

Session 8

Learning to Solve Our Community Problems Step by Step

8

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Session Overview

Session Summary: In Sessions 1 – 7, participants have learned how to work together through shared group leadership. They have developed a shared vision of their community's future. They have learned to build their group skills so they can work together effectively over time. And they have learned to communicate their vision to resource people, county officials and other community groups. The next six sessions demonstrate to the group a step-by-step method for solving community problems in an effective way.

This is the first session on how to use the Community Voices problem solving model. Participants will use the model to work towards their vision and to solve community problems/needs. During most of these six sessions, the participants will be exploring ways to solve three community problems they have chosen to work on from their vision. This can serve as a guide to solve other problems in their vision. But in this session, the first thing they will learn is an organized way or method that will help them to reach their community vision. The participants will learn that a “model” is like a guide and that the “problem solving model” is a guide to help them solve problems to reach their community vision. They will learn the six steps of the problem solving model and practice using the model to solve simple problems. The video in this session “How Fairfield got its Mail Service” is a powerful example of a community group using the problem solving model to get things done.

- Objectives:** At the end of Session 8, participants should be able to:
1. Acknowledge that they need a way or process to follow to get from their community as it is now to the community in their vision;
 2. Explain in their own words what a model is;
 3. Explain how a problem solving model can be a useful and necessary guide to solve problems in the community;
 4. List the six steps of the Community Voices problem solving model; and
 5. Show how the Community Voices problem solving model (or a part of it) can be used to solve a simple problem.

Session Overview

Session Outline: Opening the Session

Review
Bridge
Introduction

Skill Work

1. How do we get from where we are now to where we want our community to be in ten years?
Strategy: exercise and discussion
2. What are the six steps of the Community Voices problem solving model?
Strategy: example with discussion
3. How does the problem solving model work?
Strategy: practice and discussion
4. How did Fairfield County solve its mail service problem?
Strategy: video example with discussion

Follow Through

Can we use the problem solving model?
Strategy: practice at home

Closing the Session

Review – What did we learn and is it useful?
Preview – Step 1 of the problem solving model

Session Overview

- Materials Needed:**
- drawings from Session 3: “Our Community Today” and “Our Community in Ten Years” and the list, “Community Problems and Needs”
 - two copies of Tool Kit 8.1 – 8.5
 - Tool Kit 8.6
 - flip chart paper with the six steps of the problem solving model written on it (Tool Kit 8.7)
 - copies of example of problem solving (Tool Kit 8.8) for each person
 - flip chart paper
 - markers
 - masking tape
 - videotape “How Fairfield Solved Its Mail Problem”
 - VCR, monitor and extension cord, if needed

Things to Do

- Before the Session:**
1. Make two copies of the squares in Tool Kit 8.1 – 8.5. You will need these for the exercise in Skill Work 1.
 - With copy 1, cut each of the five squares into the three marked pieces.
 - Mix up the pieces
 - Put the pieces in an envelope and label it “*Group 1*”
 - With copy 2, cut each of the five squares into the three marked pieces.
 - Mix up the pieces
 - Put the pieces in an envelope and label it “*Group 2*”
 2. Review the six steps of the Community Voices problem solving model.
 3. Write the steps of the problem solving model on flip chart paper (Tool Kit 8.7).
 4. Find the two Community Drawings the group did in Session 3 and the list of problems related to the vision.
 5. Make sure you have the videotape and VCR set up before the session begins.
 6. Make copies of Tool Kit 8.8 for each person.

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Learning to Solve Our Community Problems Step by Step

Opening the Session

Review: 1. Open the session with these words or words of your own.

We need to review two things today: the county wide meeting and the observations you made about how groups work. Let's start with the county-wide meeting. Would three or four volunteers tell us briefly what the main points were that you learned at the meeting?

Points could include: progress of other groups in the program, common points in the vision, introduction to resource people and county officials, problems can be county-wide, community groups can work together on common problems that affect everyone

Now let's go to the second part of the review. In Session 6, you were asked to observe various groups that you are a part of or come into contact with in the community. You were to note the kinds of roles members of the groups played and the kinds of decision-making approaches they used. Will some of you volunteer to report on what you observed about groups?

2. After the reports are finished, ask two volunteers to briefly answer these two questions:

- *What kind of decision-making approach did the group learn in Session 6?*
- *Why is this approach (consensus) the one we use in Community Voices?*

Bridge:

In the first seven sessions, we have worked on three important ideas: (1) You have learned what shared group leadership is. (2) You have worked out a shared vision of what you want your community to be like in 10 years. (3) You have learned and practiced skills that will help you work together as a group and how to network with county officials, resource people and other

community groups. All three of these are necessary to know if you are going to be a group which improves things in your community. But you still need to work on two more ideas: (1) You need to learn a method that people in communities like yours use to solve problems and (2) You will learn how to work on your own as a community group. In the next five sessions, we will be working on a way to solve problems.

Introduction:

It will take some time and planning to make your community vision happen. Some problems can be solved right away. Others will take more time. But you must go one step at a time, learn, and build on your successes. In this session, you will learn a way that many other communities have used to solve problems.

Skill Work

1. How do we get from where we are now to where we want our community to be in ten years?

Purpose:

It won't be easy to get where you want your community to be in ten years, but a guide or model may make it easier. A model is a plan or method that shows you the steps to do something. We're going to talk now about models: what they are and how they can help us.

