

toward community development

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Home delivery of mail! Community recreation facilities! Regular garbage pickup! Convenient school bus routes! Such services often are taken for granted by those who live in more fortunate neighborhoods and communities, particularly cities and incorporated areas. But if you live in a small, remote, rural community, these facilities may be scarce, and usually need strong community organization and leadership to become a reality. This was demonstrated in a community development program in rural Louisiana, which also provided good insight into the community development process.¹

Our study showed that community residents should understand the respective positions of service agencies and the educational mission of the Cooperative Extension Service. . . .

Methodology

Seven small communities were involved in the project. A part-time community development aide was assigned to each community, under the supervision of the local Extension community resource development (CRD) agent.

Initial developmental strategy was to make surveys in the communities for determining potential leaders, and community needs and problems. The survey results were presented to community residents at formal meetings. Identified community leaders and others were selected to serve on planning and action groups. These groups looked at key community problems, made plans to alleviate them, and then took the leadership to implement the programs. Community support for specific developmental projects was provided by individuals and groups in terms of time, technical expertise, money, and resources. Extension specialists and representatives of state, local, and federal agencies gave programming and technical help.

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Community Development Principles

Our program ran for three years. During this time, much success was experienced with projects for recreation, road development, employment opportunity, garbage collection, and services for the elderly and others. There were also some unsuccessful projects. The lessons learned from our program have been set down as simple principles to help guide community development.

Community Identification

Delineate community boundaries by specific problems or projects, and effectively involve all concerned people.

When the definition of a community is restricted to the locality or neighborhood concept, the projects that can be undertaken are limited. Recreation and clean-up campaigns can be confined to a locality-neighborhood. But the improvement of roads, creation or solicitation of jobs, water and sewerage facilities, and garbage disposal, often require involvement by two or more "communities." In our project, one community tried to establish a water district. At least 200 users are required for a water district . . . but the community had only 106 families and not all were willing to sign up. So, a neighboring community was involved. Similarly, lack of job opportunities was a common problem. When one community tried to do something on its own, the effort was unsuccessful. However, when six communities established a representative planning and action group and contacted local employers, several individuals got jobs.

Community Inventory

Begin a program with a community inventory. Community needs and problems may be obvious, if they're highly visible problems. But specific needs and priorities of community residents and leaders may not be apparent.

Communities need periodically to determine, evaluate, and reset long- and short-range goals. By involving community residents in fact-and-opinion-finding surveys, interest is aroused. Information can be fed back to community influentials so they're involved in planning and implementation. Surveys also can be a way of confronting the power structure to get attention and help.

Local Worker

A "local" community worker employed by a change agency serves a useful role.

Each community in the project had a community development aide working for the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service. This person lived in the community, worked about 10

hours a week, and was responsible for bringing external resources and help to bear on local needs, resources, and aspirations.

The study vividly demonstrated that the aide could be a motivator, educator, planner, and facilitator. Successful aides had the following characteristics:

1. Highly motivated with positive attitudes toward community improvement.
2. Middle-aged or younger persons with experience and maturity in community work. Women aides appeared more effective with home-based activities or youth projects involving women. Men aides appeared more effective in projects that required relationships with agencies and organizations outside their communities.
3. High school or college educated in a professional occupation.
4. Influential both within and outside the community. Such people can undertake complex projects involving external resources.
5. A correct concept of his/her role in community development, namely that community development involves people in group decisions and actions, and that the aide's role is motivating, organizing, educating, leading, and serving people.
6. A proper work style of involving key community elements.

Seeking out the "right" person, and providing job orientation, training, counselling, and supervision are critical to the full development of an aide.

Viable Organization

Establish and develop an organizational structure for planned community development, either as a separate entity or in concert with the existing organizational system in the community.

. . . Our project taught us some useful lessons which, presented as simple principles, help expedite community development. These principles focus on methodology, or the "how-to-do" aspects of community development. . . .

The study showed that existing community organizations had specific goals and didn't want to assume broad-based community development responsibilities. Consequently, a community development organization (advisory committee) was created in each community involving representative and competent individuals, functioning as an overall planning

group and supported by action groups working on specific projects.

The traditional role of an Extension advisory committee was also expanded. In addition to advice and legitimation, implementation was found to be a key task, because of the group decision-action feature of community development.

*Leadership
Development*

Develop "key" people to undertake leadership responsibility. Identification, selection, recruitment, orientation, and effective involvement of leaders are important tasks in developing self-reliant communities.

Community development leaders should become capable problem-solvers, who can work in groups, have influence with the power structures, and follow up on group decisions. A useful strategy is to have a core of visible influentials to develop long-range development goals. As specific projects are undertaken, individuals who can plan and implement tasks related to particular projects should be sought.

Proper orientation and training of leaders in group management techniques, power linkage strategies, and solicitation of program help will improve leader abilities.

Specialist Help

Specialists should actively support community development efforts.

Specialists having knowledge of subject matter, and developmental processes and strategies should support all phases of developmental activity. It's important that they plan "with" people and not "for" them. As communities become self-reliant, specialists can gradually withdraw into a less visible role.

Involvement

Community residents and organizations, and government agencies (federal, state, and local) should be effectively involved.

All potential contributing elements in a "community setting" should be brought into the mainstream of developmental activity.

Community residents and organizations can devote their time and resources, participate in meetings, decide on projects, and undertake various responsibilities.

— The study demonstrated the importance of people and organization involvement. Sometimes, active participants were frustrated with public officials and agencies who had legal and/or assigned community development responsibilities. These elements hadn't been involved in planning by the community groups. The lesson learned, therefore, was that the change agency should involve all concerned individuals and groups at all stages of community development.

Systems Linkage

Clarify roles and responsibilities of educational and service systems and link them in a coordinated developmental effort.

Federal, state, and local agencies provide financial and technical help to communities through assistance programs. Farmers' Home Administration, Manpower Development, community action agencies, and local governing bodies are examples of such service help. The Cooperative Extension Service has a unique educational role.

Our study showed that community residents should understand the respective positions of service agencies and the educational mission of the Cooperative Extension Service. Community residents and some of our own aides thought Extension was a service agency providing financial help.

Since Extension is the main educational agency working in communities, it may take the lead in bringing about community understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different agencies.

Summary

Good local organization and leadership, coupled with help from specialized agencies, can move communities toward development. Our project taught us some useful lessons which, presented as simple principles, help expedite community development. These principles focus on methodology, or the "how-to-do" aspects of community development. Specific program content, or "what-to-do," isn't intended. The suggested principles can thus be used by Extension CRD agents and others in fostering community development efforts.

Footnote

1. Refer to authors' report entitled *Differential Strategies for Community Development in Low-Income, Rural Communities*, Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, Baton Rouge, 1975, for an account of the project.