



# Volunteers and Community Economic Development

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Small communities around the state of Oklahoma and the nation have suffered over the past decade because of various challenges that have arisen. These challenges include a rapidly evolving national/global economy, public sector budget constraints, and natural resource conservation issues. Community leaders often desire to create plans and identify opportunities so that their community might survive these challenges. Economic development is an option many local leaders have chosen to pursue. Economic development provides the opportunity for a community to expand the local economy and create additional jobs and income in order to maintain or increase some aspect of the quality of life in rural towns and communities.

There are several economic development options that communities and rural areas can adopt to help create jobs and income. These can be reviewed and the options that fit the situation in given communities considered. Organizing a community plan of action that incorporates these various options helps create a more sound community economy. This fact sheet reviews job creation strategies, discusses how community action plans are formulated, and addresses the role of volunteers in community economic development.

## Job Creation Strategies

### Improving a community's or area's ability to capture existing income

Capturing existing income can become a challenging task because consumers spend money out of town for various reasons. Some areas may be more convenient or have a better selection of products. Whatever the reason, communities need to find what local consumers want and need to improve the communities abilities to capture existing income. If merchants and employees strive to better accommodate consumers, the ability of the community to capture existing income will likely improve. Communities often hold campaigns to encourage local consumers to shop at home first. Special events and festivals also can be organized to bring more consumers to spend money. With communitywide planning and targeted training, improving a community's ability to capture existing income can be accomplished.

### Improving the efficiency of existing firms

Communities often have many small businesses that compete with larger highly competitive businesses. If existing

firms in a community can make the improvements necessary to become more efficient, there is a higher chance that these smaller enterprises can survive. Small businesses may need help or training skills in order to make improvements. Providing assistance to these businesses could be an important part of a community's plan of action.

### Encouraging the formation of new businesses

Attracting new firms will lead to further satisfaction of local consumers, as well as attracting new consumers to a community. Providing a welcoming environment and working to attract new businesses to a community will help encourage those entrepreneurs looking for a location. The formation of new businesses helps increase the amount of income circulating in a community.

### Attracting new industry or business

Communities often strive to attract new industries to the area. New industry provides employment opportunities and is an important key to economic development. Many issues such as supply of labor, transportation, water availability, and the community environment are involved in attracting a new industry. Improvements may be necessary to accommodate the needs of a given industry. Communities need to assess the conditions of its public utilities, roads, and other public services that contribute to its overall environment.

### Increasing financial aid received from other government levels

Communities can increase financial aid received from the public sector to help with economic development plans. Although state and federal funds for community development are limited, there are other options to look at. The government pays out a considerable percentage of U.S. income in transfer payments, this includes Social Security and Medicare. These payments are received by the elderly and retired members of a community and can account for a significant amount of community income. Community plans to attract retirees provide another opportunity for further economic development (Woods, 1987).

## Community Plan of Action

Once a community has reviewed the options for creating jobs and income, steps need to be taken form an economic

development plan. Each community will follow steps in their own unique way due to different situations and goals. The following steps are useful in beginning a community's plan of action:

**1. Establish a steering committee**

Building the foundation for an economic development plan begins with creating the leadership to carry out the plan. Leaders across the community and from different segments of the community should be chosen to serve on the steering committee. Organizations already established, such as the local Chamber of Commerce and industry organizations should be used. How to find and recruit volunteers to serve at this level, or help an already established steering committee find and manage volunteers, is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

The steering committee will be responsible for creating the plan for economic development and establishing a schedule to see that it is carried out for the community. Steering committee members will be the representatives informing the community and gaining the needed support to carry out the plan.

**2. Obtain technical support**

Often information needed for an economic development plan cannot be provided by the committee. Outside support can be obtained through many different avenues. The Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, universities, consultants, and others are potentially reliable sources for needed information.

**3. Develop basic data**

In order to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of a community, basic data is needed. Demographic information regarding the community, such as population, income, employment, wages, sales tax, utilities, and transportation services are needed information.

This information helps determine what areas of a community need improvement. Then the most beneficial economic development options can be determined. This information may also be requested by those who are interested in investing in the community.

**4. Review economic development alternatives**

Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the community makes it easier to find the best alternatives to help increase strengths and decrease weaknesses. By reviewing the options, such as increasing businesses or attracting industry, it can be determined which option best fits the needs of a community.

**5. Analyze key issues**

Key issues that should be reviewed are those that could potentially hamper or slow down the plan for economic development. Once these issues are recognized and analyzed, the community must decide whether or not to make appropriate improvements. For example, streets may need to be repaired or sewage systems updated.

**6. Identify financial resources**

A community may recognize improvements and changes that can be made but no financial resources may be available. Communities need to identify sources of capital to see if improvement funds are available.

**7. Set priorities**

Placing the plan of action in sequence according to priorities is necessary. Researching alternatives and changes needed to carry out the economic development plan will determine the priority of each event or action.

**8. Implement the plan**

The plan is not complete without following through with targeted action items. Committee members need to see their role within the plan and understand the established time frame for completion of the plan. The plan should be complete and thorough (Woods, 1989). Continued evaluation to determine when adjustments are needed is also important.

### **Volunteers as Community Leaders**

Putting together an economic development plan of action requires many resources, including the time and effort of volunteers. One of the more difficult steps in planning is establishing the steering committee or leadership team. It is important to realize that these people are volunteering their time and energy for the cause of the community, and if utilized correctly, volunteers can provide many community benefits.

Economic development plans take the time and effort of many people. Some communities have staff members who help coordinate and lead economic development plans. However, there are many components involved and often there are not enough people on staff to accomplish what needs to be done. Many communities have no paid staff for the purpose of economic development and therefore everyone involved is a volunteer. Whatever the case, having volunteers strengthen ownership in the task leads to more community-wide acceptance, understanding, and credibility of the economic development plan. The more people involved, the easier it becomes to get the community's support and interest in the economic development plans. The remainder of this fact sheet deals with identifying and attracting volunteers, managing them, and retaining successful volunteers.

### **Identifying and Attracting Volunteers**

Identifying and attracting volunteers can be a long process, but careful planning beforehand can save time in the long-run. Before searching for volunteers, the community may need individual volunteer plans. This allows leaders a better understanding of a volunteers roll and as a result they are better equipped to answer any candidates questions.

### **Why do you need volunteers?**

Volunteers are needed for several reasons, but the main objective is to provide support for the economic development plan. There are many options available with economic development plans. Once the community focus areas have been determined, people will be needed to implement the plan. Volunteers may be needed because of their expertise and experience in the community. Implementing economic de-

velopment plans could involve planning events, informing the community, making necessary contacts, raising funds, and various other tasks. Determining specific reasons volunteers are needed will aid in attracting volunteers because details concerning specific volunteer-oriented tasks are available. Therefore, volunteers can determine whether or not this is something they would like to be involved with, as well as determine if they have the time to commit.

### **How many volunteers are needed?**

Establishing the number of volunteers needed avoids recruiting too many, which can lead to volunteers giving their time with no workable projects. If there is not enough recruiting, the recruitment process may have to be reinacted. Setting a goal for the number of volunteers you need to recruit will give you an idea of how close you are to reaching your volunteer goal.

### **What personal qualifications, physical demands, and skills are needed for the different volunteer jobs?**

There may be a job requiring specific skills, qualifications, or physical demands. Before recruitment begins, you need to decide if any of these things are needed. Once identified, you can then recruit the best volunteers for the job.

### **What plan do you have for orientation and training?**

All volunteers will need to undergo some type of orientation to become aware of the community plan and take ownership (buy into it). Additional training may be necessary. If training is necessary, deciding beforehand what type and how it will be handled is important. Volunteers need to know before they commit what orientation and training steps they will undergo. Orientation and training sessions should be well planned and presented to make best use of volunteer time.

Once a plan is established for identifying and attracting volunteers, the recruitment process can begin. When identifying potential volunteers, look at the current community leaders and their respective roles. They could be excellent volunteers that bring community experience. Search diligently, the best volunteer may not be the most obvious. Sometimes it helps to look for specific qualities that individuals possess. People who are group problem solvers, group decision makers, and advocates for their cause are often the most qualified volunteers. Identifying potential volunteers allows for the best selection.

### **Recruitment-Individual Approach**

If specific individuals are identified as potential volunteers, then an individual approach should be taken to attract that individual. This approach involves a direct appeal on a person to a person basis. Having a good description of the community plan for economic development, as well as an outlined summary of why, when, and for how long the volunteer is needed, helps in approaching potential volunteers. Often, a direct appeal is followed by a letter enclosing promotional materials. An invitation could be issued requesting their presence or involvement in a situation where they are needed.

### **Recruitment-Mass Media**

If specific people aren't identified, there are other approaches that can be taken. First of all, mass media is an ex-

cellent approach because it reaches a large number of people. Advertisements through the press, television, and radio are ways of attracting volunteers. Also, newsletters, organizations, schools, brochures, and window exhibits may be used to get the attention of potential volunteers.

### **Recruitment-Delegating**

A third method is delegating recruitment to a local organization. A local civic group may want to take on the task as a community service project. This method allows the community economic development plan to gain more community-wide exposure, as well as giving the delegated organization pride in being a part of the community's efforts.

A comprehensive list of 50 recruiting techniques for volunteers is available at the end of this Fact Sheet. These may be useful in the recruiting process.

## **Managing Volunteers**

Once the process of recruiting volunteers is accomplished, managing them effectively is vital to the success of the community plan. A large portion of managing volunteers successfully is making sure their job is rewarding. Several items that help insure a rewarding experience include:

- 1. Make sure the volunteers have responsibilities**

Volunteers who know their responsibility and know it will directly affect the community economic development plan are more likely to be satisfied with giving their time and effort, and are least likely to become burnt out.
- 2. Make sure volunteers have the authority to think as well as do the job**

Allowing volunteers to have more control over the job they are responsible for gives volunteers a sense of ownership. A greater sense of ownership strengthens the volunteers commitment to the overall plan. Volunteers tend to lose ownership if they have started a task and someone new steps in to direct their work.
- 3. Develop a work structure that encourages excellence and make sure volunteers are held responsible for achieving results**

Volunteers who only perform tasks and never become a part of the "big picture" or the end results, tend to lose interest in the plan. Therefore, creating needed jobs that require volunteer responsibility increases the volunteers satisfaction with their work for the community.
- 4. Decide how to measure whether the results are being achieved or not**

It is important to evaluate the plan to see that set goals are achieved. Continual monitoring of volunteer work helps identify problems and recognize other opportunities. Monitoring the progress also lets the volunteer know how they are performing. Positive results are self motivating. This helps prevent burn-out and retain volunteers.

### **Training and Orientation**

As soon as volunteers are recruited, the training and orientation process should begin. The purpose of training

and orienting the volunteer is to give them the opportunity to become familiar with the goals of the community. There is a good chance recruited volunteers will be unfamiliar with community efforts. In order for volunteers to give their best effort they need to become knowledgeable participants in community efforts. Special meetings for the newcomers may be held to help with volunteer orientation. Some one-on-one training may also be necessary. As soon as new volunteers become aware of the goals and strategies of the community economic development plan, they should be included with the entire committee so they can observe how the committee works together. A checklist for orienting volunteers to the committee or organization is provided in the Appendix.

Simply training and orienting volunteers about the community economic development plan is not enough if you are trying to achieve the best results possible. Volunteers need the motivation that gives them the desire to contribute to the economic development plans of the community. Enabling volunteers involves coordinating their activities, motivating them, encouraging them, and recognizing their work. For a volunteer to put forth their best effort they need to be highly motivated. Lack of motivation on the part of the participant often is the cause for decay of economic development plans. Several steps that can be reviewed to insure that a job is motivating are as follows.

### **Set high standards of activity**

Very few people want to volunteer their time to do menial tasks for others who are truly involved in the activities of the committee. In other words, having all volunteers involved in important tasks and allowing all volunteers to contribute to the cause will give the volunteer a sense of being needed. This in turn will motivate volunteers to continue to give time to the committee.

### **Set challenging goals**

Setting goals that are obtainable, yet challenging, motivates the volunteer to work harder so they can accomplish their goals. Many volunteers are accustomed to facing challenges and, if a challenging task is put before them, they will be motivated to give their time and energy to the community.

### **Have enough people to do a job**

Overworking volunteers is a sure way to burn them out. Volunteers often have other jobs and careers. If a volunteer has too much work, never sees any results, or spends too much of their time volunteering, their enthusiasm for the community economic development plan may diminish.

### **Make sure volunteers know exactly what their job is**

Providing an accurate description of the job assignment prevents volunteers from wasting time working on something that may have already been accomplished or that isn't needed.

### **Make meeting worth the volunteer's time**

It is important to remember that a volunteer's time is limited. Holding organized meetings with a set agenda allows the meetings to flow smoothly and make good use of time. Volunteers won't continue to attend meetings that are not run efficiently or do not accomplish anything.

### **Encourage group efforts**

People are often motivated by friendly interaction with other people. Also, the more people put to a task the faster it may be accomplished. Putting several minds together often creates more ideas and helps the process move further along. All volunteers should feel that their job is important and that they belong to the "team." By having volunteers work in groups a sense of belonging to the "team" can be accomplished.

### **Pay attention to the job the volunteer is doing**

Paying attention to the progress volunteers are making is important for two reasons. First of all, if a volunteer is making good progress and accomplishing goals, they need to be recognized. On the other hand, when things are going wrong, or are not meeting the standards set by the committee, they need to be attended to. If things begin to flow in the wrong direction and are ignored, it will take longer to correct than if it is recognized early that a volunteer's work isn't meeting the standards. If a volunteer is getting off track with their work, it may be necessary to speak in person with him or her or even reassign jobs.

### **Recognize and reward good work**

Volunteers need to know that they are appreciated. All volunteers need some type of recognition, whether it is small or large. One of the best ways to motivate volunteers is to show they are making a difference. Good work by volunteers can be recognized at meetings, in person, or a letter of thanks can be written.

## **Volunteer Retention**

Often volunteer programs have high turnover rates, which can be costly. If volunteers leave, new ones must be recruited and trained. It takes time to begin again and can hold up the community economic development plan. The easiest way to retain volunteers is to manage the volunteers in a way that keeps the volunteers wanting to give more. Although it may sound simple, it takes time and planning to establish a successful committee made up of volunteers. The steps taken during the recruiting phase are often the most important. Recruiting the right person(s) for the job will raise the chances for success and avoid possible problems.

Many communities are searching for solutions to the ever increasing challenges in rural areas. Creating an economic development plan can be successful in reviving small communities. There are many important steps that should be followed in creating this plan. One important step is recruiting and managing volunteers in a way that promotes success of the community. Communities may go about recruiting and managing volunteers in a variety of ways; however, there are key points that will add to the success of volunteer work and contribute to the community economic development plan.

### **Points to remember to successfully retain volunteers**

- Volunteers work better in well planned and well organized programs
- Volunteers want to be a part of a team that includes all members involved, including the chairman and paid employees (if there are any)

## **Orienting Your Volunteer: Things Volunteers Should Know About Your Organization**

1. The benefits of your organization
2. The goal/mission (purpose) of your organization
3. How and why you are unique
4. How you relate to other organizations in the community
5. The role of volunteers in your agency
6. Your organizational structure
7. Your funding base
8. The basic budget of your organization
9. The history of the organization
10. Who is on your Board of Directors
11. Who is the Executive Director
12. Who are the key staff
13. Activities of each division of your agency
14. How do clients come to your agency
15. What a typical client is like
16. Basic organization staff relations policies (whom to call if sick, dress code, etc.)
17. How a volunteer "survives" in your agency
  - Parking
  - Coat racks
  - Coffee
  - Check-in procedures
  - Mail Boxes
  - Place for handbags
  - Working space
  - Restrooms
18. How this particular volunteer job helps the organization reach its goal
19. Emergency procedures and telephone numbers
20. Confidentiality procedures

Source: "Orienting Your Volunteer: Things Volunteers Should Know About Your Organization" by the Public Management

- Volunteers need to be assigned meaningful jobs
- Volunteers need to be recognized for a job well done

Volunteers provide the human capital that is often necessary to successfully implement a local plan for economic development. The purpose of this fact sheet has been to review job creation strategies and community plans of action, with particular emphasis on the role of the volunteer. The following tips contain ideas for recruiting and orienting local volunteers.