Strategy: exercise and discussion

Materials: two envelopes with five squares cut into fifteen pieces, Tool Kit 8.7, two drawings from Session 3

Note to Co-facilitator: This exercise will be difficult to facilitate if you have not prepared the materials ahead of time. See **Things to Do Before the Session # 1.**

Directions:

1. Divide the group into two small groups and ask them to move to different sides of the room.
2. Give each group one of the envelopes with the five squares cut into fifteen pieces.
3. Say this to the two groups:

Both of these envelopes are the same. Inside each of these envelopes, there are fifteen small pieces of paper. If you put them

together in the right way, you can make five squares from the fifteen pieces. I want each group to try to make the five squares. I am going to give Group 1 a guide or model for making the squares. Let me know when your group is finished making all of the five squares.

4. Give Group 1 a copy of Tool Kit 8.6 which shows how to make the five squares from the fifteen pieces.
5. When one group finishes, look at the work of both groups and then ask both groups to stop working

Note to Co-facilitator: Group 1 should finish first since they have a model or guide of how to put the pieces together, but Group 2 may have gotten some of the squares too. If Group 2 finishes first, indicate that they were creative and worked well as a group.

6. Ask the two groups to come back together as a large group.
7. Read and discuss these questions with the group:

- *Which group finished first and why?*
- *How did the group do that didn't have the model or plan to follow?*
- *What did you learn from this exercise?*

8. Read this summary of the exercise:

If there was enough time, both groups could figure out how to make the five squares without using a model or guide. But the model helped Group 1 see and understand the steps to follow to solve the problem. We also have a model that will show you the steps to follow to solve problems.

This exercise also emphasizes working together and sharing ideas. It also shows the importance of different group roles and how each person contributes to completing the whole task. We cannot solve problems if we don't work together.

9. Tape up the two drawings the group did in Session 2: "Our Community Today" and "Our Community in Ten Years."
10. Point to the two drawings and tell the group:

These are the drawings you did in Session 2. Here's your view of your community as it is now and here's your drawing of what you want your community to be like in ten years. Getting from the

present to the future in your community is a lot like figuring out how to make the five squares. A model or guide will help you get the best results. We're going to look at a model that many other people have used to solve problems in their communities. It is called the Community Voices Problem Solving Model.

Summary:

There are steps and an order to doing almost anything. When you fix a car that won't start, make a quilt, or grow a garden, you follow steps even though you don't think about it. Solving community problems is something you can do well if you learn and follow the steps in a guide or model.

2. What are the six steps of the Community Voices problem solving model?

Purpose:

Now let's look at the Community Voices problem solving model. There are six steps in this model or guide. These steps can help you solve community problems and problems in your work and everyday life. This model has been used by other communities like this one to work toward their community visions. First we're going to see the six steps. Then we're going to try out the steps using a simple example.

Strategy: examples with discussion

Materials: flip chart paper with the six steps of the problem solving model written on it (Tool Kit 8.7)

Directions: 1. Tape up the flip chart paper with the steps of the problem solving model.

Note to Co-facilitator: Save this chart. You will need it in Session 9.

2. Say to the group:

When we go over the six steps of the problem solving model, think about a group of people in your community such as senior citizens, youth, farmers, mothers with children or families. Think about what their problems or needs are.

3. Read and explain the six steps to the group in words the group will understand. Here are some suggestions to help you:

Step 1: Identify the problem

In other words, think about the community situation. Figure out what the problem is. What should change? If there is more than one problem, which one will you choose to work on first?

Step 2: Investigate the problem

Gather different kinds of information on the problem. The investigation may include why it is happening. Find out how people have tried before to deal with this problem before. Find out what other people are thinking about this problem. What are the resources for solving this problem?

Step 3: Determine solutions

What are all the things you could do to solve the problem? What things would work best in your community? What solution will you try first? How many different solutions can you use to tackle the problem? What are the short-term and long-term solutions? How can you combine ideas, skills and resources to solve the problem?

Step 4: Make an action plan.

How will your group share responsibilities and tasks to implement the solution? What are the things that need to be done? Who in the group will help and seek others to help? What will each person do? When will they do it?

Step 5: Take action

This just means go ahead and do what you have planned to do. For example, if you decide to implement a youth program, whoever is responsible for the tasks will make the action happen.

Step 6: Follow up

Did the solution work the way you hoped it would? If you had to do something like this again, what would you do in a different way? What else do you need to do?

Summary:

You have been introduced to the six steps of the problem solving model. You can use this model in various situations. You can solve a household problem or a problem at work with this model. It is

Six Steps of the Community Voices Problem Solving Model

1. Identify the Problem.
2. Investigate the Problem.
3. Determine Solutions.
4. Make an Action Plan
5. Take Action.
6. Follow Up.

especially important to use this model to work on community problems. The problem solving model will help you figure out solutions that will enable your group to change many conditions and situations that will improve your community.

3. How does the problem solving model work?

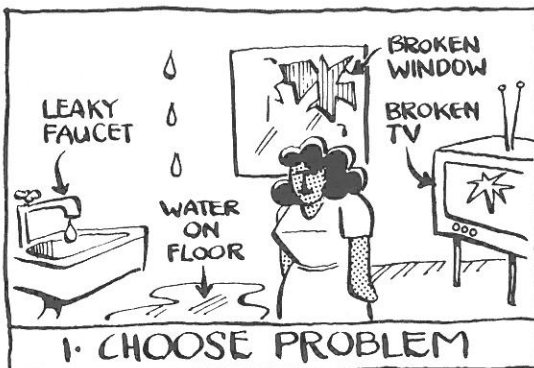
Purpose: Now let's look at a simple example and practice using the six steps of the problem solving model.

