Futures Festivals: An Intergenerational Strategy for Promoting Community Participation

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SUMMARY. This paper describes a special events strategy for mobilizing community residents of all ages to take part in a community visioning process. Through locally initiated special events—called “Futures Festivals”—community residents come together to share their concerns and hopes for their community. Planning for these events is driven by a
collaborative process involving representatives of local community organizations and agencies. The rationale for this intergenerational model is twofold; people of different age groups often have limited opportunities to communicate with one another, and the viewpoints of youth and seniors are frequently overlooked in the community planning process. This paper profiles two Futures Festival events and other preliminary organizing taking place in western Pennsylvania communities during the summer of 2002. Findings suggest that Futures Festivals can be effective tools for broadening the circle of community residents and other stakeholders engaged in critical dialogue about community issues.

KEYWORDS. Community participation, Futures Festival, intergenerational, visioning

INTERGENERATIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Intergenerational Programming–Roots and Rationale

Over the past 25 years, there has been rapid growth in the number and diversity of intergenerational programs across the country. As defined by the International Consortium for Intergenerational Programs, these are “social vehicles that create purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning among older and younger generations.” They are found in a variety of community settings, including schools, community organizations, retirement communities, hospitals, and places of worship. The focus is usually on establishing connections between people who are 21 and under and people who are 60 and over, with the intention of benefiting one or both age groups. Intergenerational programs represent a set of practical, effective strategies for enriching the lives of young people and older adults, promoting family cohesion, and strengthening community support systems (Henkin and Kingson, 1998/99; Stearns, 1989).

At the root of this program activity is a conceptual framework that attributes societal significance to intergenerational programs and prac-
For example, we are in the midst of what has been termed a “longevity revolution,” a dramatic increase in the size of the older adult population. From an “intergenerational perspective,” the aging society phenomena is seen as presenting an “opportunity to be seized” (Freedman, 1999); intergenerational programs serve as vehicles for mobilizing the talents, skills, energy and resources of older adults (as well as young people) in service to people of other generations (Henkin and Kingson, 1998/99).

Intergenerational programs are also often justified on the basis of providing an effective countermeasure to patterns of residential and social segregation of age groups (Newman et al., 1997; Stearns, 1989). Various negative consequences have been associated with the trend toward increased intergenerational segregation, including a decline in senior adults’ life satisfaction, an increase in negative stereotypes toward the aged and aging among younger people, and a reduction in the extent and quality of the social networks of children and senior adults (Crites, 1989; Henkin and Kingson, 1998/99; Kalish, 1969; Newman et al., 1997).

In the intergenerational programming literature, the rationale used to justify intergenerational programs has traditionally generally been derived from human development theory. This theoretical approach suggests that children, teens and young adults need nurturers, positive role models, a sense of identity, a secure value system, recognition of their worth and a sense of their place in history. Likewise, adult development theory suggests that older adults need to nurture, a sense of purpose, and recognition of their worth. Certainly, intergenerational programs do fulfill many needs for both groups, yet the significance of intergenerational programming goes beyond impact on the participants. Largely ignored in the intergenerational literature are the community development aspects to these programs.

**INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMMING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

When conceptualizing the intersection between intergenerational programming and community development, it is helpful to employ an “empowerment” theoretical framework. Rappaport (1984) defines empowerment as “a process: the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives” (p. 3). In the context of intergenerational programs, empowerment means that participants take...
an active, directive role in program development and implementation. Throughout the process, participants gain knowledge about key community issues and the underlying organizational and political dynamics that affect their quality of life. Participants also develop leadership and other skills to enact desired change—change within themselves, change in their organizations, and change in their communities. For intergenerational initiatives with community improvement goals, an empowerment framework might mean that participants are at the helm in terms of choosing issues on which to focus, defining community change objectives, and deciding upon organizing tools and tactics.

When older and younger members of a community are brought together to explore local issues and work together to improve local conditions, there are community quality of life as well as human development implications. In this context, some intergenerational programs are designed to help participating youth and older adults learn about each other's community concerns and this, in turn, provides a focal point for stimulating intergenerational collaboration and joint involvement in community affairs (Kaplan, 1997).

Here are some examples of intergenerational programs intentionally designed to promote community study and improvement:

- “Hidden Treasure: Our Heritage–New Horizons”—developed at the Oklahoma State University in 1981: The emphasis is on studying and preserving local history (Generations United, 1994).
- “Youth and Elderly Against Crime” program—established by Dade County Public Schools (Florida): Senior adults and older school-aged children work together to develop antiviolence bills which they present to state legislators and for which they seek political support (Friedman, 1999).
- Neighborhoods-2000—developed at the Center for Human Environments (City University of New York) in 1988: Fifth and sixth grade students and senior volunteers work together on a series of community exploration activities such as the neighborhood “walk about-talkabout” activity and landuse mapping (Kaplan, 1994).

Benefits afforded to participants of such intergenerational programs include:

- an enhanced understanding of societal problems,
- a greater sense of “belonging” to the community,
- a better sense of local history and how this history contributes to residents’ current feelings about community pride and identity, and
• more of a sense that others value their views and (potential) contributions to the community.

