
I. Introduction to the Community Voices Program

This guide is designed to introduce an organization and its administrative units to the program scope and to show how the program can be a valuable resource to their organization staff, communities and county. The key questions that administrators often ask are:

- What is the program?
- Does the program fit within the organization's mission?
- What are the benefits for the my organization?
- What are the benefits for the communities in the county?
- Can the program work in our delivery system?
- What changes will we have to make in our organization?
- What staff time and resources are required?

This first section of the guide should give you some basic answers to these questions. If you decide you are interested using the Community Voices program in your organization, community and county, you can find out more detailed information on how to adapt the program to your organization by writing or calling:

Community Voices Program
Cooperative Extension Program
North Carolina A&T State University
P.O. Box 21928
Greensboro, NC 27420
919-334-7008 or 919-334-7956
[Area code will change to 910 after November 1993.]

Goals of the Program

There are two interrelated and equally important goals of the Community Voices program. The first goal is to develop new groups of community leaders who can work together with other citizens to identify, investigate and solve problems in their communities and county using available resources or securing outside resources. These new leaders are citizens who traditionally have not been an active part of public decision making in matters that concern them and their communities. They have often experienced many social, economic and educational limitations. The second goal of Community Voices is to develop a shared group leadership process in which the organization and its staff can work with community

groups as partners to help shape programs and use resources to meet the specific needs of community citizens. This shared process gives staff members of organizations the skills and strategies to work more effectively with both non-traditional and traditional audiences in all program areas.

This program is designed to be implemented into several communities within a county in order to develop an adequate base of leaders to address county and community issues. However, variations of the program are possible. The program can be implemented in one community, in issue-related groups focused on housing, health, youth, family, agriculture or rural development, or in advisory groups. If you implement the program in these types of groups, you will have to adapt several sessions such as Sessions 1, 7 and 15 for single community or issue-focused groups.

Participatory Training Approach

All levels of training in Community Voices are based on a participatory approach. This means that learners are actively involved in the training and that expressed needs shape the focus and direction of the training. In participatory training, learners are not passive listeners to experts. Rather staff of an organization, Co-facilitators and Emerging Leaders learn together in a structure that allows all participants to work together and share their knowledge and experience and perspectives to help identify and solve problems. The trainers in Community Voices are called “Co-facilitators” because they help guide the training activities and discussions rather than lead or direct them. The participatory strategies used in Community Voices, such as the Go Around, consensus decision making and the problem solving activities, allow for the ideas of learners to be voiced, respected and incorporated into the training, thus reinforcing the Community Voices belief that learning is the result of a continuing dialogue. In this dialogue, participants learn to listen and respect the ideas of others as well as to express their own ideas and thoughts with confidence. This builds group strengths and creates bonds among the leaders in the groups.

Focus on Shared Group Leadership

Community Voices is not a leadership development program that focuses on individuals. In Community Voices, we use the shared group leadership style where individuals learn to work together as a group and learn basic problem solving skills in order to address issues and needs in their communities and county. The combined resources of a group of community leaders working together with others can provide the structure, the motivation and the persistence to solve long term as well as short term problems.

Description of Program Outcomes

The main goal of Community Voices is to develop skilled groups of community citizens who can work together over time, problem solve, and work as partners with resource people to develop programs that will meet the needs and concerns of their communities and county. This goal cannot be imposed on community citizens. Rather this goal can only be reached effectively with the active participation of the community at all levels of the program. There are four key outcomes of the Community Voices program. Within each of these outcomes are strategies and methods for active community participation and involvement that can be implemented throughout the program. The following list describes the key program outcomes of the Community Voices program:

