

A Guide to Starting and Developing Community Forestry Programs

With Specific Reference to

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Shade Tree Committees

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PREFACE

This guide has been prepared to assist in the development of successful community forestry programs. It is intended to serve as a reference for individuals/groups wishing to facilitate a new program in their community. The guide will be most beneficial if you and other interested individuals read through a section or two each evening and then get together to discuss what each feels are the most important and pertinent aspects. Because this guide is designed to cover a wide variety of situations (communities of various sizes and a multitude of

different needs for each), you may find that certain sections are more practical for your particular needs than others. Use what seems to be most important for your situation. The table of contents can be used to find the section(s) that might be most appropriate. Concentrate on those sections initially; skim over or save the rest for more indepth review at a later date. The authors believe that you will find the guide to be helpful in steering you and your community in the development of a successful community forestry program.

INTRODUCTION

Every community at some time or another encounters the task of establishing new projects or programs (i.e. main street improvement, community beautification, athletic facility improvements, centennial events, Arbor Day programs, etc.). Residents often feel that city government should be responsible for such programs and services. Unfortunately, though many city governments would like to provide these services, funding just doesn't allow it. Options are available, however, to people who have community program ideas but feel they lack the money and expertise to carry them out. The options an individual or group chooses and the sequence in which these options are implemented will play an important role in the program's outcome.

This guide provides direction from the first step, the initial idea about a community need, through the succeeding steps necessary to establish a successful community program.

The specific program that is referred to throughout this guide is community forestry. Trees are a commonly neglected city asset. Though most city officials realize the important role street and park trees serve in the community, budgets seldom extend beyond caring for basic public services such as streets, water, sewer and waste disposal. Most city officials are willing to support

resident efforts to maintain and improve important community resources — if their efforts are organized and appear to be heading in a positive direction.

The process begins by identifying community needs and evaluating the potential program to determine desired outcomes. When the program's need has been assured and its desired outcome(s) identified, program initiators must decide how the program can best be directed. Committees are frequently formed for this purpose. The committee's effectiveness will depend initially upon who is chosen to serve and how well the committee itself is organized, and in the long run, by how well they are able to involve the community in the program.

Once the committee is established, present and potential problems and concerns the program may encounter must once again be identified. These issues can be summarized into a goals and objectives statement for the program. Program goals and objectives make up the committee's action plan.

When the action plan is in order, methods of transferring information from the committee to the public must be considered. A look at the various situations a committee may encounter will help to reveal many pos-

sible communication tools. Knowing how and when to use these tools will play an important role in the success or failure of a program.

Program evaluation should take place while program objectives are being implemented and after they have been completed. Various evaluation processes are discussed along with how this information contributes to the program's future. Evaluation is a crucial element to program success. Periodically looking back at what has been accomplished and comparing it to what you had hoped to accomplish will reveal directions that are on target or need to be changed and objectives that

should be continued as they are or changed to move more surely toward committee/program goals.

Although community forestry is used as an example throughout the guide, any community program can be developed using the principles outlined. The keys to success are your imagination and determination. Community programs are most successful and long lived when everyone in the community is aware of and supports the program, and many people are actually involved. Be persistent and enthusiastic. It will rub off! Your entire community, as well as future generations, will reap the benefits.

SECTION 1 — PROGRAM/ISSUE EVALUATION

Suppose you have an idea for a program that will help solve your community's tree needs. Form a committee, get some money from the city council and start planting trees every spring. People love trees so there should be no problem with community support. Service clubs are always looking for community projects to tackle, so the tree planting labor will be no problem. The local garden supply store orders trees every spring and can order extra trees for the city. The committee can organize the whole program and plan a big ceremony each spring to celebrate the planting. Sounds like a great program! And it is — but there are pitfalls and a great deal of planning is needed.

Establishing Program Goals and Objectives

Any program begins with an idea. The idea may come from an individual or a group of people. Whatever the source, you must look closely at the potential effects the idea might have on the community if it is developed into a community program. What do you really hope to accomplish by initiating this new program? How realistic are your program goals? Will these goals be beneficial to the entire community? Who will benefit most from the program? Can you honestly expect community residents to support the program? If you are hoping to promote a **community** program, the goals you and your group have must be beneficial to the community as a whole. For example, if community residents are to fully enjoy the aesthetic benefits trees provide, the trees must be properly cared for. Implementing a program to assure maintenance of community trees will

help prevent injuries to local residents or damage to their property, thus minimizing local government liability.

Before getting too far into goals and objectives, be sure that each is clearly understood. The terms are often used interchangeably. For the purpose of this publication:

A goal is an end toward which effort is directed. An objective is part of a series of efforts needed to attain the desired end, or goal. Objectives lead to the goal.

Establishing goals before promoting new programs forces you to develop a clear understanding of what you and your group are hoping to accomplish. The process should involve looking at the present situation in your community and considering where the community will be after the program has been implemented. The time devoted to this process will play a large role in the success of your program.

After you know the desired program outcome (goals), strategies toward getting there (objectives) can be discussed. Program objectives include the methods (the "how-to-do-its") that must be implemented as the program develops in order to reach the desired program goals. As objectives are being developed, keep asking the question, "If we do this, what will be the result?" Keep in mind that each objective should have a goal, and each of these goals contributes to the overall program goal.

Be sure that the goals and objectives you set for the program are precise and measurable. This means carefully describing what lies between the current situation and the desired situation. For example, if 70 percent

of the trees along your city streets are a single species, such as American elm or Norway maple, and you want to reduce that percentage so that no single tree species constitutes more than 10 percent of the total street tree population, it will be most precise and useful to your program to state in your objectives that you want to reduce the percentage of this single species from 70 percent to 10 percent. The more precise and measurable your goals and objectives are, the higher your probability of achieving the desired change. This will also show you if the program has been successful or what should be changed if the program is not successful.

Kaufman (1982) suggests a statement of goals and objectives should:

- Tell what result is to be achieved.
- Tell when the result is to be achieved.
- Tell what criteria will measure its achievement and under what conditions it will be measured by and when.
- Communicate without confusion.

A possible example of a goals and objectives statement for a group wishing to initiate a community forestry program might be:

By 1995, the program will be running smoothly on an annual budget of \$20,000. Office space and equipment will be provided by local city government. Two individuals will be employed seasonally to provide street and park tree care. Administrative responsibilities will be handled by the Shade Tree Committee with assistance from a city government official such as the city planner and/or the state urban forester. The committee will meet monthly throughout the year. In addition to monthly meetings, committee members will be required to attend the annual "State Shade Tree Committees Workshop" conducted by the state urban forester. A Shade Tree Ordinance will have been passed by the city council recognizing the Shade Tree Committee as a council advisory committee and defining its responsibilities and powers. The ordinance will also include the following specifications:

1. No single tree species will make up more than 10 percent of the total street or park tree population, and the master street tree planting plan initiated in 1985 will be recognized and followed by all property owners in the community.
2. All nursery operators and tree care businesses will be licensed by the city to ensure proper care of the community forest.
3. A minimum of one workshop annually will provide education concerning community forestry for the public and private sectors of the community.