Interest in intergenerational approaches to community development also emerges from the community development side of the equation. Community development projects have traditionally focused on a particular locality with an emphasis on creating or increasing the “capacity” of the local community to plan and act upon a basic change strategy (Hyman, McKnight, and Higdon, 2001). Key to this process of building community capacity is the creation of communication channels between citizens and local leaders in the public, private and non-profit sectors. All too often, community development projects are organized, planned and implemented by professionals or working age volunteers with an interest in a particular local issue. When the number and diversity of participants is broadened to include people across the age continuum, the planning groups’ perspectives and ideas for viable alternative visions of a particular community development project or neighborhood plan are also likely to be broadened.

If we consider the complexity and depth of many community problems, it does not make sense to exclude any age groups when trying to figure out solutions. Why remove the time, talent, and experience of any age group when seeking to address society’s most pressing needs? Also, why deny anyone the opportunity to contribute to the civic vitality of their communities? An intergenerational perspective could readily be brought to bear on problems traditionally seen as being related only to youth (e.g., “youth vandalism”) or older adults (e.g., the loneliness experienced by many homebound seniors). In a broader, intergenerational context, by looking at the full range of recreational opportunities available to all residents, and examining what this means for building community relationships and support systems, it would likely be considered everyone’s business if it is found that there are not enough positive recreational outlets for any one age group.

An intergenerational approach to community development is characterized by intensive dialogue about how people of all ages experience the local community. As conversants articulate their personal narratives of local history and experience, they learn of collective histories and shared concerns about the quality of life in their communities. Such realization helps to transcend interpersonal barriers, whether they are erected on the basis of age, cultural identity, or some other characteristic.
FUTURES FESTIVALS IN WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

The remainder of this paper will highlight and provide mini-case studies of a unique intergenerational community visioning model called “Futures Festivals.” This approach was developed by the Center for Human Environments at the City University of New York Graduate Center, and piloted in Long Island City (New York) and Mount Vernon (New York) in the late 1980s, as a means for bringing community residents of all ages together to share their views and visions for their communities. Through murals, models, photographs, theatrical displays, and other communications media, community residents and public officials share their ideas about community development. Festival participants get the chance to answer (and learn how others answer) the all-important question: “What would you like to see in the future of your community?”

In the fall of 2001, a group of interested Penn State University faculty, Penn State Cooperative Extension staff, and community leaders agreed that the Futures Festival model, as described in an Extension community development publication (Kaplan, 2001), would be a useful tool for promoting an age-inclusive community participation process in two communities in the southwestern section of Pennsylvania, one an urban community in the south end of Pittsburgh and the other a rural community in Fayette County. These areas were chosen, in part, due to the availability of local Extension educators with community development skills and staff support offered by the newly created University Center for Community Engagement and Partnerships at the Penn State McKeesport Campus, located south of Pittsburgh (UCCEP).

Before describing and discussing these events, we provide some generic information about Futures Festival methodology and lay out several points about the community-building significance of this approach.

What Is a Futures Festival?

There are various ways to conduct a Futures Festival. They can be organized as separate events or incorporated into other events (such as annual fairs) for which strong local traditions already exist. In either case, it takes a team effort to conduct a successful Futures Festival event. At the core of the team, there is usually an official event coordinator and a home base for operations. The event planning process generally takes place over a two- to four-month period of time and involves the basic steps outlined below.
Step #1: Organize an event coordination team

Members of the event coordination team are responsible for: recruiting participants, exhibitors, and presenters; publicizing the event to the media; and coordinating, facilitating, and evaluating activities on the day of the event. Team members might include human service professionals working with children, youth and older adults; planning professionals working at the community, county, and municipal levels; and volunteers with skills in environmental design and development, community history, photography, public affairs.

Step #2: Determine event location and date

One of the first tasks is to determine event location and date. Futures Festival events are typically conducted in public parks or large indoor facilities.

Step #3: Recruit exhibitors/presenters and generate community interest and excitement

The planning process requires time to pull together local groups and incorporate stakeholder interests. Strategies for publicizing event-planning meetings and the event itself include putting up postings on local bulletin boards, writing articles for community organization newsletters, conducting presentations at meetings of various school and community organizations, and drawing upon personal social networks to reach key local educators, community organization administrators, and other professionals with community ties. Here are some examples of event activities and exhibits:

a. Mural painting or model building of the “ideal neighborhood”: Intergenerational groups of community residents work together to create murals or build models that depict their desires for the future of their neighborhood.

b. Theatrical displays: Local groups and organizations develop short skits to dramatize quality-of-life concerns, highlight ideas for new community resources, arouse feelings about places of sentimental value, and promote a sense of civic awareness and responsibility.

c. Photography exhibits: Photos (old and new) and drawings of favorite landmarks and other locations of sentimental value are displayed.
d. **Display plans for new facilities:** County, regional, and municipal planning officials display sketches and models of planned facilities and request feedback on these plans.

The Futures Festival does not end with the event. Organizers are encouraged to take actions after the event to keep residents interested and involved. One simple post-event strategy involves writing a press release to highlight the community concerns expressed at the Futures Festival. This media coverage typically conveys the “human interest” angle that is a vital yet often ignored part of community development. Ideally, members of the event planning group will continue to meet to plan additional events and programs through which local youth and seniors can continue to share and work collaboratively to enact their community visions. For more information on how Futures Festival events are organized, see Kaplan (2001).

