you think you're hearing. Ask if your understanding is correct.
- Describe your interests instead of defending your position - Most of us have a good idea of how our interests can be fulfilled. That's our "position." If, instead, we talk about what we want—our problems, needs, and interests—before seeking solutions, the discussion may lead to alternative ways of fulfilling those interests.

- Join them before asking them to join you - Look for ways in which their interests are consistent with yours. Then work with them to focus on how you can both get what you want.
- Set aside differences and disagreements to solve mutual problems - If you're talking with people with whom you've disagreed in the past, don't ignore those differences. Instead, clear the air by acknowledging them. Agree to disagree respectfully on certain points, but keep in mind that what's most important is that you're part of the same community and you're eager to collaborate on this particular effort, regardless of past differences.
- Employ active listening - Acknowledging, empathizing, and clarifying: these are the most valuable skills that can be brought to any important communication.

### ***Employ Active Listening***

This may be the most potent and important suggestion. Active listening is the basis for all effective communication. When people understand that you're listening to them, they'll listen to you and others; they'll want to work with you and the group.

Active listening is based on three skills: acknowledging, empathizing, and clarifying. These skills are easy enough to understand; in fact, you probably already have them. But to use them, you must practice.

As you work with your group, look for the positive. Then, during discussion, acknowledge people for making perceptive comments, going out on a limb, showing a willingness to volunteer or to work with an adversary—whatever positive you find. There's no need patronize; just make sure people are clearly acknowledged for what they've said or done.

Don't, however, gloss over difficulties. Rather, when people indicate they're having a problem, empathize by letting them know that you understand what they're going through. You might note similar difficulties that you've had.

Empathy isn't sympathy. For instance, "I get the feeling that you're angry" is an empathetic statement. It acknowledges important feelings, it confirms that what is being said is being heard. In contrast, "He shouldn't have done that to you" is sympathetic. It supports negative feelings and judges who is wrong or right—an inappropriate position for a facilitator.

When people talk about issues that are important to them, their statements can become a bit jumbled. One excellent way to help them find their way through the tangle is to clarify—say what you think you heard them say. Carefully reframe, rather than interpret, their statements. That is, don't color the clarification with your values, needs, perceptions, and assumptions (even if you think you're right). Another way to clarify is to summarize. For instance, when several points are made over the course of a long statement, you can help by summarizing the points and checking with the speaker or speakers that your summary is correct.

You'll find that some people repeat their points, sometimes endlessly. Usually, they repeat themselves because they think no one has heard them. As facilitator, you can eliminate most repetition by summarizing and clarifying. If they hear you say it, they'll feel less need to repeat it.

These active listening techniques are important to any communication. They may seem obvious, but they're easier said than done. Many of us tend to talk and not listen. Practice acknowledging, empathizing, and clarifying with your friends and family. You'll be amazed at the results you get.

## ***Excerpt from a Speech by Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber***

— September 7, 2001

Let us remember that the word “politics” derives from the Greek word “polis,” meaning “city” -- or in more modern terms, “community.” That is to say, a group of individuals functioning together as a whole for their mutual benefit. In its original sense, then, “politics” referred to those activities necessary to sustain a community -- composed of individuals whose views and needs would not invariably coincide.

Our political system - or perhaps more accurately, our system of governance - grew out of the recognition that there had to be some way to regulate the ways in which people interact, precisely because their views, needs and interests would not always coincide.

And of course this implies that individuals have an equally important duty: they have to recognize that their own personal welfare is inseparable from the welfare of the community as a whole, and they must be willing to act accordingly, even if it means subordinating some of their own personal desires for the larger good.

The way in which this “larger good” was arrived at was a central point of contention during the drafting of the United States Constitution.

The first view was represented by Thomas Jefferson, who espoused what has been called the “politics of engagement,” a model in which people work together in a spirit of cooperation to find common ground and solve mutual problems. The Jeffersonian model rests on the conviction that people are essentially reasonable, and will work to achieve the common good if they can agree on or be brought to understand what it is.

The second view was set forth in a set of documents known as the Federalist Papers, whose chief authors were James Madison, John Jay and Alexander Hamilton. In contrast to the Jeffersonian model, it embodies a “politics of disengagement,” wherein social stability is achieved not by cooperation among individuals, but by a careful balancing of private interests, one against the other. This model assumes that individual interests will inevitably clash, and that the role of government is to minimize or control these conflicts in a way that produces the common good. But the common good in this case is not the result of cooperation among individuals seeking common ground. Rather, it is the result of external, top-down management.

It was this second view that more or less prevailed as our nation developed. Certainly it is what Americans today have come to expect from their government, and what they now most resent about it. But more importantly this model does not resolve conflict. Indeed it often tends to encourage conflict. By no means does it foster a spirit of community or a sense of responsibility beyond narrow self interest.

People feel no obligation to learn about the needs of their community. Rather, they rely on government (or the courts) to manage conflict between individuals. Yet this “third-party” management invariably produces “winners” and “losers,” thus removing any incentive for individuals to cooperate.

What I’m suggesting is that there is a gap in our system of governance -- a gap that has everything to do with our ability to create a sustainable future.

The primary tools of government are laws, regulations and the allocation of resources. And with these tools government does many things very well. It provides infrastructure that fosters private sector investment and economic activity - everything from railroads to highways to water and sewer systems to telecommunications.

Government operates primarily through law and regulation. It enforces laws and incarcerates those who break them. It provides for the national defense, establishes health and safety regulations and maintains a system of public education.

What government does not do very well, however, is to bring people together to solve problems - especially when the problems are complex and the solutions require the participation of many people.

Watershed health is a case in point. In the past, the main threat to water quality has been point source pollution -- a problem that lent itself to government regulation. Today, however, the challenge is non-point source pollution -- runoff not only from agriculture and timberlands, but also from rooftops, driveways and yards in urban and suburban Oregon.

Reducing nonpoint-source pollution requires far more than simply passing laws and regulations. It requires a sustained environmental stewardship -- a long term commitment to change behavior -- by hundreds of thousands of people living in the watershed -- most of them living in the city. To accomplish this there must be a place to bring people together, to somehow see their common interest in assuming greater individual responsibility for water quality.

Likewise, to prevent development pressure and population growth from degrading our quality of life, there must be a place for state and local agencies, community leaders and business leaders to come together to ensure that investment are balanced and coordinated to produce livable communities.

Our ability to create such a place—or places—will largely determine our success in building a sustainable future.