DEVELOPING

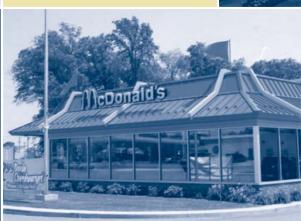# *A Community Strategic Plan*

A GUIDE FOR LOCAL OFFICIALS

Developing a Community Strategic Plan

A Guide for Local Officials

Commissioned by

Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor

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Prepared by

Illinois Association of Regional Councils

Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

The Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) is the lead state agency responsible for improving the competitiveness of Illinois in a global economy, resulting in growing, prosperous industries, high-quality jobs and world-class communities. DCEO provides information, financial and technical assistance and advocacy to facilitate and advance the economic development process in partnership with Illinois' communities, businesses and a network of public and private service providers.

The Illinois Association of Regional Councils (ILARC) serves as the recognized organization in Illinois representing regional councils at the state and national levels. ILARC works to advance communication, education and cooperation among regional planners, local officials and government agencies. ILARC works closely with state and federal agencies on various public policies related to community development and fosters local involvement and regional cooperation.

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A Shared Vision

A community is a group of people tied together by a common geographical, social, economic, educational and public environment. Communities are also the product of the choices made by its members over time. Preferably, the people that comprise a community have a shared vision of what a community should be.

A shared community vision will be essential for Illinois communities to address the many challenges of the 21st Century. In particular, many communities throughout the State of Illinois are facing ever more complex issues in the face of limited financial resources. Others are faced with the consequences of tremendous short-term growth, which strain local tax bases, transportation systems and natural resources. These challenges are intensified by an extremely volatile world economy that can cause very sudden and widespread changes at the community level.

Communities will be in this dynamic environment for decades to come. Many will use the narrow short-term approaches of raising taxes and cutting services. However, these traditional approaches may create long-term problems in the areas of sustainable growth, public health and safety, infrastructure support and the ability to adjust to changing conditions. Communities that identify, develop, implement and evaluate long-term approaches will be the ones that will grow in ways best suited to both their desires and their resources.

A community strategic plan can be an excellent tool for pointing communities in the direction they want to go. This publication, *Developing a Community Strategic Plan,* is a straightforward guide designed to lead local officials, planners and citizens through a strategic planning process. The publication highlights clear examples of plan concepts and includes plan "worksheets" which provide local officials with hands-on-tools to develop a community strategic plan.

What is a Community Strategic Plan?

The strategic plan is the basis for change in a community.

In particular, it is a detailed blueprint leading to its "vision" – what a community wants to be. A community strategic plan provides direction on how to get there. For example, a community might envision its future as follows: "By 2015, our community will be the regional center for commercial and industrial development, providing adequate opportunities for employment and a high quality of life for residents."

The important aspect of a strategic planning process is not to have a finished plan but to have and maintain a framework for the paths that should be followed to ensure the future of the community. A well thought-out community strategic plan stresses visioning, goals and objectives, and the plan process (not the plan itself). The final product will be a collection of very specific goals, along with specific and detailed objectives of how to achieve these goals. Each of these is described as follows:

1. The Vision

A community "vision" is the definition of what a community wants to be. The process of creating the vision is called *visioning*. The visioning process itself can be a rather lengthy process involving citizens from all walks of life.

2. Goals and Objectives

A goal is a specific statement of what the community would like to be. Goals should be derived from the vision for the future. It must be clear and concise, providing direction toward your vision. For example, to work toward the vision as stated above, a goal could be: "To enhance accessibility for industrial development, our community will review its development strategies to determine if there are any inherent weaknesses or biases that would be a detriment to future industrial development."

Objectives are tools that are used to determine the progress toward meeting established goals. As such, the objectives should describe the key results to be achieved, quantifiable measures of progress if possible, identification of what parties are responsible for achieving the objective, and target dates for completion. Objectives must be detailed, realistic, and attainable. They may also be challenging, and may involve some element of risk. As an example: "By October 10, 2004, our community's planning and zoning department will have completed a review and update of current ordinances, to provide a detailed summary of any current development practices that may hinder industrial development efforts and suggested improvements."

3. Strategic Planning Programs

There are many strategic planning programs in place in Illinois to assist communities in the strategic planning process. These include programs through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), including the Competitive Communities Initiative (CCI) and the MAPPING the Future of Your Community Program administered by the Illinois Institute of Rural Affairs (IIRA), as well as efforts driven by specific federal agencies such as the Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy process. A more detailed summary of these programs can be found in Appendix A.

While all of the forementioned programs involve similar basic steps – strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation – this guidebook will walk the reader through a community strategic planning process that incorporates all of these factors.

Getting Started

Where does your community want to be in ten years?

Communities that identify, develop, implement and evaluate long-term approaches will be the ones that will grow in ways best suited to both their desires and their resources. A community strategic plan can be an excellent tool for pointing communities in the direction they want to go.