In terms of the community-building significance of Futures Festivals, event organizers have the opportunity to generate an alternative planning vision within the community and, by skillful follow-up activities, can use the enthusiasm and knowledge generated by the event to influence the planning agenda of more dominant economic and political institutions in the community. This process can be viewed broadly as a grassroots, participatory development technique (Prokopy and Castelloe, 1999) and more specifically as a form of “popular education” in which young and older residents are engaged by a facilitator in a grassroots search for community-specific knowledge and social change (Castelloe and Watson, 1999).

The role of the community development practitioner in this process is to allow seniors and youth to engage in an open dialogue of mutual understanding and learning. In this way, the Futures Festival participants are able to become “actors” in a democratic planning process as opposed to being acted upon or directed by established political and economic institutions. This process can also be seen as a form of “action research” where local groups learn to understand their personal experience in the context of reflective learning about broader trends and changing realities (Lewin, 1948). Participation in a Futures Festival event encourages residents of all ages to reflect on their current situation and to consider modes of direct action to change that reality. From this perspective, community visioning can facilitate a process of “creative empowerment” in a multigenerational project setting.
Futures Festivals provide a venue for articulating indigenous expressions of community concern and vision. The method is flexible and can be implemented in a wide range of community and cultural contexts.

**The Fayette County Futures Festival (Fayette County, PA)**

**Background**

Fayette County is a distressed Appalachian area that began to suffer economic and population losses in the 1940s from which it has not fully recovered. Although the population is mostly rural and homogenous (more than 95% of residents are Caucasian), the social welfare statistics most closely resemble Philadelphia County with high rates of infant mortality, teen pregnancy, disability and health problems, and crime and delinquency. Education levels are low and much of the available employment is concentrated in low-paying, service sector jobs. About 18% of Fayette County residents live in poverty, with more than one quarter of families with small children living in poverty. In addition, Fayette County has a rapidly aging population; more than 18% of the residents are over the age of 65 and the median age is 40 years. In the face of its economic troubles, however, Fayette County refused to lie down. In the past ten years, concerted actions with community support have resulted in greater educational achievement, increased employment opportunities, and rising income levels. Planning and investment in the health care sector have resulted in greater prenatal care, lower rates of disease, and increased health opportunities. Furthermore, areas of the county have been designated a Federal Enterprise Community, and public and private investments are leading to increased opportunities for education, work, and community development.

**Process**

The Fayette County Futures Festival was planned by representatives of five agencies over a 31/2 week period of time. The Penn State Cooperative Extension Community Development Educator in Fayette County initiated the event planning process by pulling together a small planning group which included directors of three key local development organizations, the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Uniontown, Uniontown Downtown Business District Authority, and Fayette Enterprise Community/Fayette Forward. The planning team decided to hold the Futures Festival event as part of the Fayette County Family Fun Fest.
An entire tent was devoted to the Futures Festival which consisted of the following three activities:

- **“Test Your Knowledge” Quiz Show**: Participants were given a series of questions about Fayette County’s resources and rich heritage.
- **“Where Is This Place?”**: Participants were asked to identify the name and location of the sites pictured in over 40 photos. The person who identified the most pictures correctly won a basket of exotic foods.
- **“Design the Ideal Community” Mural Painting**: Working in small groups, participants were asked to paint their images of the “ideal” community on 24” × 36” canvas boards.

**Outcomes**

The Fayette County Futures Festival drew approximately 300 people, with a majority of the participants attending as families. According to comments made by the participants at the event, many became more aware of the community’s rich natural and cultural resources. Those who took part in the “Where Is This Place?” activity made comments such as: “That’s so beautiful,” “That’s really in Fayette County?” and “Where are these places? Are they all in Fayette County?”

During the debriefing meeting after the event, members of the event planning group assigned significance to such statements; they indicate how little many local residents know about their community. At this meeting, for example, an entire discussion took place focused on how few people could answer the question, “Who wrote the Marshall Plan?” General George C. Marshall, a native of Uniontown (in Fayette County), is memorialized by a Marshall statue, a Marshall Park, and a Marshall highway; George Marshall even won the Nobel Peace prize.

Planning team members also gained some insight as to how to promote more awareness of the area’s rich history and heritage. According to the coordinator of the “Where Is This Place?” exhibit, the images that drew the most attention were those that provided hints of activities that participants can engage in such as rafting. This suggests that in developing a campaign designed to enhance appreciation of the various significant sites of Fayette County, it might help to emphasize the activities that can be done at these sites.

The objective of stimulating intergenerational dialogue about the community was only partially realized. The “Where Is This Place?” ac-
tivity yielded a fair amount of intensive discussion between family members of different age groups, particularly when one family member—usually the oldest—was able to identify and say a few words about the sites pictured in the photos (Figure 1).

Efforts to encourage participants of various age groups to share their hopes and visions for the future of their communities were less successful, however. The mural painting activity, which was intended to be an intergenerational activity, ended up being a youth activity. Consistent with most activities traditionally conducted at the Fayette County Family Fun Fest event, children and youth did the activity, in this case mural painting, with the parents and grandparents standing behind and watching. Furthermore, the visioning component of the event did not emerge as planned; of the nine murals painted at the event, only one had any elements of something new (i.e., a tree house). Again, this might be a function of the overall event, which was focused on fun activities rather than community reflection.