Strategy: practice and discussion

Materials: example of problem solving model (Tool Kit 8.8)

Directions: 1. Pass out copies of Tool Kit 8.8. Say to the group:

Look at this example of problem solving. Each box in the picture represents a step in the problem solving model. Let's discuss what is happening in each of the six boxes in the picture.



2. Point to Box 1: **Identify the problem.** Ask:

- What are the problems for the woman in this house?
- What problem should the woman choose to work on first? Why?

3. Point to Box 2: **Investigate the problem.** Ask:

It appears that the water on the floor is a problem, but this problem is really the result of another, bigger problem.

- What does this woman need to find out to determine the cause of the problem?
- What does she find out?





4. Point to Box 3: **Determine solutions.** Ask:

- What are some of the solutions for dealing with the problem?
- What solution does the woman choose?



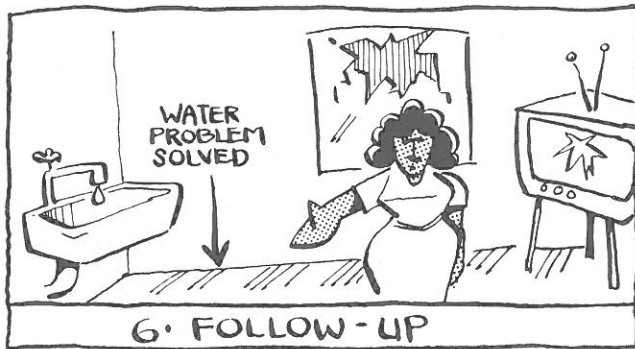
5. Point to Box 4: **Make an action plan.** Ask:

- What are the things the woman needs to do to before she can start on the solution?



6. Point to Box 5: **Take action.** Ask:

- What is happening here?



7. Point to Box 6: **Follow up.** Ask:

- What should the woman do in this step?

8. Ask and discuss this question:

- Are there any questions on the steps of the model?

Summary:

We have gone over this example to give you some practice in using the steps of the problem solving model. From it we can see that what we sometimes may view as the problem may be the result of a bigger problem. The problem solving model suggests that we must investigate further to determine the cause or root of the problem before we determine solutions and action plans. Sometimes we spend too much time working on symptoms or results of problems rather than on the larger problems. There will be many more chances to practice and talk about the steps of this model to solve community problems.

4. How did Fairfield County solve its mail service problem?

Purpose:

Now we're going to see a videotape that shows how a community used a step-by-step problem solving model to identify a problem and work on it. The video also shows that groups like yours can work together and make a difference in the community.

Strategy: video and discussion

Materials: videotape "How Fairfield Solved Its Mail Service Problem," VCR, monitor and extension cord if needed

Directions:

1. Introduce the video. Tell the group that the video is short and you will show it two times. You may use the following introduction or put the information in your own words:

In the Community Voices video that we saw in the first session, you saw four people that worked on different types of problems: health care, housing, roads and jobs. After groups see that video, they often ask, "How did those leaders go about getting those problems solved in their communities?" In this video, we'll see the problem solving steps one of those same communities—in Fairfield County, South Carolina—followed to solve a problem. Watch the video the first time just to see what happens.

2. Show the video, "How Fairfield Solved Its Mail Service Problem." It's about eight minutes long.
3. Stop the video and rewind it after the first showing is over.

4. Ask the group to answer and discuss the following general questions about the video:

- *What was the problem the Zion Hill community decided to work on?*
- *Why did they decide to work on this problem?*
- *Were they successful?*
- *Does anyone want to say anything else about the video before we look at it again?*

5. Say to the group:

As you watch and listen to the video again, look for how they use each of the six steps of the problem solving model.

6. Read or ask a volunteer to read each of the six steps of the model from the flip chart paper.
7. Show the video again. When it is over, turn off the VCR and the TV.
8. Read and ask the group to discuss the questions following each step of the problem solving model:

Note to Co-facilitator: There are possible answers listed after each list of questions. These are just a guide. It's much better if the participants figure out these answers than if you tell them the answers.

Step 1: Identify the problem

- *What community problems and needs did the group identify as part of their vision?*

Possible answers include: Housing, better school bus service, a community park, annexation to the town and home mail service.

- *What problem did they choose?*
- *Why did they choose the problem of mail service to work on?*

Possible answers include: It was a winnable problem. The problem was one the group could do something about right away. The problem was an important need in the community because post office box rates were going up and people on fixed incomes didn't have the extra money.

Step 2: Investigate the problem

- *Why didn't Zion Hills have home mail service?*
- *How and where did they investigate the cause of the problem?*

Possible answers include: A long time ago, the community was too near the post office to get home delivery and now they were outside the city limits.

• *How did this information help them solve their problem?*

Possible answers include: The community didn't have home delivery because of a very old rule that didn't apply anymore. They found out that they could work with the postmaster to change the rule.

Step 3: Determine solutions to the problem

• *What solutions did the group come up with?*

Possible answers include: They had to investigate what resources could help with the solutions. They determined that they needed resource people to help them with their problem. The resources and the people in the community all contributed to solving the problem: the Postmaster, the Highway Department and store owners. They talked to the postmaster to change the rule and help come up with a solution. They decided to ask for donations of mail boxes or discounts on the price of mail boxes. They decided to ask the Highway Department to install the mail boxes.

Step 4: Make an action plan

• *What do you think people had to do to get the mail boxes put up?*

Possible answers include: The leaders in the community had to carry out different actions as a group had to accomplish the task:

- meet together and work in groups like in Community Voices
- reach out to and work with others in the community by contacting everyone in Zion Hill about getting a mail box
- connect to resources: find store owners who would donate mail boxes for those who could not afford them
- get all the mail boxes together
- contact the Highway Department about installing the mail boxes
- tell the postmaster when the all the boxes were up
- help people fill out change of address forms from their post office box to their new home delivery address
- check to see if everyone was getting their mail

Step 5: Take action

- *How long did it take to get the mail boxes put up?*
- *How was it done?*
- *Did the action take a great deal of money?*

Possible answers include: It took six months to solve the problem. The problem was solved by the people of Zion Hill using various resources including the postmaster, store owners in the town, and the highway department. The action didn't cost very much money.

Step 6: Follow up

- *Was the problem solved?*
- *What did the community learn from this experience?*

Possible answers include: The problem was solved and the community of Zion Hill got free mail service directly to their homes. They learned that they could change things and help themselves if they worked together. They learned that they could probably work on bigger problems.

Summary:

We've learned from this video about the Zion Hill community that communities can and do solve problems using the problem solving method. We also learned that you need to have a community's problems and needs identified for everyone to be aware of before you choose one or two problems to work on. And you need to figure out and agree on how you will choose several problems if you have a list of problems.

We also learned that you do not always need just money to solve problems. You need to investigate a mix of existing resources that might help you solve a problem. The hard work is creating new ideas and ways to solve problems with existing facilities and resources; and by combining community groups, organizations and agencies with resources to solve problems.

Follow Through

Can we use the problem solving model?

Purpose: | *The purpose of this Follow Through is to give you practice using the problem solving model at home or at work.*

Directions: 1. Say this to the group:

| *I want you to choose a problem at home or at work to solve using the six steps of the problem solving model. Remember, once you have*

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- Summary:** *decided on a problem you have done Step 1. Use the handout you received earlier in the session to help you with the steps. At the beginning of the next session, I'll ask volunteers to explain how they used the steps to solve a problem.*
- Summary:** *While you are practicing using the problem-solving model in other situations, I hope you'll see the ways this model can be useful in the various things you are involved with.*
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Closing the Session

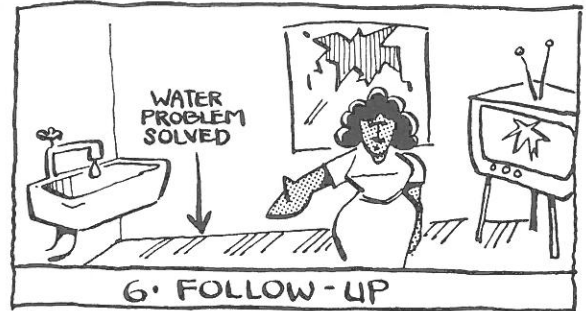
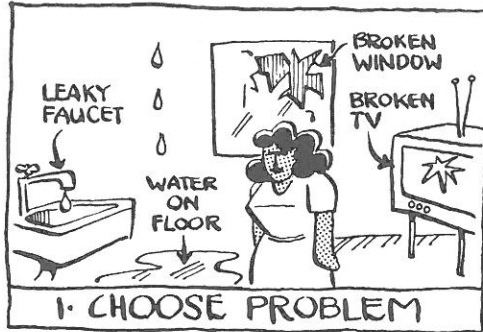
- Review:**
1. Explain to the group:

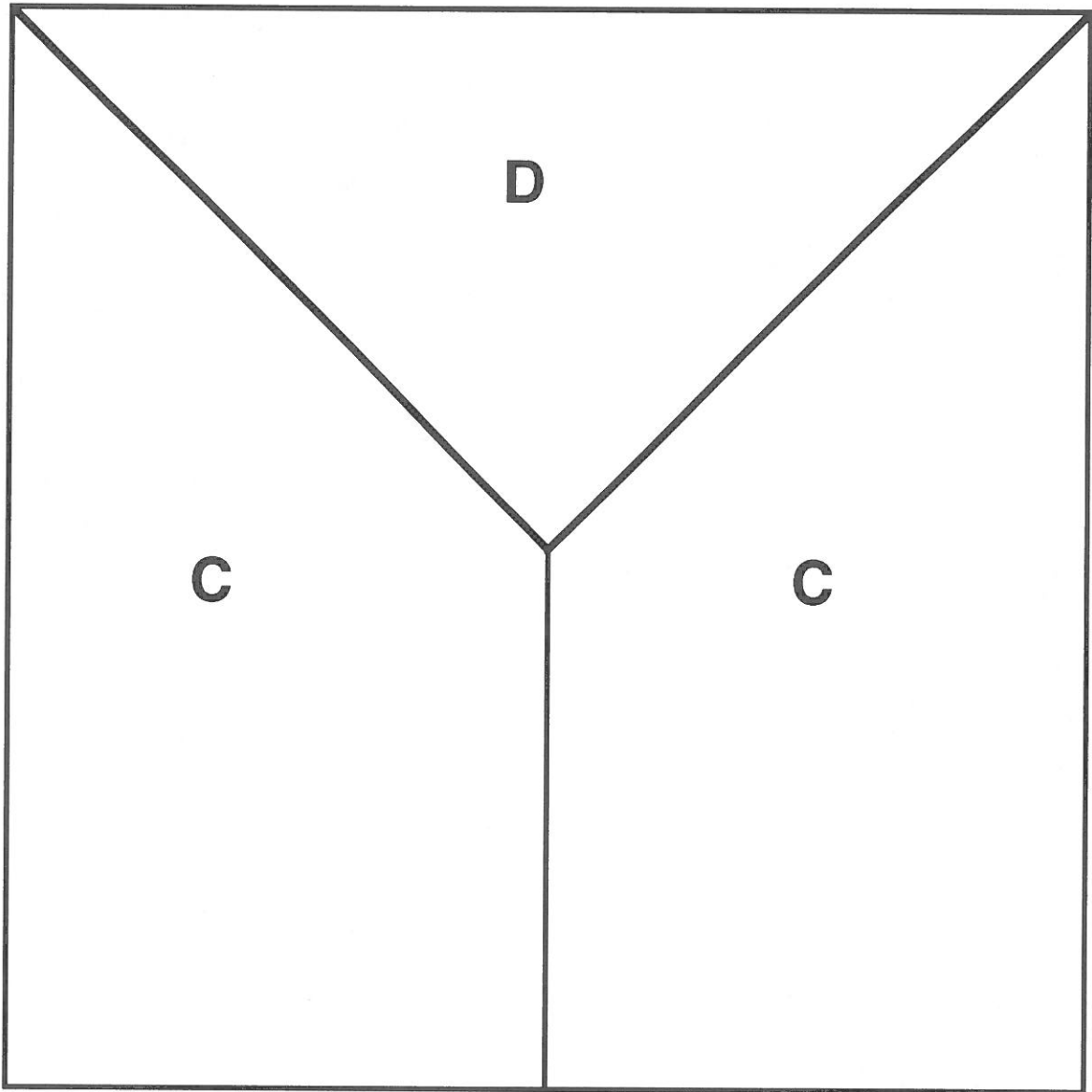
I would like the group to take some time now to think about what you have learned today. What was useful to you?
 2. Ask the members of the group in a Go Around to say something based on the following questions:
 - *What do you think of this model for solving problems?*
 - *Is this how you go about solving a problem?*
 - *What part of the model is familiar to you? What isn't familiar?*
 3. Read this summary or say it in your own words:

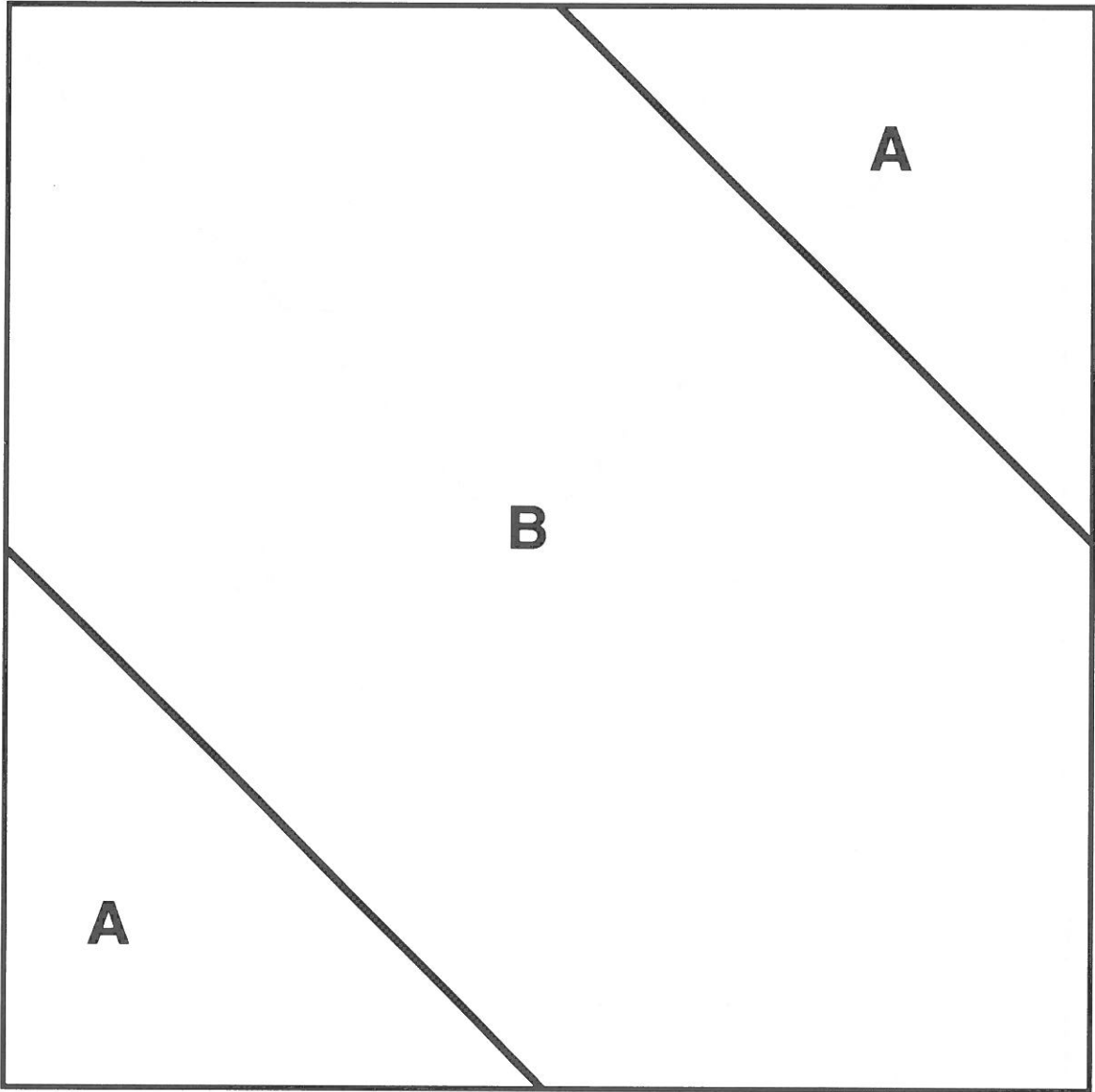
In this session, we learned that we all follow steps whenever we do something whether it's figuring out a puzzle or fixing a car. We also learned that there are steps people in many communities use to solve problems and that these six steps are called a problem solving model. These steps show us that we need to do some thinking and planning first before we tackle problems in our community. This model can be used to work through all of the problems in all of the issue areas in your vision.
- Preview:** *In the next session, we'll look at your shared community vision again and at the list of community problems and needs you came up with in Session 3. We'll use Step 1 of the problem solving model and identify the community problems you want to investigate and work on. We will also be looking at difficult problems that may require a short-term solution until a long-term solution can be reached over time.*

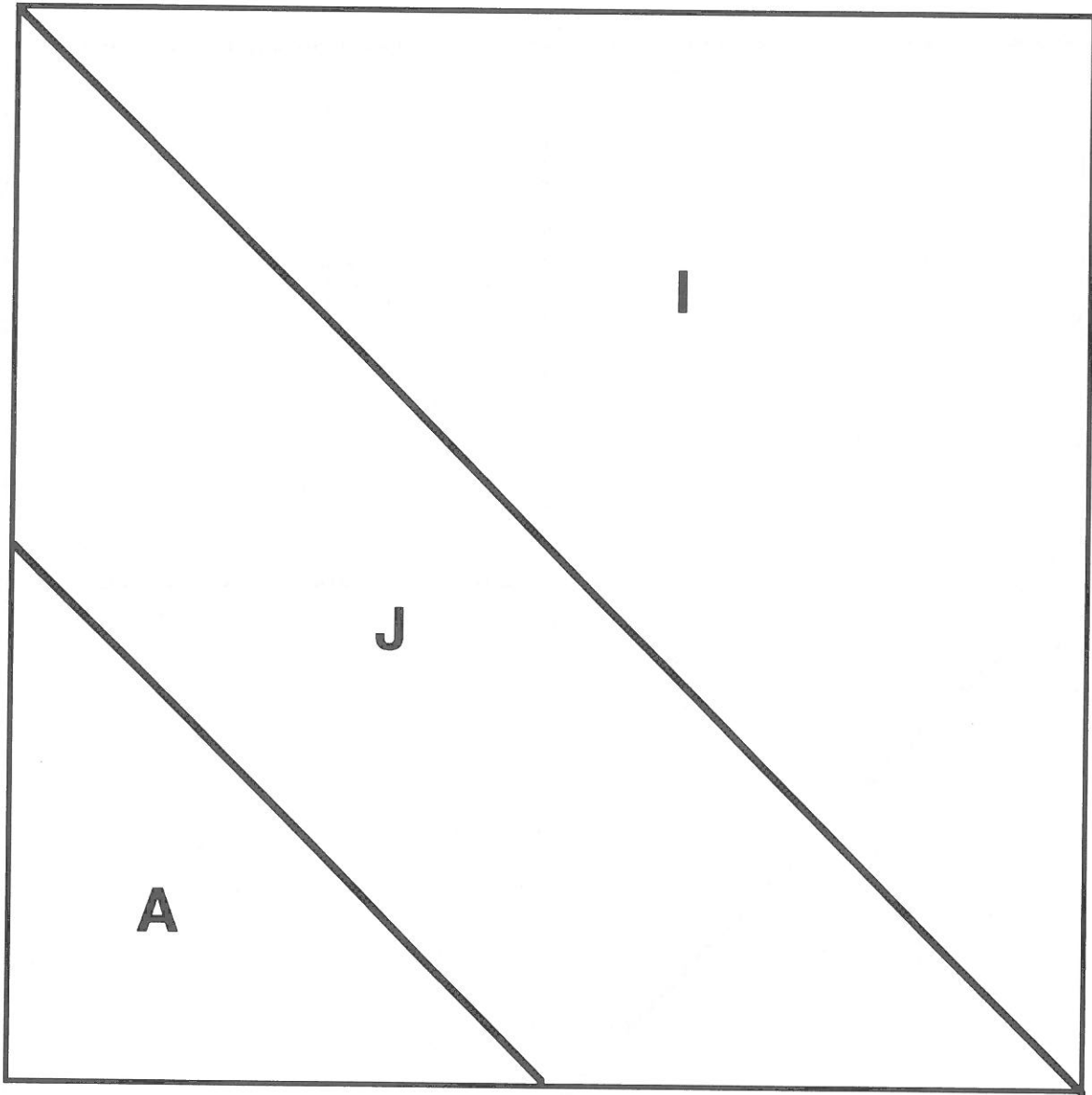
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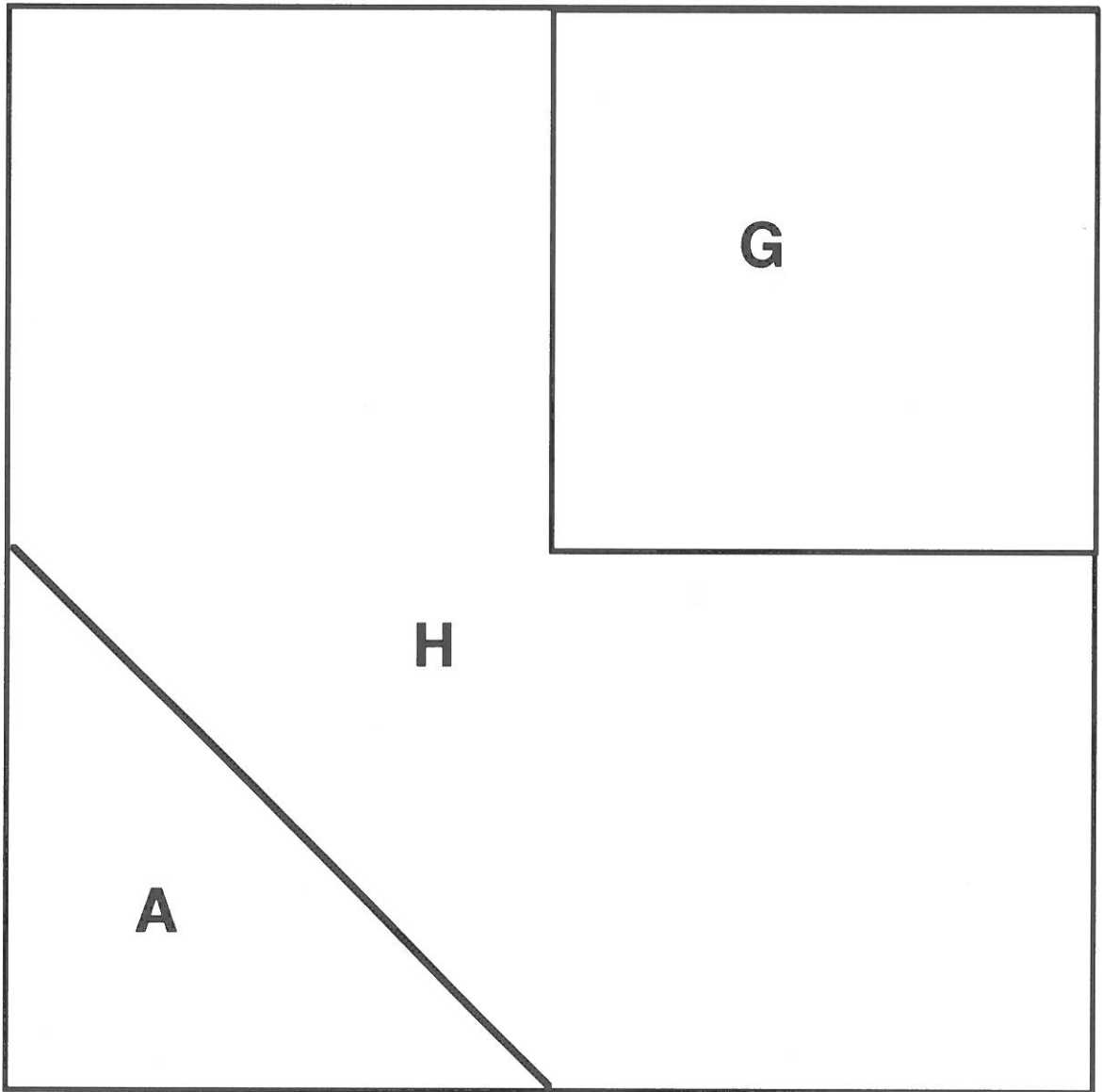
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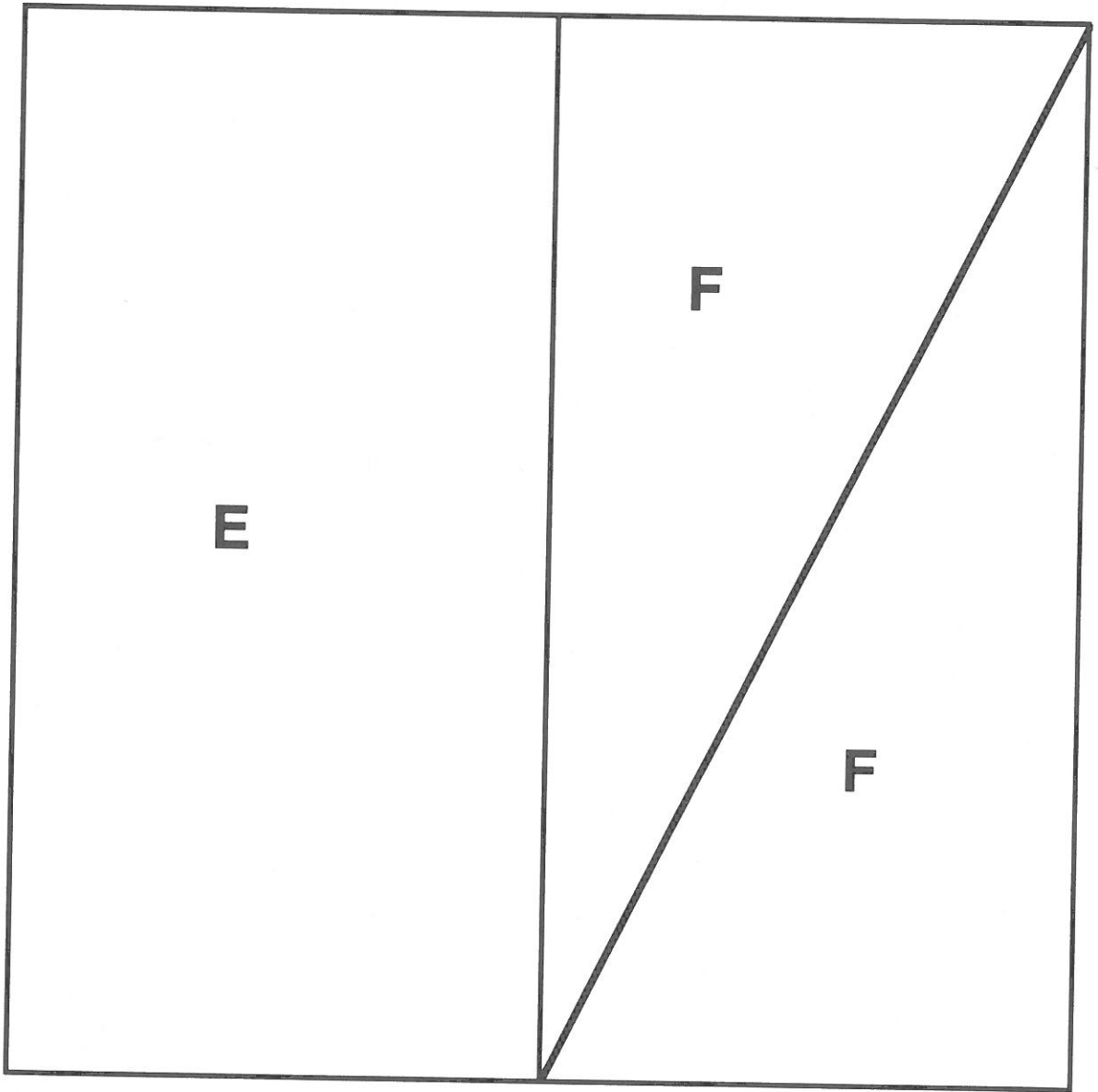




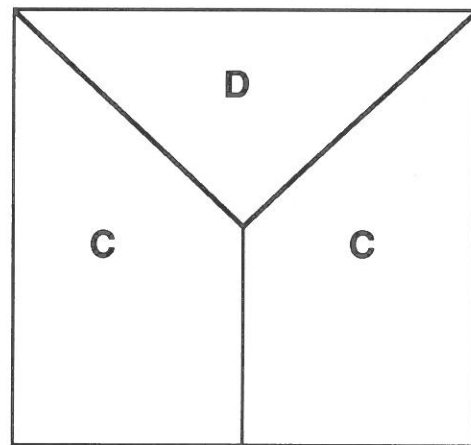
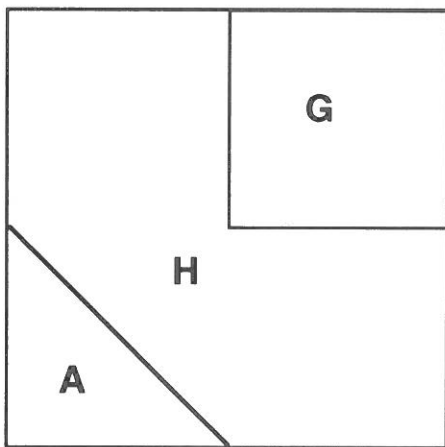
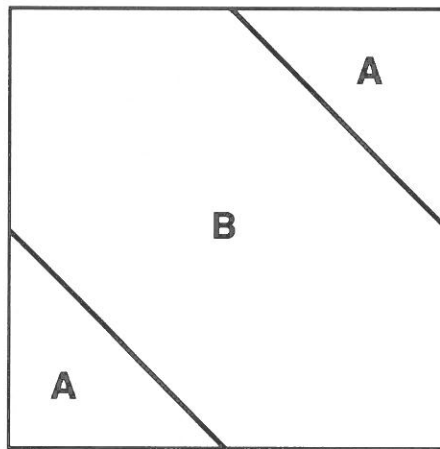
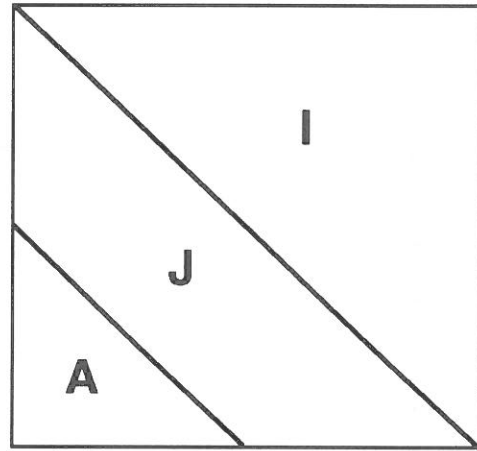
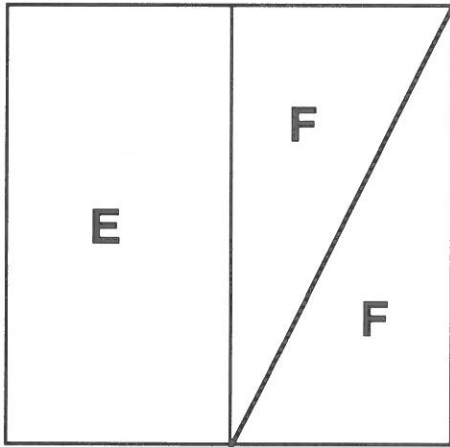








Tool Kit 8.6



Six Steps of the Community Voices Problem Solving Model

- 1. Identify the Problem.**
- 2. Investigate the Problem.**
- 3. Determine Solutions to the Problem.**
- 4. Make an Action Plan.**
- 5. Take Action.**
- 6. Follow Up.**

Community Voices Problem Solving Model