Notice that the goals and objectives in this statement:

- Are measurable.
- Identify who will display the desired behaviors and attitudes.

- List the criteria for evaluation and the conditions for evaluation.
- Leave little room for confusion.

Along with this "what-should-be" statement, a "what-is" statement should be prepared. From these two statements, objectives can be developed that will close the gap between them.

Identification of Publics

Upon completion of a "Goals" statement that includes objectives to reach these goals, things appear to be thumbs up for moving ahead and initiating the community program. But are they? Up to now, everything has been done by one individual or a small group of people. There has been no input from the community other than what you have perceived to be the community's best interests.

At this point, you should solicit outside input. But whose input would be most useful to increasing the program's chances of success? Not everyone in a community has equal influence concerning area programs and activities. Actually, a relatively small number of people influence local decisions. These key people are the ones who must be contacted before proceeding with the program. These individuals will give legitimization to your program. Without their support it may be next to impossible to activate the community.

Knowing who your local community leaders are (both social and political leaders) will be helpful when promoting programs to bring about change. These key people often own or control considerable resources such as jobs or money. They can often be identified by position or by their reputation. The mayor and/or city council members are good individuals to talk to when seeking to identify key groups or individuals. Also keep in mind that key individuals may vary depending on the program you are promoting. If you are promoting a program to control an insect-carried disease, such as Dutch elm disease, leaders of local environmental groups must be contacted before program promotion begins. But if you are promoting a program to increase pedestrian safety awareness, local environmental leaders would probably not be important influentials to contact.

The reaction of key people in the community to new programs will depend on the specific program emphasis, the program stage at which you involve these individuals and possibly who informs them. For example, the city mayor will be more likely to support a community shade tree program that he has been aware of (and has had opportunity to provide input into) than a program that has been planned without his input or approval.

The key people also should learn of these programs directly from the program initiators rather than indirectly through community gossip, etc. Community leaders want to know what is going on and want to be able to influence these activities before the news is spread throughout the community. Valid attempts to ensure this

will gain the respect of key individuals, even if they are not interested in becoming involved with the program.

The importance of these concepts cannot be emphasized enough. Programs have failed not because influentials were against them but because they were not seen as being supportive.

After the relevant community leaders have been contacted and your program idea has had time to be accepted by these key people (i.e. they have been informed and given the opportunity to provide input), plans for directing the program should be implemented.

Program Administration

One of the most common and potentially effective methods of directing a community program is through the appointment of a committee. The committee has numerous advantages over general group meetings as a method of reaching the public:

1. Smaller committees are more efficient and flexible than large groups. Each member has more opportunity to take part when the group is small. Committee size is best determined by deciding the number of people needed to accomplish the program's purpose. Group members should help establish the program's goals and understand that they must actively play a role if they are to see those goals accomplished.
2. Because committees are small, meetings can be conducted in an informal manner. This tends to promote open discussion, and committee members make greater personal contributions.
3. If members are specially chosen to serve, commit-

tees are more likely to have persons interested in addressing program goals and objectives.

4. A small group is much easier to convene than a large one.
5. A small group can operate more efficiently, particularly when several decisions must be made.

Programs may require more than one committee. Some individuals are more interested in organizing activities than in implementing them. Forming an advisory committee to plan programs and an action committee to implement the programs will involve more individuals and allow all to put their best skills to work!

Far too often we assume that appointing people to a committee and selecting a committee chairperson will ensure the development of a productive group. Unfortunately, this is just not true. Effective group relationships evolve with time. Knowing the principles of group formation and maintenance can speed up the process and improve group effectiveness.

Suggested Reading

- Fazio, James R., and D. L. Gilbert. 1986. Public relations and communications for natural resource managers. Kendall/Hunt Publ. Co., Dubuque, IA.
- Johnson, Craig, G. McPherson and S. Gutting. 1982. Community forestry manual for the cities and towns of Utah and Southern Idaho. Utah State Univ. Coop. Ext. Ser.
- Kaufman, Roger. 1982. Identifying and solving problems: A system approach (3rd edition). University Associates, San Diego, CA.
- Morgan, R., and World Forestry Center. 1987. An introductory guide to community and urban forestry in Washington, Oregon and California. World Forestry Center, Portland, OR.

SECTION 2 — ESTABLISHING A COMMITTEE

If you are going to ask people to become involved, you need to know why you are asking them and exactly what you will be expecting from them. This will require you to do some homework. Collecting the following information will benefit the potential program and provide the information you will need when confronting potential committee members.

Factors to Consider When Forming Committees

1. Purpose of the Group

Committee authority should be established by city

ordinance. The group may be given policy-making powers or it may be strictly advisory to local government. Shade tree committees often serve in an advisory capacity to the city council or local park board.

Develop an understanding with local government officials about who will have the final word on issues, and clearly communicate this understanding to committee members at the group's first meeting. If the committee will be responsible for implementing projects, be sure to define these projects as specifically as possible (i.e. a goals and objectives statement that is precise and measurable).

2. Time Commitment

If the program is to continue indefinitely, procedures to replace officers and members must be arranged. Staggered terms, frequently 2 or 3 years, are very effective for such programs.

3. Resources Available

Will the program require a budget? What other resources are necessary for the committee to function? Where will this money come from?

4. History

Have any events occurred that may inhibit the committee's effectiveness? For example, a similar program may have been attempted previously and failed. Factors that contributed to the program's failure must be determined and addressed.

5. Relationship to Other Organizations

How will the committee relate to existing groups in the community? Try to ensure that other groups will not view the committee as a replication of what exists. (i.e. The city council may consider a proposed shade tree committee to be a replication of an existing beautification committee, while the latter committee may have nothing to do with trees.)

Criteria for Selection of Members

The committee's purpose should be the most important consideration when determining how large it will be. Remember that the advantage to forming a committee is the greater efficiency and flexibility of a small group over a large one. For example, shade tree committees in communities with populations between 100 and 10,000 residents often include from 3 to 9 members.

Potential committee members should be able to determine why they are being asked. Certain criteria will be helpful in developing a list of committee candidates (Howard 1984). These criteria will also assure selection of individuals capable of carrying out an effective community program. Be sure to consider the committee's purpose and the community where the program will be implemented when selecting necessary criteria for selection of members.