Reflections

There were some negative as well as positive aspects associated with linking the Fayette County Futures Festival to the Fayette County Fam-
ily Fun Fest event. On the positive side, this made it easy to work out basic logistics such as location, timing, and food, thus making it possible to conduct the Futures Festival event with very little advance preparation (3 1/2 weeks instead of 2-4 months). Yet, there was also a drawback; the people who traditionally come to the Family Fun Fest event tend to expect fun activities for the children, rather than to engage in dialogue and reflection about community places and issues. To address this problem in future years, the Futures Festival planning team plans to work more closely with Family Fun Fest organizers to ensure that the public is informed about the goals and objectives of the Futures Festival. Planning team members also discussed starting the planning process earlier next year, thus allowing more organizations to be brought in as part of the event-planning team. This also provides time to correct an unintentional omission in the planning process noted above, i.e., the lack of involvement of youth and older adults in the event planning meetings.

Also, as noted in Table 1, and the ensuing discussion comparing this event’s mural painting activity to the one organized as part of the Lincoln Place event, a lengthened planning process has implications for generating more intergenerational dialogue and more reflection about future development possibilities.

To reflect further on the limited attention that event participants paid to community development possibilities, it is relevant to note that there is very little mobility in Fayette County. Almost 92% of Fayette County residents in 2000 lived in Fayette County in 1995, and most of these individuals are native-born Americans (99.4%), born in Pennsylvania (87.5%). This lack of mobility combined with the isolation of an insular community leads not only to strong community ties but also to limited visions of development possibilities.

**The Lincoln Place Community Pride Festival (Pittsburgh, PA)**

*Background*

Lincoln Place is located on the southeastern tip of the City of Pittsburgh. This quiet residential neighborhood, one of four city communities tucked into the wooded hillsides that make up the 31st Ward, has a population of approximately 3,800 people. It features several churches, a community park, an elementary school, a child care center, a couple of convenience stores, and a dance studio. Lincoln Place residents often refer to their community as the “forgotten” neighborhood. There are people living in Pittsburgh who have never heard of Lincoln Place, and
Lincoln Place residents have the perception that they are often overlooked when authorities make decisions about which neighborhoods will receive city services. Yet, the suburban atmosphere makes it a desirable and affordable place to live for city-employed teachers, firefighters and policeman who must reside within the city limits as well as other middle income persons working in construction, production, management-related, and service professions. One challenge facing this community is figuring out how to make it an active, viable community for the residents who span three generations. Many of the older, long-time residents (19.5% of the residents are 65 and over) articulate a strong sense of community identity and pride, but have concerns that such sentiments do not extend to newer residents. Part of the problem is that there are no organizations or organizing efforts that serve to build a sense of inclusiveness on the part of newer residents in the community.

Process

Staff members from Penn State Cooperative Extension and Penn State McKeesport-UCCEP worked with members of a local church congregation to organize this Futures Festival event. Whereas the church members initially saw themselves as holding the festival “for the community” and did not seem to fully recognize the importance of including other groups in the planning of the festival, a common goal was soon established for broadening the base of local participants in the organizing committee. Over the course of a three-month planning process, the planning committee grew to over 25 community residents, project team members and local sponsors.

The planning group decided to name the event the “Lincoln Place Community Pride Festival.” There were two reasons for this. First, it was felt that the critical issue facing the neighborhood was the need to build a greater sense of local pride in the area. Second, there was concern that people would not respond well to the concept of a “futures festival.” One person on the planning committee stated, “We can’t call it ‘futures festival.’ It’s too abstract. People won’t know what it means.” Though the ultimate goal was still to initiate a visioning process, it was decided to focus on the past and the present in order to first “get people on the same page,” a starting point for launching a visioning process.

The Festival was held in two adjacent spaces; one was a big community room in the Lincoln Place Presbyterian Church and the other space was the public parking lot behind the church. Activities/exhibits included the following:
• **Lincoln Place History:** A subcommittee of local residents, informally called the local “historians,” put together a display of vintage photos, maps, and news stories.

• **Now and Then:** This display consisted of the juxtaposition of historical and current photographs of six sites in the community.

• **Dancing–Then and Now:** Children and young and older adults taking dance classes at Mary Ann’s Dance Studio jointly performed a series of dances from different eras.

• **Design the Ideal Community Mural Painting:** Using water-based paint and brushes, older and younger participants worked side by side to create three large murals (4’ × 6’) which portrayed collective visions of the community.

• **Time Travel:** This small exhibit included various items from 30+ years ago—e.g., a first generation television set, old dolls, toys, and books.

• **Tour of the Indian Cemetery:** A series of tours were conducted of this site which is a centerpiece of a fair amount of local folklore.

• **Tree Planting Ceremony:** A crab apple tree, donated by Penn State Cooperative Extension and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Community Tree Association, was planted on the grounds of the nearby elementary school as a symbol of community unity.