1. Creation of community partnerships by involving community leaders as important partners throughout the program. The supporting program strategies are:
 - marketing strategies
 - community selection strategies
 - recruitment strategies
 - use of Existing Leaders as Co-facilitators
 - program implementation by a community team
2. Development of program ownership through the use of participatory training methods at the organization and community levels. The supporting strategies include the training of:
 - training teams from the organization
 - co-facilitators
 - Emerging Leaders
 - knowledgeable, resource, agencies, organizations
3. Ensuring program endorsements through the training of community groups utilizing group defined issues and problems. The supporting strategies include the development of:
 - community skills among different levels of leaders
 - shared group vision of community
 - shared group vision of county
 - problem solving based on learner selected problems
4. Development of community and county leadership structures to continue the program over time. The supporting program and curriculum design provide communities within a county ways to develop:
 - structure and skills for groups to continue after Session 15
 - leadership base to incorporate into on-going organizational programs

II. Building a Community Leadership Base Through Training

The Community Voices program is designed to train three program audiences to achieve the final goals of the program. The audiences include Emerging Leaders; Existing Leaders; who may be Knowledgeables, or individuals from agencies and organizations and the staff of the sponsoring organization.

Training Curriculum for Emerging Leaders

The Community Voices curriculum for Emerging Leaders is about enabling community citizens to come together and to determine the future for their community and their families in that community. When the program begins, there are ten to fifteen individual participants (Emerging Leaders) from one of several communities within a county. These participants may represent diverse groups in a community. In the past, these individuals may have been leaders or followers and they may have been occasionally active in their communities or just had the desire to become active and involved. The Community Voices program enables these individuals, which the program calls Emerging Leaders, to develop into a core group of community citizens who can work together over time. The curriculum also enables this group to develop a shared vision of what their community should be like in key issue areas such as housing, education, youth development, family, agriculture, rural development and health care and to have a plan and the commitment to reach that vision. In order to accomplish such outcomes, the community groups need to share and learn these six aspects of the program:

1. an underlying philosophy and belief that the group can make a difference if they work together;
2. a shared vision of what they want to achieve as a community group;
3. the ability to know about and connect to resources that can help them reach that shared vision;
4. ways to work together effectively as a group and communicate their ideas to others;
5. a systematic problem solving method to help them address community issues and needs; and
6. an organizational structure to continue working on their vision on the community level and on the county level after the formal Community Voices program is completed.

This is what the Community Voices curriculum offers to its participants and different types of leaders in a community and the sponsoring organization. The fifteen sessions of the Community Voices training curriculum can be found in the two-volume manual, "Community Voices: Participatory Training Guide for Community Co-facilitators." The sessions are divided into four units which outline the direction of the curriculum. By the end of the fifteen sessions, participants should be able to work together effectively as a group and know how to recruit others to join in their efforts to solve problems in their community. Each group will have a shared community vision and a shared county vision based on issue areas and be able to follow the steps of a problem solving model to identify, investigate, propose solutions to problems using available resources, and develop an action plan to solve specific problems. Each group will also develop a community and county structure or some organizational method to continue working on their vision after Community Voices training is over. Here is a listing of the four units and fifteen sessions of the Community Voices training for Emerging Leaders that will allow the program outcomes to be accomplished:

Unit One: Building a Community Vision Using a Shared Group Leadership Approach

Sessions 1– 4 teach the participants the importance of working together as a group and how to develop a shared community vision of what they want their community to be like in five to ten years. In this unit, participants also learn how to connect their vision to community strengths and resources that can help them solve those problems. The training sessions in this unit are:

1. Community Voices: Working Together to Build a Strong Community
2. Combining Our Skills Through Shared Group Leadership
3. Creating a Shared Vision of Our Community's Future
4. Connecting Our Vision to Community Strengths and Resources

Unit Two: Communicating Our Vision Through Working Together

Sessions 5 – 7 teach the group how to listen and respect the ideas of others; how to make group decisions using consensus; and how to communicate their ideas and vision to other groups in the county. The training sessions in this unit are:

5. Communicating as a Group to Reach Our Vision
6. Making Shared Decisions as a Group
7. Sharing Our Vision With Other Communities