1. Skills

- Group skills. Individuals should be capable of working with others and communicating in a group setting.
- Technical skills related to program needs (i.e. public relations, fund raising, tree care, etc.).
- Leadership skills. Not every member must be a potential leader, but leadership qualities will enhance group effectiveness. Leaders must also understand the importance of sharing leadership with others.

2. Knowledge

- ...of community or specific community elements

(i.e. local key people, segregations within population, etc.).

- ...and of subject matter relating to program needs.

3. Creativity

A successful group should have a mixture of "thinkers" and "doers." Most individuals tend to be one or the other!

4. Interest

Though knowledge of the specific program being started is not necessary, interest and willingness to learn are good qualities to look for in committee members.

5. Commitment

Be aware of the need to develop a sense of belonging and commitment, a committed membership. Because individuals serve on various groups in the community does not necessarily mean they will be committed and active in your program. Look for individuals eager to participate.

6. Access to Information/Resources

Your group will probably require access to specific resources. Having individuals with such access in the group may free up these resources.

7. Representativeness

Select individuals who will provide representation of various aspects of the community. Members commonly include local representatives of the city council, park board, power company, law enforcement agency, public works department, service clubs, nurseries and/or tree care businesses, Chamber of Commerce, garden clubs, senior citizens and a citizens representative. Don't forget to include appropriate key individuals (influentials)! They can be essential to committee/program success.

8. Training Function

It is often beneficial to the committee to have some inexperienced (but willing and active) members. People gain experience in the program's function by working alongside more experienced people.

Motivating People to Participate

You have now determined what the committee's purpose will be and what criteria to use for selecting potential committee members. Unfortunately, no magic formula is available for motivating people to become involved, but using a variety of approaches may help. Because everyone is different, the use of more than one approach will often be necessary.

1. Potential members will be more supportive of your ideas when you present them personally in a one-to-one situation.
2. Individuals must feel that they will play a signifi-

cant role in the success of the program. Try to consider each individual's basic needs and interest and appeal to these characteristics. When recruiting individuals, tell them why they were chosen and why their particular combination of knowledge, skills and interests is so important to the committee's success. If you are sincere, it will be an offer they can't refuse!

3. Define clearly the purpose of the committee, the committee's authority boundaries, the purpose of the program, and when the program will likely be finished. People must clearly understand the task and the time period for which they will volunteer.
4. Emphasize the benefits of participating in the program. Explain the training opportunities committee members will have. (Volunteering to serve will be beneficial to the individual. We can all stand to learn something new from time to time, and this will be beneficial to the community as well!)
5. Try to understand other points of view on community issues. Not everyone selected to serve will respond as you had hoped, so make an effort to understand their opinions. This will help to win program support from those important individuals choosing not to serve.
6. Let individuals know that they will be involved in the program planning process. People are more willing to serve if they are responsible for planning as well as implementing projects.

Committee Leadership

Much thought should go into selecting the chairperson of a committee. This individual is commonly selected by the program initiators and will direct the program until all members have been selected. The committee may then decide to elect officers or continue the program as is.

The primary responsibilities of the chairperson are to provide group leadership and to stimulate members to their highest productivity, both individually and as a group. Viewing leadership as a responsibility of all committee members can assist the growth of both the formal leader and members of the committee. Though the chairperson need not be the most knowledgeable committee member about the topic at hand, he/she should have the ability to organize the individual members into a working group. An enthusiastic and dynamic personality will also enhance the chairpersons' effectiveness. After the chairperson has been selected, other leadership roles are filled by appointment or election.

Some committees require that certain individuals serve as ex-officio members. This simply means that such an individual is a member by right of the office or professional position which he holds. This procedure enables the committee to keep in close touch with outside organizations and professionals. It is also a good way to make available certain kinds of information from

these outside sources which the committee may need to carry on its activities.

An ex-officio member may be given the same rights (voting, participation, etc.), duties and responsibilities as other members, but these specifics need to be made clear from the beginning.

Committee Procedures

The program committee is a reality at last! The next step is to call a committee orientation meeting. By this time, members should know why they have been selected and be familiar with general program goals. However, they may not be familiar with committee operation procedures. This item is often overlooked by new committees and can disrupt the road to progress. Members will be more likely to participate in meetings once they are comfortable with proper procedure.

Group operation will proceed much more efficiently, according to Lowry (1965), where:

1. The atmosphere is relaxed and supportive.
2. The chairperson guides and directs rather than orders (a catalyst rather than a dictator!).
3. Members understand the importance of reaching decisions **after** group discussion rather than before.
4. Attention is focused on program goals and objectives rather than on the formal rules of procedure.

In the early stages of committee development, a city government official or urban forestry specialist may need to take an active role, gradually dropping back as the group becomes familiar with committee procedures.

Nothing contributes to efficient committee operation like a written agenda. An agenda provides both long and short term program benefits. It provides direction for each meeting by listing specific objectives to be addressed, which better enables members to see how and where they can contribute. An agenda will also ensure at least minimum preparation before each meeting. The committee chairperson should be responsible for preparing the agenda of each meeting.

Committee meeting minutes serve as both a short and long term record of committee decisions and activities. This places an important responsibility on the individual delegated the task of taking minutes and relaying results of committee deliberations to the community and/or public officials. The secretary should be chosen on ability to record the heart of each meeting's discussions for later use by the group. This involves recording not only decisions made and actions taken at each meeting, but also interpreting in the minutes the nature and character of discussions. Each committee member should have the opportunity to read and react to the previous meeting's minutes before they are approved. Should a question arise in the future as to why a certain decision was made, the minutes will provide the only accurate explanation.

To emphasize the importance of accurate meeting minutes, and the importance of understanding the boundaries of authority delegated to a committee, let's look at what can happen when these issues are not addressed.

A newly formed shade tree committee had been asked by its local city council to evaluate a park tree being considered for removal. The committee met at the site, evaluated and discussed the situation and decided that, on the basis of health and safety, the tree was in good condition and not a hazard. Though the committee chairman recorded the decision and passed it on to the council, no one had been appointed to record the group's decision criteria. Unfortunately, the council decided the tree should be removed. When the local newspaper reported this, a large number of residents voiced their disapproval. A public debate ensued, and when the dust settled, the tree remained.

The whole ordeal left certain residents with a poor impression of city council, and city council with a poor impression of the shade tree committee. Had the committee provided the council a written account of their decision criteria, city officials would have had no reason to look unfavorably upon the committee. More importantly, had there been a clear understanding between the city council and the shade tree committee of the committee's authority boundaries, the conflicting decisions might never have occurred.