**Outcomes**

The Lincoln Place Community Pride Festival was attended by approximately 300 residents. Most participants arrived in “extended family” clusters of parents, toddlers and children, and grandparents, though there was an assembly of older adults arriving in pairs and in small groups. The most significant intergenerational contact occurred during the painting of the “Design the Ideal Community” murals. Muralists of ages 3-80 worked together on constructing three large murals. The most popular items, resounding with muralists of all age groups, were a diner, a multi-program recreation center, and a camp site/nature preserve. All three of these elements have in common the characteristic that they provide safe, comfortable places where people can congregate with their friends. Several of the suggestions for community facilities were age specific. For example, a couple of teenage boys championed the cause of inserting a WWW Federation (wrestling) facility. The murals were kept intact and have been displayed at the City-County Building in downtown Pittsburgh (Figure 2).
Several activities at the Lincoln Place event were viewed as being part of the exclusive domains of younger or older participants. For example, the older participants tended to gravitate toward the display of photos depicting the community in the past. These images provoked a great deal of discussion and reminiscence among these older adults. In fact, one observer noted that the lively interaction between the seniors reminded him of seeing a group of children trading baseball cards. Although the younger participants at first did not appear interested in the historical photo display, they did ultimately exhibit a keen interest, particularly after a neighborhood history trivia game was initiated in which prizes were awarded to youth who could answer questions about the photos. This turnaround in interest level suggests the importance of careful activity planning.

At the post-event debriefing meeting, Festival organizers judged the event a “success” in terms of bringing an unprecedented number of people and organizations together for an afternoon of enjoyment, celebration of the past and creative visioning of the future. Of particular note was how the event and the event planning process encouraged local community organizations to be more collaborative and community-fo-
cused in their operations. For example, administrators of the Holmstead & Mifflin Township Historical Society noted that they will make a greater effort to participate in community events, particularly those at which they are likely to meet community residents who are great sources of historical information and photographs.

Reflections

One of the main limitations of this event was the way it was laid out physically. The historical photo displays and food for sale were located inside the Lincoln Place Presbyterian Church community room. The other exhibits and activities took place outdoors, in the parking lot behind the church. As noted above, the photos drew an extensive amount of interest on the part of local senior adults, some of whom stayed indoors for most of the event and missed the mural painting, the dancing display, and other activities taking place outdoors. With more careful planning, exhibits and activities could be arranged in a manner which facilitates a greater level of intergenerational interaction.

Comparing Futures Festival Events

Though both Futures Festival events drew approximately 300 people, there were fundamental differences, primarily in terms of length of the pre-event organizing period, the number of organizations involved in the planning teams, how the events were organized (e.g., whether part of a larger event or as a stand-alone event), and in the activities and exhibits chosen by event organizers to highlight local residents’ concerns. Yet, as one similarity between both events, they both included a “Design the Ideal Neighborhood” mural-painting activity.

Table 1 illustrates some of the process and outcome differences in the mural activities enacted in both events. Compared to the mural painting activity at the Lincoln Place event, the one at the Fayette County event yielded more completed murals (9 versus 3), murals with fewer innovative ideas about community development (there were 0-1 versus 4-8 items per mural representing ideas for new community elements), and more limited plans for using the murals after the event. (The Lincoln Place murals were kept intact and displayed at the City-County Building in downtown Pittsburgh, whereas no such plans were made for the Fayette murals.) There was also a fundamental difference in the age composition of the muralists; in Fayette county the participating mural-
ists consisted predominantly of children and youth, whereas the Lincoln Place muralist groups included adults as well as children and youth.

Several of these differences in mural outcomes can be attributed to differences in the planning process which took place for both events. The 11-week planning period for the Lincoln Place event provided time for event organizers to enlarge the event planning group (and this made it possible to enlist several facilitators to stimulate discussion between muralists), engage in detailed review of the underlying intent and operating procedure for each of the planned activities (this helped ensure that event organizers had a common understanding about the event emphasis on promoting intergenerational communication where possible), and to begin discussions about what would take place after the event (e.g., arranging for post-event display of the murals).

In contrast, the 3 1/2-week planning period for the Fayette County event did not provide event organizers with ample opportunity to fully discuss each activity and explore ways to facilitate multigenerational participation and intergenerational communication. The truncated planning process necessitated an emphasis on making quick, efficient decisions rather than on expanding the planning group to include more stakeholders in the planning process. After contrasting both event planning processes, results suggest that the time spent on preliminary orga-

TABLE 1. Comparisons Between Futures Festival Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Event</th>
<th>Fayette County Futures Festival</th>
<th>Lincoln Place Community Festival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some basic characteristics of the event</td>
<td>– About 300 participants</td>
<td>– About 300 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– F.F. organized as part of another event</td>
<td>– F.F. organized as a stand-alone event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Planning process: 3 1/2 weeks</td>
<td>– Planning process: 11 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Planning team: 4 orgs.</td>
<td>– Planning team: 8-10 orgs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of mural-painting activity</td>
<td>“Design the Ideal Community”</td>
<td>“Design the Ideal Community”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of murals developed</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. # of participants for each mural</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of new (futures-oriented) items</td>
<td>0-1 per mural</td>
<td>4-8 per mural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of i.g. communication (Mural-painting)</td>
<td>Little (mostly children and youth)</td>
<td>Some (mixed-age groups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans for future use of the murals</td>
<td>As “art”</td>
<td>A “statement” of community desires (and “art”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
nizing pays dividends in terms of being able to reach out to a broader spectrum of the community and obtain input in organizing activities and framing issues on which to focus at a Futures Festival event.