Unit Three: Working on Our Vision — Step by Step

Sessions 8 – 12 teach the group how to solve problems using a six-step problem solving model. In this unit, participants select three problems from their community vision and learn how to investigate the problems including locating available resources and then how to determine appropriate solutions to those three problems. The training sessions in this unit are:

8. Learning to Solve Our Community Problems Step by Step
9. Selecting Community Problems From Our Vision
10. Practicing Solving a Problem in the West End Community
11. Seeking More Information About Our Problems
12. Determining Solutions to Our Problems

Unit Four: Building a Community and County Organization to Implement Our Community Action Plan

Sessions 13 – 15 teach the group the importance of having an organizational structure to continue their work and follow through with their action plans to solve community problems. The last session emphasizes the need to work on a county level to solve county-wide problems or those problems that exist across communities. The training sessions in this unit are:

13. Making a Shared Community Action Plan
14. Planning a Community Organization to Continue Our Work
15. Working on Issues at the County Level

Training Workshop for Co-facilitators (Existing Leaders)

This training workshop is designed to enable the staff training team to train Existing Leaders to be Co-facilitators of the Community Voices curriculum for Emerging Leaders using the “Participatory Training Guide for Community Co-facilitators.” After this one and a half day training workshop, the team will then follow up by meeting individually with Co-facilitators to assist with the content and specific activities in the sessions as well as the learning points of each session. The sessions for training workshop for Existing Leaders can be found in the second part of the manual, “Community Voices: Program Implementation Guide.”

There are two main goals of this training workshop: (1) to introduce Existing Leaders to the Community Voices Program, and (2) to give Existing Leaders an opportunity to practice co-facilitating a segment of the training program for Emerging Leaders.

In the opening part of the training workshop for Existing Leaders, they will be introduced to the Community Voices training program including their role in the program; how to recruit Emerging Leaders; how to co-facilitate; and how to use the two-volume training manual, “Community Voices: Participatory Training Guide for Community Co-facilitators.” Staff members as part of a training team will demonstrate a practice session; work with Existing Leaders to prepare their practice sessions; and help evaluate the practice sessions.

At the end of this training workshop, Existing Leaders should be able to:

1. Explain their role in the Community Voices program;
2. Plan how to recruit Emerging Leaders for the training sessions;
3. Summarize generally the content of the fifteen training sessions;
4. Demonstrate the following skills of co-facilitating a group:
 - working as a partner with another Existing Leader
 - using questions as prompts to encourage a discussion
 - using a flip chart to focus a discussion
 - listening to and reading the audience
5. Use the “Community Voices: Participatory Training Guide for Community Co-facilitators” to co-facilitate sessions; and
6. State the next step they are to do as Existing Leaders.

Training Workshop for Sponsoring Organization Staff

The training workshop for staff members of the organization can be found in the second part of this manual, “Introduction to Participatory Training.” The listing of goals of the training workshop that follows should give you an idea of the skills and information that will be taught in this workshop. See the table of contents for this part of the manual for an outline of the workshop sessions.

The individual workshop sessions will focus on five areas of the Community Voices program:

1. Information on the Community Voices program
2. Understanding participatory styles of training
3. How to train Co-facilitators (Existing Leaders)
4. How to train Emerging Leaders
5. Understanding the program implementation process

The goal of the workshop is to provide an experience for the the staff members of the sponsoring organization that will enable them to do the following:

1. Value the Community Voices program and innovative process for the organization (Cooperative Extension);
2. Feel more confident in implementing the program in their community;
3. See the program as one which helps reach and build groups of people to enable them to work together in a community to solve problems/needs rather than only a leadership development program;
4. Begin to understand and value different learning principles, strategies and experiential learning as a basis for training various audiences;
5. See the benefits to the organization and to the community and county;
6. Make the transition from information deliverer to that of trainer and program coordinator;
7. Gain skills in program management, mentoring, monitoring, evaluation and program continuation; and
8. Work with diverse community audiences.