A few additional hints to improving committee effectiveness concerning meetings and members:

- Avoid unnecessary meetings. Time is far too valuable to waste, and the result will be unhappy committee members and ineffective program results.
- Encouragement, accomplishment and recognition are three essentials to maintaining active committee involvement. Let committee members know how important they are to the program, and publicly thank them for their efforts.
- A goal-oriented leader may try to move the committee directly into problem solving. Committee members must receive adequate time to become comfortable with each other and with the program goals and objectives. Ignoring these needs can lead to ineffective meetings and program downfall.

Committee Progress

All right! We have a group of people who understand why they are together and feel comfortable with each other. Everyone understands the general meeting procedures and is prepared to move ahead.

When the idea for a program was first being considered, individuals interested in starting the program established a list of potential program goals and objec-

tives (Section 1: Establishing Program Goals and Objectives).

To this point, this list has been a generalized basis for the program. Now the program committee must evaluate these criteria and identify specific program aims. This process enables the committee to look carefully at the situation from its own point of view and to decide as a group if the potential goals and objectives addressed initially are items to which they can devote their total efforts. This is best done by going through the process of establishing goals and objectives outlined in Section 1.

The group may find that establishing program direction is aided by following what is called the "Nominal Group Process" (Delbecq et al. 1975). This process is an excellent technique for preparing a list of program priorities. Necessary materials include a facilitator, newsprint pad, felt tip pens and a series of index cards for each participant. The process requires the following steps:

1. Committee members silently and independently make a list of program needs or problems as they perceive them.
2. Going around the table, each person reads one item which is then written on the newsprint pad. This round-robin continues until all items are posted. No debate is allowed, and duplicate items are not recorded twice.
3. After all items are recorded, each item is briefly discussed, particularly for clarification, but comments can also be offered in agreement or opposition to the item. The facilitator makes certain all items are covered in a timely manner.
4. Each participant then weights each item on an index card. One possible weighting system assigns a "3" to items of highest priority; "2" to medium priority; "1" to low priority; "0" to no priority.

The facilitator then collects the cards and lists each item along with the total number of points for each. If the total number of points are added and the points each item receives are divided into the total, a percentage will be achieved for each item. The end result is a program priority list.

Suggested Reading

- Blackburn, Donald C. 1984. Extension handbook. University of Guelph, Canada.
- Grey, G. W., and F. J. Deneke. 1986. Urban forestry (2nd Edition). John Wiley and Sons, NY.
- Moore, Carl. 1987. Group techniques for idea building. Applied Social Research Methods Series, Vol. 9. Sage Publ., Inc., Newbury Park, CA.
- Morgan, R., and World Forestry Center. 1987. An introductory guide to Community and Urban Forestry in Washington, Oregon and California. World Forestry Center, Portland, OR.

SECTION 3 — DEVELOPING A PROGRAM ACTION PLAN

The committee's list of program goals and objectives should be recorded in a program "statement of purpose." From this statement, the committee must develop an "action plan" that organizes goals and objectives into a plan of action the committee will follow. The action plan should be written so that program success can be measured as the program is implemented. A typical plan can be summarized as follows:

1. List the overall program purpose.
2. List goals that must be achieved to carry out the program purpose (goals statement).
3. List methods of reaching these goals as well as alternative methods (just in case your original plan doesn't work out. Use good offense rather than defense!). This list makes up the objectives statement.
4. Prioritize program goals and the most efficient and effective objectives to reaching each goal, and the time frame in which this should happen. This becomes your program "action plan," which details **what** is to be done, by **whom** and by **when**.
5. Initiate the program.
6. Evaluate how effectively the program goals are being met.
7. Make changes in areas where goals are not being met.

This seven-step process is helpful any time you want to identify and resolve problems. The program committee should be able at this time to proceed to Step 4, which involves prioritizing program goals and objectives. This is where the committee must begin looking beyond itself for program input.

Soliciting Public Opinion; Gaining Resident Input

Until now, program input has been sought only from key influentials within the community. Let us assume the program has been approved by these key influentials and the program committee has established the program's purpose and the committee's role in carrying this out. The time has come to present the program to the community for public input.

Before the committee proceeds any further, it is important that members consider more specifically the audience they will be attempting to influence. A community consists of many different groups and individuals, and each possesses unique characteristics. Two or more people with a common interest and who may be expected to react similarly in a particular situation or to a specific issue are referred to as a public (Fazio and Gilbert 1986). If committee members can identify these "publics" before initiating a public in-

formation campaign, they will be more efficient and effective in their efforts.

Keep these three important items in mind when identifying publics:

1. Publics are identified in relation to your group's position as each situation is analyzed. For example, when dealing with trees located beneath power lines, the power company and homeowners with trees affected by power lines will become the key publics. When promoting diversity of tree species in public parks, however, the key publics will be less specific. The entire community will need to be included in promotional efforts. Power companies would most likely not even be identified as a public. Publics will often change for each program project.
2. The list of who makes up a specific public should be updated each time an issue affecting that public arises. Time changes the interests and attitudes of people and groups. Groups consisting of elected or appointed officials may change. Avoid assuming that such a group's attitude toward your program will remain constant. Keep selling your program and be sure that the group that supported your program last year still supports your efforts this year!
3. Publics should be categorized to fit your program objectives. This is helpful when determining how and in what order to approach each public. Nursery operators and homeowner publics would be higher on the initial contact list than tree care services when planning a program to promote tree planting by residents along city streets.

Focusing on specific groups and individuals will increase the effectiveness of public relations efforts. The result will be greater program awareness, involvement and success.

Community Presentation Techniques

The process of presenting the program to residents for their input is an important one that must be carefully planned. Each public must be convinced by this effort that a problem or need exists and that the problem or need directly affects them. Community presentation techniques might include:

Survey or Questionnaire — If properly asked, questions can provide individuals with information that gets them thinking and talking about the program. At the same time, answers to these questions provide valuable information for the committee.

Public Meetings — The public meeting can be used to provide an overview of the proposed program to all interested residents. It can also provide an opportunity for individuals to voice their opinions publicly.

Small Group/Organization Presentations

Most communities consist of a network of groups such as service clubs, youth clubs, business associations, garden clubs, park boards, etc. that are active. Program presentations aimed specifically at these groups (each has a special interest to focus on) will pay great dividends for your program's future.

Local Media — Presenting the program through local newspaper, radio and television media can be effective if the process has been organized by someone familiar with these organizations. This is perhaps the best method of reaching the most people, especially to make them aware of a new program, but feedback is limited.

Comparison and Competition — Other communities in the area may have implemented similar programs. If it worked for them, it can work for you! Arrange a tour of such communities and/or arrange media coverage showing the benefits experienced by communities implementing similar programs.

Exploiting Crisis — People respond quickly to crisis. Take advantage of this fact when promoting a program intended to prevent a crisis or a recurrence of a past crisis. Many communities across the United States have experienced the devastating effects of Dutch elm disease. Using information from a community similar to your own that has experienced such a disaster can help heighten local awareness and enhance proposed prevention programs.