In the section below, we describe a community needs assessment strategy called “stakeholder analysis” which can be a very valuable tool for systematically broadening the segments of the community that are brought into preliminary planning process for Futures Festival events. It is also an effective strategy for identifying issues of local concern.

“STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS” AS A PRELUDE TO ORGANIZING FUTURES FESTIVALS

Background

While the Futures Festival events noted above were being planned, staff from UCCEP (Penn State-McKeesport Campus), CEDEV (Penn State-University Park) and Penn State Cooperative Extension were using a “stakeholder analysis” strategy aimed at examining the feasibility of organizing additional Futures Festival events in several areas of the Mon Valley, located south of Pittsburgh along the Monongahela River. Stakeholders are the people, groups and institutions in a community that have a genuine interest in the development of a project or program. A stakeholder analysis identifies the projects’ key stakeholders, assesses their interests and evaluates how their interests affect the project’s chances of acceptance and success (Allen and Kilvington, 2001). As a result of this community assessment process, three of the Mon Valley communities—McKeesport, Duquesne and Braddock—were identified as prime sites to conduct future Futures Festival and other intergenerational community visioning initiatives.

Stakeholder Analysis

The stakeholder analysis process has three main stages: (1) identify major stakeholder groups; (2) determine interests, importance and influence; and (3) establish strategies for involvement. At all stages, the project team attempts to capture a wide range of opinions of the local community.

Identifying Stakeholder Groups

The project team used a key informant approach to identify major stakeholders in the community (youth, elderly groups, ethnic groups,
social service and business groups). Key public and non-profit participants (or informants), identified with the help of UCCEP staff, were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol that allowed them to voice their concerns, hopes and ideas in regard to intergenerational communication. As part of the interview, participants were asked to identify up to five other members of the community who might have an interest in an intergenerational program. This “snowball” sampling technique allowed the project team to quickly build a sample of community contacts and identify an initial set of community stakeholders in the project. A partial listing of stakeholder groups includes public housing residents and management; YWCA, Boys and Girls Club and other youth recreation organizations; Social Service Agencies; school district officials; middle and high school students; business owners; local government officials; and members of the Weed and Seed program (federal youth program). In total, there were 35 informants from the entire three-community area.

**Stakeholder Interests and Concerns**

Below are some of the interest statements coming from our preliminary stakeholder contacts. Each generalized statement is followed by the percentage of contacts mentioning it directly and a listing of the stakeholder groups who identified it.

1. **Younger residents are leaving the area** because of unemployment, crime and lack of youth-oriented activities. (53%; public housing; youth organizations; social services agencies; local officials; retired residents; school district officials)

2. **Violence is an increasing problem among local youth** and the fear of violence is causing divisions between younger and older community residents. (40%; youth organizations; college students; middle and high school students; retired residents)

3. **The community continues to be “close-knit” despite a continued migration of families into and out of the area.** The feeling of being a close-knit community is strongest among older residents. (33%; youth organizations; retired residents; local government officials; school district officials)

4. **Racism is perceived as a major problem in the community.** There are divisions between and within racial groups and this has fueled political conflict, resentment and misunderstanding within neigh-
borhoods. (33%; public housing; social service agencies; youth organizations; retired residents)

5. Drug use is becoming more prevalent among area residents—especially among the youth. (33%; youth organizations; high school students; business owners)

6. Local team sports continues to be an important outlet for youth and a source of local pride. There are concerns about the availability and access to the sports organizations that exist in the community. (13%; public housing residents; high school students)

The image one gets from this sampling of community voices is that of an urban community struggling to retain its youth in the face of persistent racism, rising unemployment, violence, and drug abuse. In spite of these problems, residents still see their community as “close-knit” although changing rapidly as migration continues to change local demographic patterns. While this “snapshot” of local stakeholder interests and concerns is incomplete, it does give us some indication of the problems facing the community and moreover, a more realistic sense of some of the issues that might be addressed through a Futures Festival visioning process. For example:

- Given the positive feelings many residents express about the close ties they have within the community—is it possible to find a common cultural, historical or emotional “link” with which older, younger, long-time and newer residents can identify?
- Considering the negative feelings expressed about racism, violence and drug abuse—is it possible to find a festival location where everyone would feel welcome and safe to attend?
- Since many local contacts realized the community was losing its youth (and future workers, business owners, voters and volunteers)—could one possible theme among festival organizers be the need to create a “youth-friendly” community?
- Given the importance many people place on local sports teams—would it be possible to weave sports (local sports heroes, clinics, contests) into this local festival as a way to build interest among parents and their children?
- Considering the prevalence of youth problems in the area—is there a pool of senior adults that can be drawn upon to listen to the concerns of local youth and to engage them in constructive activities?

These initial observations and “questions” are only suggestive of a number of complex forces interacting within the community. Further-
more, they only represent a starting point—a baseline for understanding how local residents might begin to successfully organize an intergenerational visioning event in their community. The challenge for community organizers is to help facilitate a process that allows generational groups to foster or rediscover feelings of mutual trust and a shared sense of purpose that commonly exist within “healthy” communities.