In completing it's strategic planning process, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity realized that most traditional processes lack a framework – a foundation on which to build a plan. It was identified early in the DCEO process that the first step needs to be a "Plan to Plan." Not only must it be determined what the community is going to do, but also who should be involved, who is in charge of the effort, and other details that will guide the development of the vision for the future.

Questions to answer in your plan to plan include:

A. Why Plan?

- What is the motivation behind this effort?
- Are there certain issues in the community that prompted an interest in a planning effort?
- Has the community ever undertaken a strategic planning process before?
- Has it been a number of years since the community has reviewed its strategic plan?

B. Who is in charge of this effort?

- Who will be responsible for making all the necessary arrangements for meetings and notices?
- Will the locally elected governing board (i.e., city council, village board or county board) be in charge, or should another community group be the leader of the effort?
- Are there reasons why one group should be in charge instead of another?
- What group is going to have the authority to ensure that the planning process will yield results?
- Which group can motivate and render the necessary resources to effect the suggested changes?

C. Who do we think should be involved?

- What groups in the community should be included?
- How do we ensure that everyone is given an opportunity to participate?
- Should everyone participate at every stage of the process?
- Based on why we are undertaking this effort, are there groups that we need to make sure are involved?

D. What resources (monetary and non-monetary) can we bring to bear on the planning effort?

- Are we going to have the right people and groups involved to ensure that we can enact any changes that are brought forth in the planning process?
- As the planning process progresses, are there groups or people we may need to add to the mix to ensure that we can accomplish the things that are being identified?
- Do we have the authority to initiate a change based on the planning effort, or do we have the right groups or agencies involved that will have the proper authority?

E. What are the planning process "logistics?"

- When are the meetings to be held?
- What is the appropriate time to schedule meetings to ensure maximum participation?
- What organization will send out the meeting notices, prepare minutes, and reports?

Planning to Plan

Communities need to define who its "customers" are.

In its planning process, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity needed to define who its "customers" were for economic development planning in the public sector. This process started off with interest groupings:

- local governments
- small business
- community organizations
- development organizations

Communities group their interests under major concerns which vary from locality to locality. Often however, communities group their interests under the following major concerns:

- Advanced and Basic Infrastructure
- Availability of Comprehensive Medical Services
- Economic Development (workforce development, business development, downtown revitalization)
- Education (especially primary and secondary)
- Housing Stock
- Public Health and Safety (law enforcement)
- Recreational Opportunities
- Transportation

Once the foregoing questions have been thoroughly addressed, the Strategic Plan process can begin. Based on the concepts outlined in "A Guide to Strategic Planning for Rural Communities" published by U.S. Rural Development in March, 1998, the following steps are suggested in getting the strategic plan process started.

Getting Started ➡

Determine the "lead organization" that will provide leadership and support in the early stages of putting together a strategic plan (meeting space, clerical support, etc.).

Involve all kinds of people in the planning process. The strategic plan will have greater support if many people are involved and participating.

Form a steering committee to oversee the strategic plan process. Form a diverse group consisting of individuals that have the trust and respect of others in the community, as key leaders.

Obtain resources. Developing a strategic plan requires resources: organizations, people, place and equipment (computers, copiers, etc.) to do the work. Resources include State agencies and area regional planning commissions. Once identified, create a list of start up needs and find people or organizations willing to help.

Develop a planning timetable setting out when and where events will take place and who is responsible for organizing them.

Establish the process of events needed to develop the strategic plan including meetings. A meeting "facilitator" can be effective in making sure each step in the process is fully addressed and completed in a timely manner.

Creating the "Community Vision"

What kind of community do we want to become?

The process of creating the vision is called "visioning". Creating a community vision requires the development of a "vision statement".

A Guide to Strategic Planning for Rural Communities (U.S. Rural Development) emphasizes that the community vision starts with asking questions such as "what are the community's shared values?", "what is important to the community?" and "what values will guide a community's activities?" This is definitely the time to involve as many people as possible in the visioning process to brainstorm these questions and others. When crafting the vision statement, the following perspectives need to be taken into account:

- How the community's citizens, economy, public institutions and environment will interact
- Where the community wants to be in the next 10 to 15 years
- How the community of the future will be different from today

The community's vision statement is a foundational part of its strategic planning efforts and is shared among policy makers, city staff, residents and business owners alike. It should describe community values, inspire pride and community spirit and serve as the benchmark to guide future actions.

For example, a community might envision its future as follows:

"Our community is a place that people choose to call 'home.' It offers its residents a progressive tradition of good government, civic participation and a vibrant economy for business and industry.

In our community, residents cherish their children, value education, embrace their diversity, respect their neighbors and protect their environment. Their promise to future generations is an even greater, more beautiful city than the one they inherited."

Another example is:

"By 2015, our community will be the regional center for commercial and industrial development, providing adequate opportunities for employment and a high quality of life for residents."

Or, it could be similar to:

"By 2020, our community will have maintained its population and employment levels to allow our graduates to remain in the community with opportunities available to them for adequate employment levels, housing, and services."

The remainder of the planning process will be focused on achieving this vision.

Developing the Plan "Framework"

How a community strategic plan is structured is absolutely critical in determining its direction and ultimately, the direction of the community. It's much more than developing an outline. It goes to the deeper question of how planning components are determined. In particular:

A. How are the plan "elements" determined?

- How and when will it be decided what to include in the plan?
- Values and goals play a key part in the planning process – to be able to select among alternatives, the planners must understand the goals and values of the audience being served.

B. What questions are we trying to answer?

- What are the issues that prompted the community to undertake the planning process?
- What changes are needed?

Developing the Plan "Focus"

Assess current conditions in the community and determine potential futures.

In order for a community to attain its vision, it must assess its current conditions, determine potential futures using various analytical tools, evaluate its current state based on analysis of information obtained, determine major priority issues and identify goals and objectives.

There are several approaches to developing the plan's focus. The "Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats" (SWOT) process is one that can be an excellent tool in evaluating a community's current state. "Strengths and Weaknesses" are factors that are considered within a community's control. "Opportunities and Threats" are factors that also affect a community but are considered beyond a community's control. The flowchart on page 17 illustrates a community strategic plan "SWOT" process. The detailed elements of developing the plan focus can be found on page 19.

Community Strategic Planning SWOT Process

START ➡ Form Steering Committee ➡ Steering Committee arranges public meetings for citizen input

"Citizen Meeting" held to identify "strengths," "weaknesses," "opportunities," and "threats" **(SWOT analysis)** ⬅ "SWOT" and other data collected and summarized ⬅ Community "Self-Assessment" prepared

"Vision Statement," Goals/Objectives, and "Focus Areas" identified for "Action Plan" ➡ "Action Plan" subcommittees form and meet to develop "Action Plan" items ➡ All subcommittee members reconvene to review "Action Plan"

City Council adopts citizen "Action Plan" ⬅ Final "Action Plan" prepared for submittal to City Council ⬅ "Town Meeting" of all interested citizens held to review "Action Plan"

PROCESS COMPLETE

SWOT Analysis Based Community Strategic Plan Flowchart

Once again, keeping the "Community Vision" in the forefront as the guide for development of the plan, address the following steps in developing the plan's focus:

A. Assess the current conditions in the community.

Conduct an "environmental scan" (identification of the key factors both inside and outside the community which determine its character).

- Population data – historical and projected.
- Community facilities – water, sewer, transportation, telecommunications.
- Local economic development factors – current employers, types of employment, recent and long-term trends in employment levels and types.
- Identify what the community has (sometimes known as "asset inventory").

Determine potential futures.

- Identify potential short- and long-term changes that may occur in the community.
- Use current statistics and forecasts of population and other data that will allow for best estimates of the changes to affect the future of the community.
- Analyze how these short- and long-term changes in the community will have positive and negative impacts over time.

B. Using the results of the environmental scan from the previous section, evaluate whether current state of affairs is "positive" or "negative" for the community.

- Decisions regarding the status of the situation should be made in the context of the Community Vision.
- SWOT (Internal Strengths and Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis Summary *(see chart on page 17).*

C. Determine priority issues to be the focus for development of goals and objectives.

- Group issues into like categories to develop priority issues (two examples are "education" and "infrastructure").

D. Goals and Objectives Identification

- Use priority issues to develop overall goals that will move the community closer to its vision for the future.
- Discussion of "what should be done" to address or solve community related problems.
- Develop specific objectives to meet the more general goals. Keep in mind the need to obtain these objectives within the confines of the available resources – both monetary and non-monetary.

See SWOT Analysis based Community Strategic Plan Flowchart on page 17 for an outline of the above steps.

From Strategy to Action

To realize the community's vision, it needs to be translated into an action agenda.

A Guide to Strategic Planning for Rural Communities, published by U.S. Rural Development, well summarizes both the challenge and the "vision to action" concept necessary to achieve community goals and objectives when it states:

"No strategic plan is complete just because it gets written. The hard work of implementation comes next. Everything cannot be done at once, so a strategic plan should be divided into several programs of work. Divide a 10-year plan into five 2-year work programs. Each two-year work program describes who will do things, to or with whom, what will be done, at what cost, and how success will be measured."

"Implementation may be the most difficult but most important phase in the community development process. It is in this phase that the planned-for resources can be lost, partnerships become either close or distant, projects are started and then managed, and results become visible."

The following principles should be adhered to when communities formulate their work plan:

- Work plan should be for one year – the work program is the means by which the strategic plan is finally implemented and results are achieved, evaluated, and revised on an annual basis.

- After goals and objectives are clearly defined, the committee will need to formulate specific programs for action to meet the objectives, as well as establish the organizational structure necessary to implement the programs.

- Focus on specific tasks. Tasks must be stated very deliberately, not ambiguously. Identify the scheduling of tasks – start date, duration, completion date, estimated cost, responsible party/agency.

- Target activities to the proper group to accomplish them. Communities do not implement plans – agencies and organizations do. Each must know its responsibility for action. Each must know the desired results. Each must accept responsibility.

- Allocate resources – make sure not to make commitments of resources over which you have no control.

- Community representatives may need to restructure 'goal statements' into 'problem statements' to lead to more innovative ideas for solutions.

Plan Evaluation

A strategic plan is never really finished.

A community strategic plan is not just a "paper publication" that is finished when completed but rather a continuous planning process designed to address short-term and long-term community needs over time. *A Guide to Strategic Planning for Rural Communities*, published by U.S. Rural Development, emphasizes the importance of this as follows:

"A strategic plan is never really finished. It will change as your community's needs, resources and priorities change. Your first version will change over time as you learn from your experiences and improve it. Think of your plan as being in a looseleaf notebook, not as a hardcover book which never changes. Constant evaluation will help you see how well the community is doing, understand the benefits and impacts of certain activities, and make decisions based on better information. However, you should not immediately revise your strategic plan every time you identify something that needs to be changed. Planning experience has shown that an annual review cycle works well and no more than two per year should be allowed."

An ongoing step in the overall planning process is evaluating the performance and progress of the effort. This should be done continually during the planning process.

A. Monitoring of plan's progress and performance

- Continuously monitor activities to determine if specific actions and activities are being achieved. Keep track of time schedules and projected expenditures. Activities need to be well documented.

B. Performance Review

- Who does it and how often?
- Evaluate the status of the work plan and related projects.
- Evaluate performance of those responsible for managing and implementing tasks and projects. If necessary, revisit assignments.

C. Impact analysis

- What changed in the community? What's different? What's better? Are we closer to the goal?
- Are goals and objectives met?
- Is the community closer to achieving the vision?

D. Process of adjusting the plan

- Continual evaluation during the entire process dictates the need for changes.
- May need to change goals/objectives or implementation strategies.
- Continual monitoring and assessment are a necessary part of the process throughout its entirety.

E. A summary description of "scorecards and benchmarks"

Scorecards measure an activity's progress against established numerical standards (example: number of actual homes rehabilitated compared to the total number of homes targeted for rehabilitation). *Benchmarks* measure an activity's results against specific strategies (example: Install a high speed cable system sufficient to serve the Village of Westdot for many years to come. Measure: 5 miles of high speed cable need to be installed each year for the next 3 years). Action Plan activities subject to scorecard and benchmark measures should be evaluated and summarized by answering the following:

1. To what extent has the activity been implemented?
2. Is the activity's progress tracking according to schedule?
3. If an activity is lagging behind, what's the reason? Are established scorecard standards and benchmark milestones unrealistic?

Community Strategic Planning Process

Below is a community strategic planning process flowchart which summarizes the critical steps in developing and preparing a community strategic plan.

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┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
│                  │      │                  │      │                  │
│  PLANNING TO     │ ───> │  CREATE          │ ───> │ DEVELOP THE PLAN │
│  PLAN            │      │  COMMUNITY VISION│      │  "FRAMEWORK"     │
│                  │      │                  │      │                  │
└──────────────────┘      └──────────────────┘      └──────────────────┘
         ▲                                                    │
 Readjust │ Plan                                              ▼
┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
│                  │      │                  │      │                  │
│  PLAN            │ <─── │  FROM STRATEGY   │ <─── │ DEVELOP THE PLAN │
│  EVALUATION      │      │  TO ACTION       │      │  "FOCUS"         │
│                  │      │                  │      │                  │
└──────────────────┘      └──────────────────┘      └──────────────────┘
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Appendix A

Other Illinois Strategic Planning Processes

Competitive Communities Initiative (CCI)

MAPPING the Future of Your Community

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Competitive Communities Initiative

The purpose of Competitive Communities Initiative (CCI) is to assist communities as they plan for the future by helping them identify and focus appropriate human and financial resources in a coordinated fashion. CCI was founded on the belief that local citizens must create their own destiny and assume responsibility for ensuring community survival and prosperity. The end goal of the CCI process is to help communities to help themselves.

CCI specialists from the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity are assigned to facilitate the economic development process by the following steps:

A. Building a community leadership structure reflecting all segments of the community or region who are committed to the improvement of the quality of life for all citizens.

B. Training the team in leadership development to conduct a self-assessment and establish attainable goals and objectives.

C. Providing strategic planning sessions in which participants identify issues and formulate strategies to address them.

D. Providing sustained support and technical assistance to develop, evaluate, and implement a written action plan.

E. Creating an expanded network of leaders who can work together to carry out team-oriented solutions to problems.

F. Encouraging cooperation for enhanced economic development opportunities with community and business leadership.

G. Expanding the community's knowledge of social and economic trends which will increase its capacity to compete in today's global economy.

The CCI program staff have identified six basic "Foundations for Growth" that when addressed by communities, will ensure a comprehensive self-assessment. These foundations are:

A. A skilled and adaptive workforce.
B. Access to technology and business modernization resources.
C. Access to capital for business growth and expansion.
D. Basic and advanced infrastructure.
E. Pro-competitive business policies.
F. Social infrastructure.

The final outcome of the CCI program is the locally developed community plan that outlines the steps needed to strengthen the community's foundations for growth.

MAPPING the Future of Your Community

MAPPING the Future of Your Community is a tool that local citizens can use to build consensus for envisioning and planning their community's future. This program brings together community leaders and other interested citizens in an effort to discover their vision and a plan of action for achieving it. The process involves four sessions in which community leaders create a workable action plan for local community and economic development. The MAPPING program is funded through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and administered through the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA).

MAPPING is a strategic planning tool, which finds its roots in the vision statement. By working together with community leaders, the MAPPING process creates a vision statement that describes what the community hopes to become in the future. This vision is identified even if the resources to turn the dream into reality do not yet exist. By determining the vision, the four sessions of the process lead the participants toward a plan of action, and identifying specific projects and project teams to work toward the vision. Participants work together to identify specific outcomes and results for community consideration. The group participants decide which goals are most important to begin working on first.

The steps involved in the MAPPING process are as follows:

A. Meet with Local Steering Committee – the IIRA staff meet with local committee to discuss sponsorship, participation list, and logistics for visioning sessions.

B. MAPPING Orientation Session – IIRA staff acquaint the local steering committee with the process.

C. Visioning Session 1 – Where are we now? This session involves community leaders to look at current conditions and how to use strategic visioning for community and economic development.

D. Visioning Session 2 – Where do we want to be? Community leaders prioritize desired results and outcomes, building from past successes and creating a community vision that reflects long-range goals and objectives.

E. Visioning Session 3 – How do we get there? Community leaders form interim project teams and pull together a framework for the community action plan.

F. Action Planning Session – Making it happen. Participants organize for action, plan a town meeting, and consider options for long term sustainable development.

G. Community-Led Town Meeting – Civic inter-action and input for improving and mobilizing the community action plan.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is required for participation in Economic Development Administration (EDA) programs. EDA may accept as a CEDS any locally, state, or regionally prepared plan, provided that it is current and its preparation and contents are consistent with the EDA CEDS guidelines. The CEDS analyzes local conditions, identifies problems and opportunities, defines the vision and goals of the community, designs the strategies to accomplish these goals, coordinates activities to implement these strategies, and evaluates and updates the process. The process must adopt a logical approach to long-range development while identifying and implementing short-term problem solutions to achieve early results and maintain momentum and public support. The CEDS should contain four main elements: analysis, vision, action plan and evaluation.

A CEDS should be prepared with the following sections included.

A. Organizing and staffing for economic development.

1. Development of a CEDS Strategy Committee, which is responsible for developing, updating, or replacing a strategy. This committee should represent all major interests of the community, including representatives from the following groups: public leadership; economic and business development organizations; employment and training sector; community organizations; women, minorities, aged and disabled; and other groups such as heath, education, social services and other groups that might have an impact on the development of the region.

2. Working relationships must be established between the CEDS Strategy Committee and existing local, regional, and state institutions.

3. Staff support must be provided to the CEDS Strategy Committee to provide for the day-to-day functions of the process.

4. Committee work program should provide the agenda for the CEDS Strategy Committee. This work program describes each task to be performed, identifies the individual, organization or work group responsible for completing each task, and established timetables.

B. Analysis: Where are we?

The region needs to be analyzed to determine a clear understanding of the local economic situation. This analysis should include the following:

1. Background information, including: demographic and geographic data, information on current infrastructure, major sectors of the economy, factors that directly affect the local economy, and other areas that indirectly affect the local economy, including housing, health services, schools, cultural and recreational facilities, public safety, and others.

2. Issues to be covered include:

   a. identification of the strengths and weaknesses of the regional economy, along with growth sectors and clusters.

   b. external trends and forces affecting the local and regional economy, and a determination of how the region is positioned in the national and global economies.

   c. identification of the regional partners for economic development.

   d. determination of the groups, organizations, and individuals to serve as resources for economic development activities.

C. Vision: Where do we want to be?

The vision statement should answer the questions: where do we want to be in the next 10-20 years, and what are the goals to get there? The vision statement should be developed with public input, through sessions of workshops. Participants should include economic development partners and members of the public.

1. Vision statement, goals and objectives should respond to the analysis of the area's development potential and problems (strengths and weaknesses). Goals should reflect the desires of areas residents and should be realistic and limited in number. These should also address short and long-term issues.

2. Setting priorities should be done as a basis for decisions on how and where to use available resources. Setting priorities should result in the ranking of goals. These goals then provide the basis for formulating the action plan and serve as milestones to evaluate the accomplishments of the CEDS process.

D. Action plan, or how do we get there?

The answer to this question is usually based on the identified long-term goals. The action plan describes activities, assigns responsibility, resources, timeframes and priorities for implementation. It is a multi-year strategy that includes activities and programs to take advantage of opportunities for the economic development of the area. The plan should also include some elements that can be achieved in a short or intermediate timeframe.

The action plan contains two components:

1. Prioritization of programs and activities should be based on the following questions:
   a. What are the activities and what are their expected benefits?
   b. Which activities address the areas or issues of greatest need and/or best enhance the region's competitive advantages?
   c. Do these activities represent the best use of limited resources?
   d. Will the activities have positive economic, environmental, and social impacts?

2. Implementation schedule should identify the most important program activities and propose a timeframe and implementation schedule for each, in multiple phases if needed. It should describe programs and activities and identify the range of public, private and nonprofit support for each.

E. Evaluation: How are we doing?

Evaluation should be an element of an ongoing planning process. Performance measures should be identified to evaluate the progress of activities in achieving the vision and goals.

F. Documentation

The CEDS document should serve as a record of all the steps of the process followed and the broad and diverse participation of the community in the development of the strategy.

Appendix B

Worksheets

The following worksheets are designed for a community to walk through
the community strategic planning process.

A. Why Plan?

1. What is the motivation behind this effort being initiated? Why are we doing this?

2. Are there certain issues in the community that prompted an interest in a planning effort? What problems or situations made us think about looking at a plan for the future?

3. When was the last time the community did a plan? What were the goals from that plan? Were they met? What do we still need to do? How does that compare to what we have identified as our issues now? Do we need a new effort?

B. Who is in charge of this effort?

1. Will the City Council be in charge, or should another community group be the leader of the effort?

2. Are there reasons why one group should be in charge instead of another?

3. Who will be responsible for making all the necessary arrangements for meetings and notices?

4. What group is going to have the authority to ensure that the results of the planning process will yield results?

5. Which groups can motivate and identify the necessary resources to effect the suggested changes?

C. Who do we think should be involved?

1. What groups in the community should be included?

2. How do we ensure that everyone is given an opportunity to participate?

3. Should everyone participate at every stage of the process?

4. Based on why we are undertaking this effort, are there groups that we need to make sure are involved?

D. What resources (monetary and non-monetary) can we bring to bear on the planning effort?

1. Are we going to have the right people and groups involved to ensure that we can enact any changes or action items that are brought forth in the planning process?

2. As the planning process progresses, are there groups or people we need to add to the mix to ensure that we can accomplish the things that are being identified?

3. Do we have the authority to initiate a change based on the planning effort, or do we have the right groups or agencies involved that will have the proper authority?

E. What are the planning process logistics?

1. When are the meetings to be held?

2. What is the appropriate time to schedule meetings to ensure maximum participation?

3. What organization will send out the meeting notices, prepare minutes, and reports?

A. What questions are we trying to answer?

1. What are the issues that prompted the community to undertake the planning process?

2. What changes are needed?

3. Values and goals play a key part in the planning process – to be able to select among alternatives, participants must be able to identify the values of the community. What are the things that we really like about our community? What is it that makes us unique? What is it that we are most proud of for our community? These things would have also been taken into account when preparing the vision statement at the beginning of the planning process.

B. What is our Community Vision (i.e. What our community wants to be)?

Vision Statement:

A. Assess the current conditions in the community by conducting an environmental scan.

1. **Population data** – historical and projected.

   What is our current population? _____   What was it ten years ago? _____

   Projections +10 years if available _____

2. **Community facilities** – water, sewer, transportation, telecommunications, housing, recreation, education, health services, employment.

a. What is the status of our water system? Age, capacity, problems, needs?

b. Sewer system? Age, capacity, problems, needs?

c. What transportation facilities are available? Highway, rail, truck routes, buses, public transportation? Age, capacity, problems, needs?

d. What is our current telecommunications situation? Local and long distance service reliable? Fiber optic lines available? Local Internet service, DSL or some other option?

e. Who are our current employers? Employer size?

f. What types of employment are available in the community? Top ten employers? Sectors?

g. What have been the recent and long-term trends in employment levels and types? What employers have left the area? Why did employers leave the area? How many jobs have left in the last five years? What employers have moved into the area? How many new jobs added in the last five years?