Individuals involved in presenting program information should be recognized within the community as being action leaders. Hopefully, the committee has such individuals available either as members or as resource personnel. The more inspiration, zeal, dedication and respect from the community these people have, the more successful your program will be.

Though all of the community presentation techniques mentioned earlier are important, only survey/questionnaires and public meetings will be discussed in detail. These two techniques, though they have tremendous potential to enhance programs, are poorly understood and often misused. Therefore they demand further explanation.

Keep in mind also that the purpose of community presentation techniques is to educate and/or enlist public support for desired programs and to give your committee a better understanding of public opinion regarding the programs and ideas you are proposing. Your committee members may feel that they have a good understanding of resident support or knowledge of the desired program. If that is the case, a survey will probably not be necessary.

Surveys and Questionnaires

Properly conducted, the survey can be a powerful tool. The survey not only collects information, but peo-

ple become directly involved by providing the information being sought. A well-done survey can reveal the proportion of a community's residents who support a specific program, hold certain attitudes and opinions, etc., and the proportion who do not. Such a tool is not only appropriate, it is necessary!

For a committee developing an action plan, the survey is an excellent way to collect public opinion concerning the proposed program. It also informs the public of the new program by providing information through properly worded questions. Keep in mind the full range of benefits a survey can provide. **A survey has the potential to reveal the percentage of residents favoring a specific action, inform residents of a new program and, most importantly, assist the decision-makers (your committee) in making program decisions.** To prepare, conduct and analyze a community survey takes time and careful thought.

Methods — The three most common methods used when conducting surveys are face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews and mailed questionnaires. Generally, response rates for mail surveys run 10 to 15 percent lower than response rates for face-to-face interviews and telephone questionnaires, which run about the same (Dillman 1978).

Telephone and mail surveys are the most commonly used community surveys, largely due to convenience and affordable costs. Telephone surveys yield much quicker results. Though some individuals do not feel comfortable with telephone interviews, this process is more personal than the mail survey, enabling the individuals conducting the survey to get a better feeling for respondents' true impressions. Telephone surveys conducted by volunteers such as program committee members can be beneficial in that members come away with a better feeling for resident attitudes concerning the program and the direction it should take. Committee members must be unbiased when conducting the survey, however, if the results are to be of any real value to the program.

When a survey requires a large number of participants, the mail questionnaire becomes much more practical than other methods. For example, a community may choose to seek comments from all residents rather than a representative cross-section of the community. In this situation, the mail survey will be much more practical and less time consuming than a telephone survey.

Having the committee conduct its own survey is advantageous in that it forces members to work together at this early stage of the program and it gives them an opportunity to hear first-hand how residents feel about the goals and objectives they have proposed. Thus, survey results will be much more useful if members have been involved in the entire survey process. A final advantage is the survey cost. Volunteer labor is much more practical than spending several thousand dollars

to hire a professional survey team — if the survey is conducted properly and the results are implemented into the program planning process!

Hiring impartial and objective community development specialists from outside the area can be beneficial when dealing with sensitive local issues. Professionals will likely be more efficient than a local volunteer survey team, thus yielding results more rapidly. The major disadvantage to this option is that local people may choose to ignore the results because they were not involved in the process. This problem reinforces the idea that residents need to have continuous feedback to keep them feeling involved in community projects.

Regardless of the survey method your committee chooses, it is essential that the results be unbiased. True community-wide representation can only be obtained if the survey is conducted in a random manner.

Public Meetings

Public meetings are ideal for presenting ideas and limited amounts of information, since people attending are usually interested in learning and contributing to the planning process. Committees may benefit from them by hearing new ideas or different interpretations of ideas they have presented. Public meetings are valuable in that they create awareness and inspire further program interest. Unless well planned and moderated, however, public meetings often become difficult when dealing with large groups of people, because effective exchange and discussion of ideas are impossible. Time limits dictate how much can be accomplished. Most people attending have a point of view they wish to express, but given a large crowd many will not have the opportunity to speak. The result is frustration and a feeling of "wasted time."

The key to success of this method of public involvement is assuring the public that their input is important and that it will be used in the planning process. This might be accomplished by accepting public "testimony" at a designated time during the meeting or accepting written comments if received by a designated date. Another approach involves scheduling small group meetings after the public meeting where individuals may further discuss concerns and ideas.

If people get the impression that they are just being given information without the opportunity to affect future decisions, meetings will be of little value and likely will do more harm than good. Every form of publicity (posters, radio, newspaper, television, direct mail, etc.) is important to assure good attendance and provide necessary feedback after meetings have been held.

Putting It All Together

The purpose for soliciting public input is to help the committee prioritize program goals and objectives. The committee needs to understand how residents/ publics view the program being proposed. Soliciting public opinion is a great idea, but too often the results of such efforts are not incorporated into the program prioritization and planning process. For this reason, the committee should consider how they will use the results of such efforts before seeking public input.

You will find that the use of a variety of techniques is really the most effective way to create public awareness and action. For example, local newspaper, radio and television are commonly used and are effective, but if your committee is interested in learning what people are thinking, incorporating additional techniques such as public meetings or questionnaires will probably be necessary. Also, consider what other communities in your area are doing. Have they had problems that your community could avoid by initiating a particular program? Why have programs in some communities been so successful? Are there organizations such as service clubs, Scouts, garden clubs, etc. to which your committee could present their ideas in order to enlist their support?

All of the community presentation techniques mentioned emphasize the need to create public awareness. But simply making the public aware is not enough. Residents must be motivated into action. Getting people to agree with program goals and objectives does not necessarily mean that people will take action. Residents need to commit to do something, such as volunteering to participate in the program, agreeing to contribute financially and agreeing to confidently support the program until program goals have been met. This commitment to action is one of the most important processes the program will face.

Suggested Reading

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- Fazio, James R., and D. L. Gilbert. 1986. *Public relations and communications for natural resource managers*. Kendall/Hunt Publ. Co., Dubuque, IA.
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SECTION 4 — MOTIVATING THE PUBLIC TO TAKE ACTION

Public Relations Principles

We now come to Step 5 of the action plan (Section 3, page 12), the program initiation stage. All previous efforts mean nothing if the public does not respond positively to the program. Incorporating some basic public relations principles into this effort will improve community response to your program and the committees' image in the community. The seven principles outlined here reflect the minimum knowledge needed for your committee to improve its public relations skills (Fazio and Gilbert 1986).

Principle 1: Every Action Makes an Impression — Everything the committee says and/or does will influence how others (various publics, the community as a whole, etc.) perceive the committee. Thus, every action produces a judgment by community residents. In dealing with the public, there is no escaping this principle.

Principle 2: Good Public Relations Is a Prerequisite of Success — Realize first that program success requires resident support. The next step is determining the best procedures and the right tools to assure that support.

Principle 3: The Public Is Actually Many Publics — A public is two or more people with a common interest and who may be expected to react similarly to a particular situation or issue. The population of a community can be separated into such common interest groups, resulting in increased efficiency and effectiveness of communications efforts by the committee.

Principle 4: Truth and Honesty Are Essential — No matter how powerful, how well financed or how well organized, no effort to influence public opinion can succeed on a foundation of dishonesty.

Principle 5: Offense Is More Effective Than Defense — Public relations must be an "aggressive" program activity. Positive relations must be developed with the various publics before negative incidents occur, rather than waiting until a problem or opposition arises and then taking defensive action to try and correct it. If something does go wrong, the correct action is for the committee to admit that a mistake has been made and that the committee is sorry. This can significantly reduce potentially devastating effects of negative incidents.

Principle 6: Communication Is the Key to Good Public Relations — Communication is the successful transmission of messages without distortion. It is essential in developing a favorable image of your committee and the program you represent. The more skillfully communication is used, the greater the chances

that public opinion will be successfully influenced. This will increase public support, which enables the committee to proceed in the program direction best for the community. This is the ultimate objective of public relations, and communication is the key to realizing this objective.

Principle 7: Planning Is Essential — Planning is a key to the success of any program or project. The effective program committee must plan every effort. Planning keeps the committee on the offensive in that it prevents negative events from occurring. It anticipates potential situations and plans actions that steer the program in the right direction. But situations will occur that cannot be anticipated. In these situations, planning should be the first step to reaction.

Committees must view resident involvement positively when promoting public programs. Resident participation can be promoted more positively if we assume that:

- People are happiest in groups.
- It is human nature for people to be interested and involved in things that affect them and their neighbors.
- People will not solve problems unless they own the problem or feel they own it.
- Every individual wants to improve personal effectiveness, and every community wants to improve its viability. Given proper information, both will do so.
- Lack of community interest by residents is contrary to human nature.
- Community apathy will develop when resident involvement is inhibited.
- If the obstacles to resident involvement are identified and removed, resident participation will likely increase.

Public Participation Obstacles and Solutions

Eliminating obstacles is best accomplished by looking at some common obstacles that exist to varying degrees and in different forms in communities. Several are presented below.

Poor Community Communications — We cannot expect people to become involved if they are not aware. Presenting the proposed program to residents through local news media is a frequently used and effective way of communicating. Coordinating an opportunity for public response to media information is also a good idea. Including residents in the planning stages of community programs will often increase community involvement. Answer the question, "How do people communicate within my community?" Could this method of communication be improved? If so, identify some possible solutions and implement them.

Limited Citizenship Skills — Most residents do not understand how communities, and particularly local governments, operate. Limited skills in group organization, communications and interpersonal relations contribute to inadequate public participation. These skills can be developed indirectly through “on-the-job” program experience. The key to this is presenting new programs in such a way that residents want to become involved, then integrating projects that will develop deficient skills. For example, rather than promoting a single community Arbor Day project, each neighborhood or various sections of the community could be encouraged to conduct their own program. This might be accomplished by selecting a key individual from each neighborhood (someone respected by the residents of each neighborhood) to take part in an Arbor Day training program. Residents are more receptive to new ideas from someone they personally know and respect than from a committee they may not be completely familiar with. These individuals can then organize neighborhood planning committees which consider ideas, plan publicity and coordinate involvement for their particular area. This enables more residents to become actively involved with meeting procedures, organizing, communicating and working with others.

Community Attitude and Expectations — Attitudes and expectations have a great impact on achievement. The attitude that “this community can’t get together on anything” will likely be true if we allow it to persist. This is why it is so important to identify the various publics within a community and adjust program promotion specifically to each group’s interest. Labeling the entire community as one group of “non-motivated” individuals is unrealistic and self-defeating. Individuals and community groups will work on problems if they are convinced that the problem truly exists — and that they will enjoy direct benefits from solving the problem.

Additional factors that limit resident participation might include too many poorly organized, unproductive meetings, limitations on parents with small children, “burned-out” leadership and general impatience with others. These factors can be overcome. For example, bimonthly newsletters published by the American Forestry Association (Urban Forestry FORUM) and

the National Arbor Day Foundation (Arbor Day) are loaded with potential program ideas. Developing communication lines with established shade tree committees in your state as well as other states will also provide your committee with an abundance of useful information.

Committee meetings and public awareness programs do not have to be conducted indoors. Arrange for your shade tree committee to meet at the city park when possible and invite the public to attend from time to time. Special presentations by local or state tree care professionals are also a necessary and inspirational addition to committee meetings or programs. Incorporating new ideas into your program and providing opportunities for people to become involved will greatly enhance your program’s success.

Keep in mind that obstacles will not be removed overnight. A certain public just may not be willing to participate. That is to be expected. Hopefully, your committee has identified many publics and prioritized them for the particular project. Consider what may have gone wrong, make adjustments and move on to the next group. If your committee considers these factors and consistently works on eliminating barriers to participation, it will experience greater personal satisfaction along with eventual program success.

Suggested Reading

Arbor Day Newsletter. A bi-monthly publication of the National Arbor Day Foundation. Membership fee is \$10/year. Write to: National Arbor Day Foundation, 100 Arbor Ave., Nebraska City, NE 68410.

Books related to Volunteerism in your local library, or write to: National Center for Citizen Involvement, 1214 16th St. N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

Fazio, James R., and D. L. Gilbert. 1986. Public relations and communications for natural resource managers. Kendall/Hunt Publ. Co., Dubuque, IA.

FORUM Newsletter. A free, bi-monthly publication of the National Urban Forest Council. Write to the National Urban Forest FORUM, the American Forestry Assn., 1516 P St., N.W., Washington, DC 20005.

Tree City U.S.A. Bulletin. Bi-monthly, \$10/year. Especially for shade tree committees. Write to the National Arbor Day Foundation, 100 Arbor Ave., Nebraska City, NE 68410.

SECTION 5 — EVALUATING THE PROGRAM

Evaluation can be a committee's best friend. Unfortunately, however, this important element of community programs is commonly overlooked. Evaluation is necessary because, if properly conducted, it indicates both the elements of the program that have been successful and those requiring change. The key question to consider when evaluating is, "Did the program or the specific objective achieve desirable results?"

Evaluation Considerations

The evaluation process begins by developing a clear understanding of what you are evaluating, why you are evaluating and how you intend to use the results. Those using the results (i.e. the program committee, program sponsors, etc.) should determine the information to collect and when it should be collected. The following factors can help your committee determine necessary information to collect (Brack and Moss 1984):

Evaluation Purpose — As stated previously, evaluation is necessary because, if properly conducted, it indicates both the elements of the program that have been successful and those requiring change. Constant evaluation of the ongoing program is necessary through careful observation from the committee and a qualified observer. Through this process, your committee will likely identify specific program areas that are not achieving desirable results. A thorough evaluation of these areas will be necessary to identify solutions.

Resources Available — The evaluation process will require committee time, expertise and possibly money. Communities commonly operate programs under limited budgets and often restrict themselves to a thoughtful program critique by a qualified observer. Such evaluation is adequate, but proper planning combined with assistance from state Cooperative Extension Service specialists can enable additional, more informative evaluation procedures to be used.

Program Phase Being Evaluated — Identify which phase of the program you wish to evaluate and evaluate each program phase separately. For example, evaluating community involvement in a specific phase of the program, such as resident participation in Arbor Day celebrations, would be quite different from evaluating the results of an educational campaign to promote proper pruning in the community.

Program Setting — Evaluation procedures must fit the community. Evaluation ideas can be gained from other communities and their programs, but be sure such information will be effective in your community. This is best carried out by testing ideas before implementing them. Plan ahead and implement evaluation into your program before the project goes public.

Who Should Be Evaluated? — Any individual

or group potentially affected by the program outcome should be included in the evaluation process. For community programs, such as a shade tree program, this should include all residents. It is important that if only a percentage of residents are evaluated, they should be selected in a random manner to assure unbiased results.

Goals and objectives should be easy to measure if they are initially written in measurable terms. At any point, therefore, you should be able to see if the program is progressing in the intended direction. If things are not going as planned, Kaufman (1982) lists a number of options:

- Change the program goal(s).
- Change the program objective(s).
- Improve the method(s) being used to reach the program goal(s) and/or objective(s).
- Quit.

Re-evaluating the **method** of achieving program goals is generally the best move when things aren't going as planned. Program goals and objectives may be fine, but if the methods being used are not adequate, the program will not be successful. Ask yourself, "Are the right people involved?" If not, are they being given adequate opportunity to participate? Do residents feel a part of the program effort? Remember, the process should include presenting information to residents, providing opportunities for and encouraging public discussion and understanding, and then watching to see if the information is used. You need to be realistic and patient, and need to keep trying throughout the evaluation process!

Types of Evaluations

Evaluation is useful at many different stages in a program. Too often, we consider it to be something that comes after the program is completed. Your committee should be aware of three basic types of evaluations:

1. Needs Assessment

This is conducted by the idea initiators and, later on, by the program committee as the idea progresses into the development of a community program. Identification of program needs is crucial if a program is to grow and fulfill its intended purpose. Completion of program objectives often creates new needs through increased community awareness. For example, a project aimed at promoting tree planting will likely increase the need for proper tree care information (planting, watering, fertilizing and pruning) in addition to increasing local demand for trees. Anticipating such needs is important for smooth program operation. By identifying indirect needs in advance, the program committee can prepare appropriate literature and plan workshops to meet these needs before they occur.

2. Process Evaluation

This involves constant evaluation of an informal nature from the time the idea for a program is initiated until it has been completed. Constant evaluation can be the most important part of a program. The committee should always be checking to see that the right interest groups (publics) have been identified and that original problems are still valid. If such items change during the course of a program, objectives may need to be adjusted as well. Program goals are much less likely to change if the committee has taken its time in preparing them. For example, your committee may specify one program goal to be that no single tree species should make up more than 10 percent of the total street tree population by the year 2000. The objectives specified to reach this goal may be:

- a. Develop master street tree planting plan.
- b. All future street tree plantings must follow the master street tree planting plan.
- c. Street trees may be planted only after securing a planting permit from city hall.

Upon initiation of this phase of the program, residents may begin complaining about the tree species listed for their particular neighborhood. Because your committee has used **process evaluation** by watching (listening) to see how the public responds as the program is being implemented, the program can be enhanced by simply adding a fourth objective — public review of master street tree plan — to reach the program goal.

Program coverage should also be evaluated. By identifying how well information has been transferred throughout the community and to special interest groups, the committee can learn where communication gaps exist. These gaps must be quickly addressed to help assure that specific objectives are reached, thus better enabling each program goal to be achieved. The committee must also determine if the public has received the information as intended. This is accomplished by providing an opportunity for the public to provide feedback (through the use of public meetings, questionnaires, etc.). Including feedback opportunities for each objective provides an opportunity for evaluating both coverage and audience response.

The importance of continuous process evaluation (evaluation of objectives, as they are being implemented, necessary to reach program goals) cannot be overstated. Unfortunately, this is the type of evaluation most commonly overlooked.

3. Accomplishments

After completing objectives toward a specific goal, groups often look at what they have accomplished. Committees tend to focus on this type of evaluation most often. Fazio and Gilbert (1986) list three

important things to look for when determining program accomplishments:

- a. Were the desired groups and/or individuals reached and how well were they reached?
- b. Was the response that which you had hoped to receive?
- c. What will the long range impact of the program be on the community (i.e. has the community's attitude concerning the need to plant trees been changed and will this attitude persist in the years to come?).

Though both (a) and (b) were discussed as elements of process evaluation, they must also be considered **after** objectives have been implemented. If goals and objectives are established at the program outset (desired short and long range impact of each goal and the program as a whole), the program accomplishments to look for are also established.

Regardless of the type of evaluation your committee chooses to use, members must remember to measure in comparison with goals and objectives established at the beginning of the program and look for the accomplishment of **desirable** results.

Evaluation Techniques

The types of evaluations discussed earlier can be collected using three different techniques, according to Brack and Moss (1984):

1. Observation

People can be observed to see how the program affects their actions. This can involve actually watching people (i.e. noting the number of participants in an Arbor Day program) or simply noting their actions (i.e. recording the number of trees being topped, planted, trimmed, etc. before, during and after the program).

2. Case Study

Records and documents can be studied to see what people have done in the past. This information then serves as a basis for documenting changes that occur as a result of program efforts.

3. Asking Questions

Through the use of personal, telephone and written questionnaires, necessary information may be collected. These evaluation techniques are discussed in Section 3.

More than one of these methods actually should be used. For example, the case study may be useful in the early idea stages to determine potential attitudes toward a specific program. Surveys will also provide this information, though the process involved will likely require more time, money and expertise. State Cooperative Extension Service specialists may be available to assist committees in setting up such surveys. Contact your county Extension agent for more information.