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## 50 Techniques for Recruiting Volunteers: A Checklist

#	Techniques	Person Responsible	#	Techniques	Person Responsible
1	Place ad in local newspaper	.....	18	Pass out recruitment brochures	.....
2	Do a radio or TV spot (Public Service Announcement)	.....	19	Put ads in membership newsletters	.....
3	Have current volunteers appear on radio, in action in the local newspaper, or TV talk shows	.....	20	Contact local organizations	.....
4	Get coverage in local newspaper (stories to potential volunteers about your work, individual volunteers, etc)	.....	21	Ask your local politicians for names of prospective volunteers	.....
5	Hold volunteer recruitment parties at your office	.....	22	Utilize Student Associations	.....
6	Have open lunches	.....	23	Try recruitment booths at local schools	.....
7	Have invitational lunches	.....	24	Plan a Telethon	.....
8	Give presentations to community groups	.....	25	Set up a Volunteers Fair	.....
9	Be on the emergency speaker's list of local community groups	.....	26	Get news articles with photos of volunteers	.....
10	Share your program and its needs before local Boards & Commissions	.....	27	Send personal letters from current volunteers	.....
11	Send out flyers	.....	28	Hold teas and dinners	.....
12	Put flyers on "key posting areas" around town	.....	29	Make phone calls to potential volunteers	.....
13	Put flyers in appropriate shops	.....	30	Contact local unions	.....
14	Put ads where likely volunteers congregate: • Supermarkets • Community and Senior Centers • Churches • Unemployment offices • Student employment offices • Student Unions • Libraries	.....	31	Make contact with public relation departments of large industries about getting ads in their periodicals	.....
15	Encourage volunteers to recruit friends	.....	32	Contact local corporations about getting executives to donate their time	.....
16	Put together a film or slide show	.....	33	Contact professional societies for names of likely volunteers	.....
17	Start a speaker bureau (volunteers trained to give presentation for you)	.....	34	Follow examples of other successful volunteer organizations	.....
			35	Hold press parties	.....
			36	Train representatives from corporations, unions, and other organizations to recruit for you	.....
			37	Hold recruitment drives with other organizations in the community	.....
			38	Hold recruitment parties	.....

#	Techniques	Person Responsible
39	Set up booths at local community gatherings, festivals, fairs, sporting events, etc	.....
40	Send brochures home with school children requesting volunteers	.....
41	Challenge current volunteers to recruit more volunteers (hold a competition)	.....
42	Challenge local businesses to see which can recruit more employees to volunteer	.....
43	Put display in local retail establishments for large exposure	.....
44	Put requests for volunteers on billboards, movie theater displays, or digital bank displays	.....
45	Put stand-up flyers on tables at local restaurants	.....

#	Techniques	Person Responsible
46	Have your request for more volunteers announced over the intercom at local sporting events	.....
47	Have flyers placed in shopping bags at local stores	.....
48	Place flyers on car windshields around town	.....
49	Have local churches place an announcement in their bulletin	.....
50	Participate in local parades and events to promote the organizations need for volunteers	.....

Source: This list is utilized the reference "38 Techniques for Recruiting Volunteers," by the Public Management Institute as well as additions by the authors.



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- It provides practical, problem-oriented education for people of all ages. It is designated to take the knowledge of the university to those persons who do not or cannot participate in the formal classroom instruction of the university.
- It utilizes research from university, government, and other sources to help people make their own decisions.
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- It dispenses no funds to the public.
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