2. **Community facilities** *continued*

h. What schools do we have? How many students? What other training programs are available? What are employer attitudes of job skills coming out of the school system?

i. What types of housing do we have? Are there homes available for all income levels? Do we have rental properties available? Is there a certain segment of the population that lacks adequate housing services?

j. What health services are available to our residents? Are there special services for the elderly? Youth? Low income? Are there programs for mental health issues as well as physical health?

k. What are our recreation opportunities? Do we have special programs for youth? Adults? Do we have public parks and open spaces? Do we have cultural opportunities for all segments of the population?

l. Is public safety being addressed for all individuals in the community? What services do we have for fire, police, and rescue situations?

m. What health care services exist in the community? Is the entire population being served? Are there special programs for given segments of the population?

n. What does our community look like? Are there aesthetic improvements that need to be made?

Community "Strengths and Weaknesses" Survey Example

DCCA used the following survey to elicit strengths and weaknesses:

One of the important things we would like to learn about is your perception of the quality of your region's economic institutions and community assets. For each of five categories of development factors, we will ask you to rate the quality of the institution/asset in your region. At the same time, you will be asked to indicate the level of priority you would place on taking regional actions to enhance that institution/asset as a means of improving economic development in your region.

Infrastructure *(circle one for each item)*	Quality of institution/asset Significant Strength				Significant Weakness	Factors for regional action Priority for action High				Low
Highways	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Commuter railroads	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Freight railroads	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Airports	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Docks, wharfs, water terminals	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Multi-modal freight facilities	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Water infrastructure	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Electric utilities	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Natural gas utilities	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Telecommunications	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Industrial/research parks	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Solid waste removal	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Sanitary sewers	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Stormwater sewers	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Public safety	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Other_____										

Business Climate *(circle one for each item)*	Quality of institution/asset Significant Strength				Significant Weakness	Factors for regional action Priority for action High				Low
Real property tax rates	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Sales tax rates	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Personal income tax rates	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Corporate income tax rates	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Enterprise zones	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Property tax abatements	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Sales tax rebates	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Unionization	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Tort liability laws	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Product liability laws	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Environmental permitting process	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Environmental liability laws	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Unemployment compensation laws	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Worker compensation laws	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Passenger air service	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Freight air service	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Other_____										

Community "Strengths and Weaknesses" Survey Example

Workforce Development (circle one for each item)	Quality of institution/asset					Factors for regional action				
	Significant Strength				Significant Weakness	High				Low
School-to-work programs	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Apprenticeship programs	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Tech prep programs	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
K-12 education	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Community colleges	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Universities	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
English as a second language	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Basic skills training programs	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Customized skill training programs	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Technology skill training programs	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Telecommuting opportunities	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1

Other_____

Business Development (circle one for each item)	Quality of institution/asset					Factors for regional action				
	Significant Strength				Significant Weakness	High				Low
One stop business centers	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Small business development centers	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Technology commercialization centers	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Minority/female business services	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
International trade offices	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
International trade zones	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Business incubators	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Venture capital programs and funds	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Technology venture promotion	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Manufacturing modernization	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Manufacturing extension centers	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Regional place marketing and promotion	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Basic research and development	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Entrepreneurial assistance	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1

Other_____

Community "Strengths and Weaknesses" Survey Example

Community Development *(circle one for each item)*	Quality of institution/asset					Factors for regional action				
	Significant Strength			Significant Weakness		High Priority for action				Low
Cultural amenities	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Recreational facilities	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Affordable housing	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
First time homebuyers assistance	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Volunteerism	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Social Services	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Family self sufficiency	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Community development organizations	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Organizational training	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Leadership training	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Community development block grants	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Tax increment financing	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Police and fire protection	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Recreational opportunities	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Recycling/resource recovery	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Energy conservation	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Historic preservation	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Smart or sensible growth	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Home weatherization	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Support for working families	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1

Other_____

Using the lists above as a guide for classification, please prioritize the following areas in terms of the level of attention your region should give them over the next five years. Please designate the area that should receive the most attention with a "1" and proceed to rank the areas down to a "5" for the lowest priority in terms of attention.

_____ Infrastructure

_____ Business Climate

_____ Workforce Development

_____ Business Development

_____ Community Development and Betterment

Which of the following industry sectors do you consider the most important for the continued economic vitality of your region? *(check only one)*

_____ Mining and natural resources   _____ Agriculture

_____ Manufacturing including tech based companies   _____ Retail business

_____ Transportation services   _____ Consumer services

_____ Business services including tech based companies _____ Government/public facilities

3. What are two threats to economic development faced by your region?

4. What are the two specific actions that could be taken in order to most positively affect economic development in your region?

B. Determine potential futures

Identify potential short- and long-term changes that may occur in the community. Use current statistics and forecasts of population and other data that will allow for best estimates of the chances to affect the future of the community.

1. Based on current population information, what do we think the next 10 years will be like in terms of our residents? Have there been a large number of births in the community? Is our school-age population growing? What percentage of our residents is elderly? How many are middle-aged, and in the next 10 years will be moving into the elderly category?

2. What do we know about our current employment situation? What kinds of jobs do we anticipate having here in 10 years? How many jobs?

4. Are there educational programs that we need to establish or enhance to complement the employment opportunities?

5. Will our current infrastructure hold up for the future? Based on population and employment estimates, will our water and sewer capacity be sufficient? What changes will we need to make?

6. Are there things that need to be changed to enhance the transportation situation for the future? If our population will be skewing toward the elderly, do we have public transportation services available for these persons?

7. What is our educational system going to be like? Are there going to be a large number of younger children coming up through the system? Are we losing students?

C. Using the results of the environmental scan from the previous section, evaluate whether current state of affairs is "positive' or "negative" for the communiy. Decisions regarding the status of the situation should be made in the context of the community Vision.

1. Determine SWOT (Internal strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and external threats).

   Our strengths in terms of our community Vision are: *List the things that will help us to achieve our Vision.*

   Our weaknesses are: *List the things that will hinder us in achieving our Vision.*

2. What are some things happening in the region/world that could affect our community? Do we have any control over these things and how they affect our community?

3. Are there developments in the larger economy that could be a benefit to our community? Are there different types of jobs being developed that would enhance our current employment situation? Are there things that we have that the larger region/world needs?

D. Determine priority issues to be the focus for development of goals and objectives.

1. From the strengths and weaknesses, determine which issues are the most crucial in relation to achieving the community Vision.

2. Group issues into like categories to develop priority areas. After grouping the individual issues, determine larger categories, such as: housing, education, employment, etc.

3. Use priority areas to develop overall goals that will move the community closer toward its vision for the future. for example, a goal may be: "To ensure adequate housing for the employees to serve our local industries and businesses, the community will determine what types of housing are available in the community."

4. After developing broad goals, develop specific objectives to meet the goals. Keep in mind the need to be able to obtain these objectives within the confines of the available resources – both monetary and non-monetary. For example, to meet the previously stated goal, an objective may be: "Conduct a housing assessment to determine types of housing, housing costs, vacancy rates, and other issues for residents of the community."

A. Formulate a work plan for each objective. Details need to be included which will ensure the completion of the objective with the community Vision as the guide.

After goals and objectives are clearly defined, the committee will need to formulate specific programs for action to meet the objectives, as well as establish the organizational structure necessary to implement the programs. For example, to meet the previously stated objective "Conduct a housing assessment to determine types of housing, housing costs, vacancy rates, and other issues for residents of the community" the following items would need to be identified.

1. Responsible agency – who will do the work?

2. Date of completion – when will it start, and how long will it take? Does it need to be done by a certain date to assist in accomplishing one of the other objectives?

3. Cost – will there be costs involved, such as equipment, supplies, or materials? What will be the staff costs? Who is responsible for paying for these costs? Is the responsible agency willing to undertake this effort based on the costs involved?

4. What is the anticipated outcome? Will there be a product as an end result? Describe the outcome in detail as a benchmark to measure results.

Evaluation of the plan is ongoing throughout the planning process.

A. Monitor plan progress and performance.

- Continuously monitor activities to determine if specific actions and activities are being achieved.
- Keep track of time schedules and projected expenditures. Activities need to be well documented.
- Use the benchmarks identified in the previous step to measure progress and success.

B. Performance Review

- Who does it and how often?
- Evaluate the status of the work plan and related projects.
- Evaluate performance of those responsible for managing and implementing tasks and projects.

C. Impact Analysis

- What changed?

- Has the community met its goals and objectives?

- Is the community closer to achieving the vision?

D. Adjusting the plan will be necessary due to continual evaluation during the process dictating the need for changes. The community may need to change goals/objectives and or implementation strategies based on the work that is being completed on tasks.

Need help developing your community's strategic plan?

Contact the regional council nearest you!

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Guidebook Feedback Form

We are utilizing *Developing a Community Strategic Plan* in the following community:

_____

Contact Person: _____

Title: _____

Address: _____

_____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

How long has the Steering Committee been formed?

☐ Less than a year
☐ 1 to 5 years
☐ More than 5 years

Date started: _____

Has this group been involved with other community planning projects?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Who was involved in the planning process? List individual's names and organizations.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Has the guidebook helped the committee take action in the strategic planning process?

☐ Yes   ☐ No *(please explain)*

_____

_____

Briefly describe the actions that have taken place with the support of this guidebook.

_____

_____

_____

What new ideas did the Steering Committee gain from working with this guidebook?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What changes have occurred in your community as a result of using this guidebook?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Additional comments:

_____

_____

_____

Please complete the feedback form and return it to Kelly Murray, Executive Director, Illinois Association of Regional Councils, 500 E. Capitol Avenue, P.O. Box 1093, Springfield, Illinois 62705-1093 or fax (217) 525-7438.

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