Observation is probably the least costly method but must be well planned to assure useful and valid results. The process is most effective when a limited number of items are observed at once, you are clear as to what is being observed, more than one individual takes part in observations so that results can be compared, and observations are taken to represent all interests affected by the program. Individuals involved in this type of evaluation should simply record what they see at the time and should not place any judgments on their observations. This ensures an objective view of each situation.

Standards for making decisions based on all of the evaluations can be developed after the evaluations have been completed. This ensures that regardless of what an individual observed, all program decisions are based on the same set of standards.

Program Evaluation Reports

The individuals in charge of distributing funds that support your program (city council, state or federal agencies, etc.) will expect an annual report of how the program is progressing. They will initially be concerned that the program has a strong statement of goals and objectives and that it serves a necessary purpose. They will also expect to receive information on how the program is progressing toward these specified goals. The evaluation process should seek to gather at least this type of information if you hope to continue to receive program funding.

Evaluation reports should also include information such as what was evaluated, evaluation methods and procedures, why you conducted the evaluation, who you evaluated, what your major findings were and what your recommendations are. The report will be used by your committee as well as by those funding the program and should be written with this in mind.

Program progress and results can be effectively relayed to the community through the use of local media. Press releases are effective, and all local media (radio, newspaper, television, etc.) should be provided equal opportunity to cover the story. Printed reports may be mailed to specific groups and individuals and/or made available at specified public locations.

The greatest benefit of conducting program evaluations comes when using the results. Future program decisions should be based on the information provided by these evaluations. Evaluation results will help your committee make the best possible program decisions.

Suggested Reading

- Blackburn, Donald C. 1984. Extension handbook. Univ. of Guelph, Canada.
- Fowler, F. J., Jr. 1988. Survey research methods (revised edition). Applied Social Research Methods Series, Volume 1. Sage Publ., Inc., Newbury Park, CA.
- Morris, Lynn L., and C. T. Fitz-Gibbon. 1978. Evaluators handbook. Sage Publ., Inc., Beverly Hills, CA.

SECTION 6 — CONCLUSIONS

A lot of information has been presented in this guide. It is not intended to be absorbed in one or even a few sittings but is something to be referred to as necessary. As you read, make notes about the ideas/suggestions that appeal to you. Give them a few days to develop. Then refer back to this guide to help you expand on your ideas. Soon you will find that you have developed more ideas than you think you can handle.

Keep writing ideas down. It doesn't matter how disorganized things seem initially. Just get everything that comes to mind down on paper. After a period of time, read through these thoughts and begin organizing them, referring back to this guide as needed.

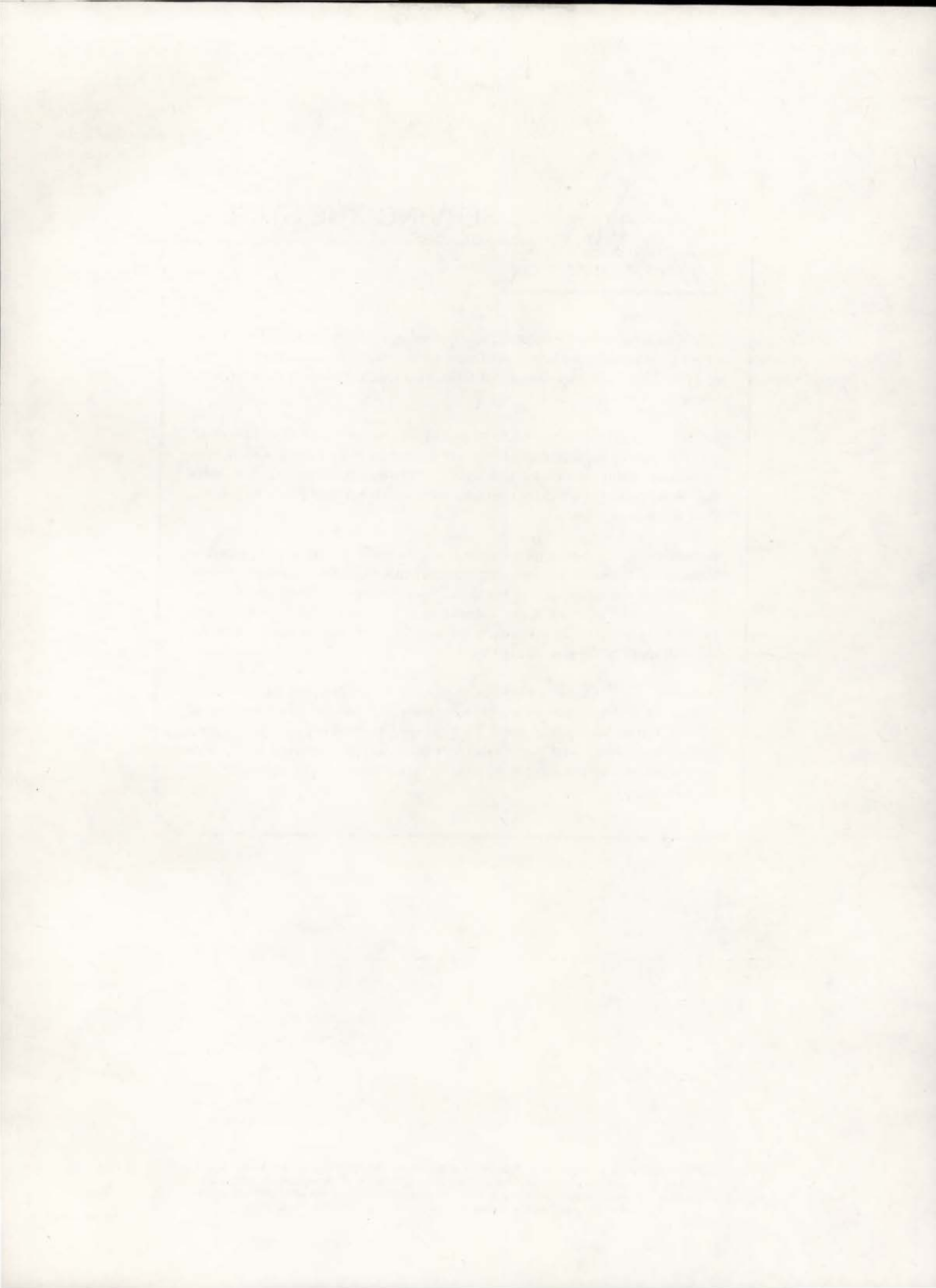
As you go through this process, you will likely end up with a rough draft for a community program. Although initiating programs can be a lot of work, the benefits you and your community receive will reward your efforts.

The actual program you develop may or may not be easy to get started in your community. That will vary with the community and how well you address necessary criteria. But keep on trying. Few people or programs become successful without first enduring some difficulties. Re-evaluate your situation, consider what you can change or do differently, and move ahead. You will find that persistence pays.

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SERVING THE STATE

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