**EVALUATING FUTURES FESTIVALS**

In terms of evaluating Futures Festival events, a distinction needs to be made between assessing impact on those who attend/participate in the festival itself—a one day experience—and impact on those involved in the festival planning process—a 1-4 month process. To assess the former, one or two members of the event coordination team could readily circulate and conduct brief interviews with participants before they leave. The interview could revolve around one basic question, “What did you learn from your experiences today?” Respondents could be further prompted to describe what they learned about the community, what they learned about the needs and concerns of local residents, and how they feel about their role in the community as a result of this new knowledge.

To assess changes in planning team members’ perspectives, concerns, and visions for the target community, one strategy is to have them fill out a questionnaire, such as the one presented in Appendix 1, at the beginning of the planning process and again at the debriefing meeting after the event. This particular questionnaire is designed to tap into a number of variables, including community development issues of concern, perceptions of the community concerns of other residents, and views about the value of working with age-diverse groups and promoting intergenerational dialogue on issues of common concern. Insofar as members of the event planning team tend to be community leaders (or potential leaders), a significant influence on how they view the community and its residents, and work to improve the community, can have a far-reaching influence on future community planning processes and outcomes.

Also, considering that some communities may want to establish a tradition of conducting annual Futures Festivals events, to help inform the planning and follow-up process each year, it would be useful to keep a careful record of each Features Festival event, noting the date, collaborating agencies, number of participants, number and nature of exhibits.
and activities offered, and the ideas expressed for community development and change during the course of each festival.

**CONCLUSIONS**

There is a paradox inherent in the idea of organizing a community participation “event.” No one community event, in itself, could generate a sustainable amount of public awareness, interest, and participation in community affairs. Hence, the Futures Festival approach, at best, needs to be viewed as a beginning, to be followed by additional efforts aimed at broadening the circle of community residents and other stakeholders, extending the dialogue, and promoting an ongoing sense of civic involvement and responsibility. In part, attention needs to be paid to the question of how to extend and strengthen the planning process. In this context, the needs assessment tool of “stakeholder analysis” is presented as a strategy for ensuring a longer, more in-depth, and more systematically conducted pre-event organizing phase. It represents a promising strategy for broadening the circle of participants, and helping them frame the community development issues on which they will focus.

It is also paradoxical to expect that a singular event can engender intergenerational trust and relationship formation. Intergenerational relationships take time and numerous engagement opportunities to form. Before intimacy can be established, there needs to be a period of communication that allows for safe and surface-level contact (Angelis, 1996; Bressler, In Press). Over time and across numerous meeting opportunities, a sense of rapport is achieved, where participants feel more comfortable with personal disclosure (e.g., of neighborhood fears), and trust each other enough to commit to joint action based on similar concerns. Thus, from an intergenerational relations framework as well as from a community participation perspective, it is important to involve youth and older adults early in the event planning process and to work to create interaction opportunities that extend across the periods of pre-event planning to post-event follow-up.

A fundamental lesson learned from both Futures Festival events that were organized is that a “community visioning” process readily includes a focus on collective histories as well as on indigenous visions for future community development. Whereas the originators of the Futures Festival concept focused almost predominantly on the goal of centering people’s attention on the future, it soon became clear that local planning teams for both events wanted to discuss community life as it
was and as it is, as well as how it could be. Activities and exhibits such as the “Test Your Knowledge” trivia game (Fayette County) and the historical photos exhibit (Lincoln Place) emphasized each area’s historical circumstances. After reflecting on this for some time, we now conclude that this emphasis on sharing common histories is an important part of the process, one that can serve as a nice complement for activities and exhibits focused on stimulating dialogue about what people would like to see in the future. Though the event in Fayette County did not stimulate much activity focused on articulating a community vision for the future, we view this as an indication that the community is in the very early stages of a visioning process rather than as a sign of failure of the Futures Festival intervention that was conducted.

Although this article focuses on intergenerational community events organized in the U.S. (Pennsylvania), the organizing and visioning processes are likely to have utility in a wide range of geographic and cultural contexts. Certainly, the local development concerns, local traditions, and the organizations and practices in place for making development decisions are likely to vary across communities and countries. Yet, the idea of broadening the dialogue about community development to include residents of all ages is a theme that should resonate with all sorts of populations. Concern about the future is universal, as is the human desire to contribute to efforts to enhance quality of life. The Futures Festival approach can be modified to fit into all sorts of community celebrations and festivals as found throughout the world, including those that emphasize cultural traditions and historical roots. What the Futures Festival concept adds is a chance to reflect on the role of such traditions and related values when looking forward into the future of the planned community.

In communities that are increasingly composed of younger and older residents from different racial and ethnic groups, the challenge becomes how to bring these diverse elements together and facilitate a worthwhile community participation and visioning process. We feel that the Futures Festival model represents a promising approach for extending the community participation arena to include young people and older adults. It also seems to be a potentially effective strategy for providing community development professionals with an additional means for finding out what community residents of all ages know and care about their communities.

However, as noted above, the Futures Festival method is, at best, a beginning point for promoting community participation and intergenerational relationship building. We advocate working to broaden the
community intervention platform to include community education and service activity options other than the Futures Festival. One such model is “neighborhood reminiscence,” developed by the Netherlands Institute of Care and Welfare as a means for facilitating youth awareness of the community memories and stories of older neighborhood residents (Mercken, 2003). One of the benefits of working with a larger arsenal of intergenerational community participation strategies is that it becomes possible to reach out to a larger number of community institutions and involve a larger, even more diversified audience.

NOTES

1. Whereas in 1900, 4 percent of the population, three million people, were age 65 or older, in 2000, nearly 13 percent of the population, 35 million people, reached this milestone. By 2030, it is estimated that 20 percent of the population, over 70 million people, will be over age 65 (Federal Interagency Forum, 2000).

2. Popular education, as pioneered by Freire (1970), can be viewed as a series of iterative stages in which a project facilitator helps participants to: (1) explore individual experiences; (2) link those experiences with others in the community; (3) make connections between experience and outside knowledge; (4) use the skills and knowledge they have gained; and (5) take action steps to achieve common goals (Arnold et al., 1991). Participants learn from one another by sharing personal experiences and perspectives about the community.

3. This organization was launched in 2001 with the mission of preserving and promoting the history of the original Mifflin Township (established in 1788); it includes 14 western Pennsylvania communities including Lincoln Place.

4. This activity was supported by a small internal Penn State grant secured by the Community and Economic Development Program (CEDEV).

5. The Mon Valley is best known as the former industrial district of the Pittsburgh region. While Mon Valley communities thrived in the early 20th century, they have struggled economically and socially since the collapse of the steel industry in the 1970s and ’80s. In recent decades, many of these communities have seen large, steady declines in jobs, housing stock and population. At the same time, there have been significant increases in the number of youth, elderly and minority residents. For example, between 1990 and 2000 the City of McKeesport saw the total population decrease by 8.2% and minority population increase by 7.3%.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1. Pre- and Post-Event Questionnaire Tools for “Futures Festival” Events

Name of Event__________________________________________

Name:_____________________
Date:_____________________
Pre_________ Post_________
Contact:_____________________

Name:_____________________

Date:_____________________

Pre_________ Post_________
Introduction: The _________________ is a special event that will take place in your community/area. To help us learn how to best organize this and similar future events, we are requesting that you fill out the following survey. Your answers will give us a sense of the issues that local people care about most. It takes about 10-15 minutes. We thank you in advance for participating in this survey.

Date: ______________________ County in which you reside: ________________

Age Category: [circle one] 15-24  25-34  35-44  45-54  55-64  65-74  75+

1. If your community/area has a name, what is it called?

2. How long have you lived in your current community/area?

3. How do you feel about living in this community/area?

4. (a) Do you think there is anything in this community/area that should be changed?  
   Yes___ No ___
   (b) If yes, what kinds of changes would you like to see?

5. What about the community/area do you think residents care about most?

6. Who do you think is responsible for deciding what will be built or changed in your community/area?

7. (a) If somebody wants to start a community/area project such as making a garden on a vacant lot or getting rid of an illegal dumping site, what is the first thing that person should do?
   (b) State the additional actions that person should take to set up a community garden project or get rid of an illegal dumping site?

8. How easy or hard is it to do things, such as building a garden or improving housing conditions, which make a community/area better? [Circle the number for your answer.]

   1             2             3             4               5                       9
   Very Hard Very Easy Don’t Know

9. How interested are you in helping to make your community/area better?  
   1             2             3              4               5                         9
   Not Interested Very Interested Don’t Know

10. (a) Are there any community/area improvement activities in which you would like to get involved?  
    Yes ___ No ___
    (b) If yes, what are they? If no, why not?

11. List the three local development issues which you feel are most important in influencing quality of life in your community/area.

12. (a) How important do you think it is to have young people and older adults talk to each other about community/area issues?
    1             2             3             4               5                       9
    Not Important Very Important Don’t Know
    (b) Please explain your answer:

13. What are some examples of local issues that both young people and older adults care about?
APPENDIX 1 (continued)

14. How did you find out about the Futures Festival? [Check all that apply.]
   ____ Brochure/Flyer    ____ Newspaper
   ____ Extension newsletter ____ Radio
   ____ Friend    ____ Other: ______________

Additional Questions to Be Asked AFTER the Futures Festival

15. (a) Did you learn anything about your community/area from the Futures Festival?
    Yes ___ No ___
    (b) If yes, what?
16. (a) Did you get any ideas about things you can do to improve your community/area?
    Yes ___ No ___
    (b) If yes, what?
17. How do you think the Futures Festival could be conducted differently to make it more enjoyable?
18. (a) To what extent did your participation in the Futures Festival affect how you view young people?
    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 9 |
    |---|---|---|---|---|---|
    | None | A Great Deal | Don’t Know |
    (b) Please explain your answer:
19. (a) To what extent did your participation in the Futures Festival affect how you view older adults?
    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 9 |
    |---|---|---|---|---|---|
    | None | A Great Deal | Don’t Know |
    (b) Please explain your answer:
20. How do you feel about the idea of having additional Futures Festival events in your area?
    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 9 |
    |---|---|---|---|---|---|
    | Strongly Against It | Strongly in Favor of It | Don’t Know |
21. List two specific things you learned about the community/area and its residents from your participation in the Futures Festival event
   (1)
   (2)
22. Answer this question if you are currently employed.
    (a) What is your job title? _______________________
    (b) To what extent did your participation in the Futures Festival provide information that will help enhance your job performance?
    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 9 |
    |---|---|---|---|---|---|
    | None | A Great Deal | Don’t Know |
    (c) Please explain your answer: