

# Creating Possibilities Forums

*A How-To Manual*



## Acknowledgements

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There are people that have made this manual possible. Chief among them are the citizens that believe that better things are possible when we work together and focus on the positive. Thank you for the generous investment of your time, energy, ideas and your giving spirits. Your communities will continue to enjoy the fruits of your labor.

The Steering Team of Counties 4 Development is a volunteer group. They have spent countless hours imagining how citizens might become more engaged in their communities. They have sought funds, developed plans, designed and presented sharing and learning sessions, and supported local citizens by helping them connect to needed resources. Above all, they have remained optimistic, constructive, encouraging and connected. They are role models for us all.

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## Foreword

This manual is intended to serve as a guide. It offers ideas and strategies for consideration when starting and supporting Possibilities Forums. This manual is not intended to be used as a recipe that must be followed as written. You should use your own ingredients, mixing style and cooking time. Consider this manual an illustration of 18 months of knowledge gained from experimenting in the kitchen of community development in our four county locality.

Each community is different and no one knows communities like their own citizens. Feel free to revise, revamp, add and create a strategy for initiating and sustaining Possibilities Forums in your community. Share what you have learned. Add to the knowledge base. Help us create vibrant, exciting communities that meet the envisioned future of their citizens wherever they live, work and play.

## Introduction

### **What Are Possibilities Forums?**

Possibilities Forums are groups of citizens in a community focused on positive change. Possibilities Forums are inclusive. They invite participants who are interested in making their community a better place to live. They engage existing agencies, public officials and local organizations to support positive community development.

Citizens engaged in Possibilities Forums work together over time. Possibilities Forums are more than a one time event. Possibilities Forums are not a conference or a single planning session. They are people committed to making their communities better. They work together to engage more citizens, identify new possibilities and improve communities collectively.

Possibilities Forums focus on process. They brainstorm possibilities. They use information about their communities' past. They look at trends and projections about the future to make decisions about what is possible. They implement projects to make their communities better. They start small and create successes that bring noticeable improvements to their communities.

Possibilities Forums use internal and external resources to create local improvements. By focusing on how to work together to get things done, Possibilities Forums learn how to achieve their goals. The content of what they are working on can and will change over



### **Possibilities Forums are groups of citizens that:**

- Focus on positive change
- Generate possibilities
- Use data to make decisions
- Represent diverse sectors of the community
- Explore what works and what doesn't
- Use internal and external resources
- Initiate projects
- Share information

### **Resources Needed by Possibilities Forums Include:**

- People
- Money
- Information
- Skills
- Time
- Land
- Buildings
- Food
- Anything of value to people and their relationships with one another

time. Projects may range from small to large, from short to long-term, from simple to complex. Once groups have an understanding of how to work together, they become independent and can change the focus of their work as the needs of the community change.

Possibilities Forums share information about what has worked and what has not worked. Participants talk openly and honestly about their successes and failures. A culture of learning is present that values failed attempts as efforts that get them closer to understanding what works. The Forums move toward the future with an understanding of the past.

### **Why Possibilities Forums?**

Possibilities Forums are a strategy for engaging citizens in focusing on the strengths of their neighborhoods and communities and for brainstorming what is possible.

Possibilities Forums move away from focusing on problems to focusing on the strengths and assets present in our communities. Possibilities Forums use local strengths to meet local needs. Possibilities Forums are built on the belief that in emphasizing our strengths and highlighting our assets, we can more successfully address our challenges. A “can-do” attitude is fostered.

Possibilities Forums began as a way to address the challenges facing rural communities today. Our rural communities hold many treasures; rich culture, long history, diverse talent and strong relationships. Historically, community development has taken place outside of these strengths with a tendency to focus on what is wrong and to rely on big business and outside influences to shape the direction of community growth.

Margaret Wheatley, an internationally recognized expert in organizational development and systemic change, in her book, *Turning to One Another*, says “Ask, what’s possible? not, what’s wrong? Keep asking.”

Below are two quotes from the Steering Team member who wrote the original request for the foundation funds needed to start the first Possibilities Forums in central West Virginia. The two paragraphs that follow are taken directly from the application and describe the reasons the originators believed that Possibilities Forums are important.

“For decades, community and economic developers ... have been wearing out the brake shoes trying to stop the loss of manufacturing jobs, local population, school enrollment and the loss of our best and brightest young people. With only a few exceptions, the results of those efforts have not been positive or effective...”

“...the future ...depends on our ability to shift from focusing on what we don't want to happen, to what we do want to happen. It will involve creative, possibly unorthodox thinking; it will require some risk taking; it will mean bringing together citizens who traditionally may not have been involved in community decision making; it will require looking beyond our individual county boundaries.”

### **Why Possibilities Forums?**

- To shift from a focus on deficits to positive possibilities
- To engage citizens in developing their communities
- To provide citizen partners for public agencies and elected officials
- To create a common, desired future

Possibilities Forums give citizen teams the opportunity to support the mission of local community and economic development agencies and public officials. Often, public servants cannot advance a progressive agenda given the bureaucratic restraints. Possibilities Forum members provide a tide of public support and a neutral place for generating, initiating and testing new ideas and options that may not be politically prudent for elected and government officials to initiate. Dr. Vaughn Grisham, a sociologist from the University of Mississippi, talks about the need that elected and government officials have for citizens to push the envelope by taking new ideas to the edge so that those in public positions can come behind and support the work.

### **History**

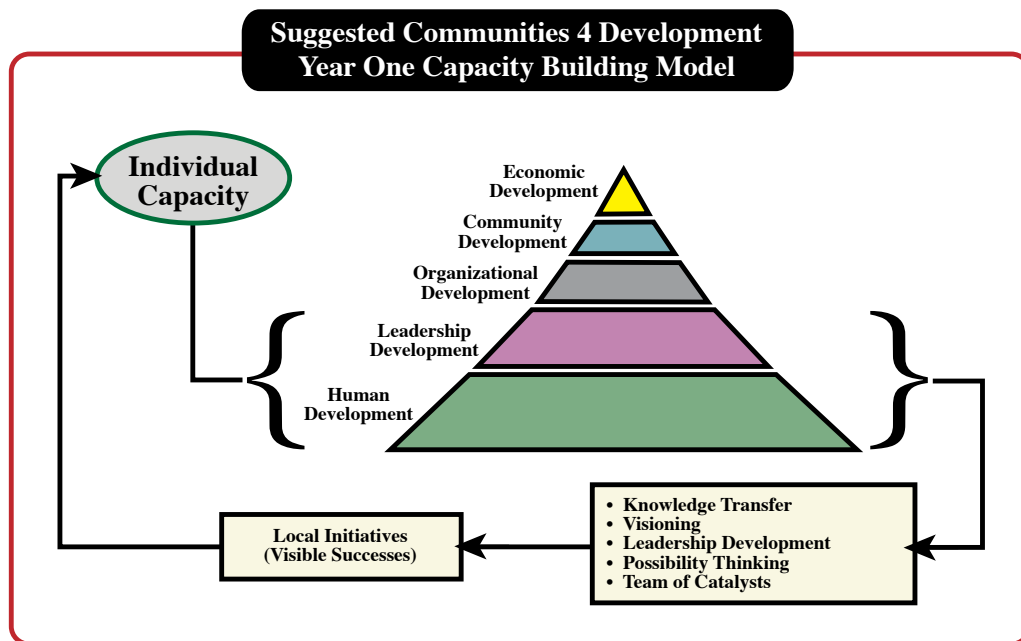
Possibilities Forums were born in West Virginia in 2005 when the directors of the Economic Development Authorities (EDAs) in Ritchie and Pleasants Counties teamed up with the Family Resource Network (FRN) Coordinators in Gilmer, Doddridge and Ritchie Counties, together with a representative of the Pleasants County Ministerial Association, a board member of the Gilmer County EDA, and a community volunteer. FRNs are local organizations charged with the coordination and planning of services and supports to children and families, while EDAs are charged with community and economic development. They had begun to realize that children and families were dependent on economic development and that economic development was not likely to occur without an improved quality of life in the community.

Participating counties were already holding regional economic development summits to engage citizens and agencies in a four county area to think differently about how they approached community and economic development in their rural counties. Their belief in taking a different approach was fueled, among other things, by the work of Dr. Vaughn

Grisham, a sociologist from the University of Mississippi. He was brought to West Virginia for a statewide conference where he talked about community change being initiated and supported by the energy and belief of one, committed individual with a “fire in their belly”. Dr. Grisham told the story of Tupelo, Mississippi and its long journey at transformation that began in the 1930’s with the efforts of a local newspaper editor. Tupelo’s journey continues today. You can read about that work in Dr. Grisham’s book, Hand In Hand.

The group began to talk about how they might engage citizens in focusing on the positive, brainstorming options for improving their communities, and implementing the changes they identified as possibilities.

This group formed the initial Steering Team that began the work of defining Possibilities Forums, seeking grant funds to support the initial pilot and working with outside consultants to help them in identifying the process and outcomes they would target for their first year. The following model describes the concept of Possibilities Forums and their relationship to the Tupelo Model as envisioned by the Steering Team. The Tupelo Model alone can be seen in Appendix A. As of this writing, the group is completing its second year and is assisting other communities in initiating Possibilities Forums.



### How Are Possibilities Forums Different From Traditional Community and Economic Development Strategies?

Possibilities Forums are different from traditional ways of thinking and talking about community development. They are also a different way to get things done. Traditionally, elected officials and professionals working in our public agencies and institutions have made decisions about what to do to improve our communities. They have secured private monies



or used public funds to complete identified projects. Public meetings have been posted in the newspaper and held according to state and federal requirements with little citizen input. Communities have been developed largely without a great deal of public involvement. Over time, citizens have relied more and more on government and elected officials to both identify and address needed change.

Possibilities Forums turn the old ways of working upside down. Possibilities Forums are different in numerous ways; from the language used to describe the work, to the people and processes used to choose and complete projects. Possibilities Forums provide a unique, sustainable method to develop the communities where citizens live, work and play.

Possibilities Forums are different in the following ways:

- **We're in this together**

Old ways of working and talking focused on limited people in power. “They” and “I”.

Possibilities Forums provide new ways of talking that focus on community involvement, ownership and equal contribution. They use words like “our” and “we” whenever possible.

- **Break down the walls**

Old ways of working on economic development defined boundaries by “counties” and “region” establishing an “us versus them” mentality.

Possibilities Forums provide new ways of talking that focus on community. They use the words “community” and “area” and “neighborhoods” to break down the boundaries, emphasizing working together and bringing the positive results closer to home.

- **Stay outside the box**

Old ways of working defined the process through committees and government bureaucracy.

In this new way of working, Possibilities Forums emphasize flexibility, teamwork and innovation.

*Possibilities Forums* – define the grouping of citizens and non-traditional leaders brainstorming ideas, identifying solutions and motivating action. These are new and creative thinkers complementing the work of existing entities.

*Community Teams* – rather than committees, special focus area groups work in teams, to emphasize the importance of working together toward a common goal, in an

**Possibilities Forums are different because they encourage citizens to:**

- Understand we're in this together
- Break down the walls
- Stay outside the box
- Paint a picture of the future

environment where everyone's unique talents and perspective are essential to the process. Teams and participants change as the vision grows.

**Paint a Picture of the Future**

Old ways of working focused on the mistakes of the past, and identifying a community's weaknesses. Possibilities Forums use words and phrases that describe what our future looks like. This includes:

- Talking about community strengths, rather than what is lacking in the community.
- Developing and describing a vision of an economy built on those strengths.
- Celebrating the things that make each community unique.

**Community Development – What is it?**

There are many definitions of community development used by many different entities.

Webster's Dictionary defines community in these ways:

- All people living in a district
- The district or city where the people live
- A group of people living together as a unit within a larger one
- A group of people with common interests, work, etc.
- A group of people loosely or closely associated because of common traditions or for political or economic advantage
- Similarity of tastes
- The condition of living with others
- Friendly association; fellowship
- Ecology; a group of animal or plant species living together and having close interactions with one another – especially through food relationships\*

The common element among every definition of community is people. Therefore, in order to develop and strengthen a community or the economy of a community, a focus must be given to the development of and interaction among the people of the community. You will see in the following box that social scientists and economists alike have identified the importance of the relationships among people as a common factor in successful community and economic development.

\* We will examine the relevance of this definition on page 21.

## Building Strong Communities

**“The social capital embodied in norms and networks of civic engagement seems to be a precondition for economic development, as well as for effective government”**

**“...communities did not become civic because they were rich. The historical record strongly suggests precisely the opposite. They became rich because they were civic.”**

*“The Prosperous Community - Social Capital and Public Life”  
Robert D. Putnam*

**“Although some...continue to believe that healthy economies create vibrant communities, in fact, the reverse is more often the case. A strong community is prerequisite for creating a healthy economy because it alone produces social trust.”**

*Jeremy Rifkin, 1999*

### Community Capacity

It is important to have a common understanding of the term “community capacity” since high levels of capacity are a natural indicator of successful communities. It is useful to look at the definition of “capacity” in Webster’s Dictionary.

- The ability to contain, absorb, receive or hold
- Room for holding
- The power of receiving and holding knowledge and impressions
- The ability or qualifications for doing something; aptitude
- Maximum output or producing ability
- A condition of being qualified or authorized

Possibilities Forums seek to expand a community’s capacity in the ways described in these definitions. It is necessary to increase individuals’ abilities before a community as a whole can increase its capacity. Whole communities are made up of individual people tied together by their relationships. When individuals have knowledge, are confident in their skills and abilities, they have individual capacity. When there are several people or groups of people that have individual capacity and are willing to work with others to improve their community, there is community capacity.

#### Community is:

- People
- Relationships between and among people

#### Community Development is:

- Improving the conditions in the places people live, work and play

**Individual Capacity is:**

- The knowledge, skills, abilities and beliefs of individuals used to improve the places where they live work and play
- Dependent on continuous learning

**Community Capacity is:**

- The knowledge, skills, abilities and beliefs of groups of people used to improve the places where they live, work and play

When people learn together by accomplishing goals that are important to them, capacity is increased. This is a basic principle of Possibilities Forums.

**Guiding Principles of Possibilities Forums**

Guiding principles are a tool to assist Possibilities Forums stay true to the purpose of their work. The principles behind Possibilities Forums reflect the underlying beliefs about what is important to their success.

***Local people must solve local problems.***

This principle comes from the work of Vaughn Grisham and the experiences of Tupelo, Mississippi. Resources and support that come from outside the community should be used as a supplement to the direction and work initiated by local citizens. No one knows more about a community than the people that live there.

***Local people must work together to discuss and envision their desired future.***

Dreaming, talking about and envisioning a positive future is essential for setting the direction for growth. This is true with individuals and it is true of communities. Without a picture of where we want to go, we spin our wheels. Like a family taking a vacation without a planned destination, it is uncertain where the family will end up. While this might be an exciting adventure for a couple of weeks in June, it is not a strong foundation for the long term development of a community.

***Focus on what we want, not what is wrong.***

The power of positive thinking has been documented in the areas of medicine, personal development and many other fields. It is also true of community development. When we focus on what is possible and move toward what we want, we create momentum and good will. For example, there is likely to be less drug and alcohol use among teens if there are constructive, appealing outlets for the creative interests of young people.

There is less room for deficits when we create positive alternatives.

***People learn best by doing.***

While solid data is important to making good decisions, it should not be provided in a vacuum. Lecturing or classroom-style learning appeals to a very small percentage of the population. Information needs to be provided to Possibilities Forum participants only when they need it to successfully complete a specific phase of their chosen work.

***Learning is a continuous process.***

Vaughn Grisham talks about how we can all get better at what we do. All of us must adopt the attitude that learning is a lifelong pursuit. The internet is a powerful tool in learning about what others are doing in the areas of interest to communities. Reading, talking with others and trying new things are all ways of learning and getting better at what we care about.

***Mistakes and failures are as valuable as successes.***

Shame and blame have long been associated with admitting to a mistake. It is still punished by bad grades in our classrooms and practiced by the way we behave in our government. Yet trying new things involves taking risks and risks involve danger. Taking risks means gambling on the chance of possible success against the threat of failure. However, triumphs cannot be reached without trying the unknown.

***Communities must invest their resources in themselves.***

Investments are made in those who invest in themselves. Outside investors are attracted to places where there are activities and investments already being made by the community. When citizens are engaged in strengthening their communities with the support of local business and organizations, others take notice. Strength draws strength.

***Use information.***

Information about a community's past and trends about its future are useful in setting a direction that honors its heritage and culture. It helps build a foundation for the future based on facts that can be woven together with dreams. Information from other communities about their attempts at similar efforts can provide a starting point that helps all communities interested in that work learn at the next level.

***Share information.***

Sharing information creates learning, builds trust and provides motivation to continue. Sharing information also creates efficiency. When we know what has worked and what hasn't worked we can try a new twist that may be the key to success in that particular area. When people share stories about their efforts, the very act of telling what happened deepens learning and builds trust among the tellers and the listeners. When we hear what others have done, we get excited about what is possible for us to achieve.

**Guiding Principles for Possibilities Forums:**

- Local people must solve local problems.
- Local people must work together to discuss and envision their desired future.
- Focus on what we want, not what is wrong.
- People learn best by doing.
- Learning is a continuous process.
- Mistakes and failures are as valuable as successes.
- Communities must invest their resources in themselves.
- Use information.
- Share information.
- Trusting relationships are essential for success

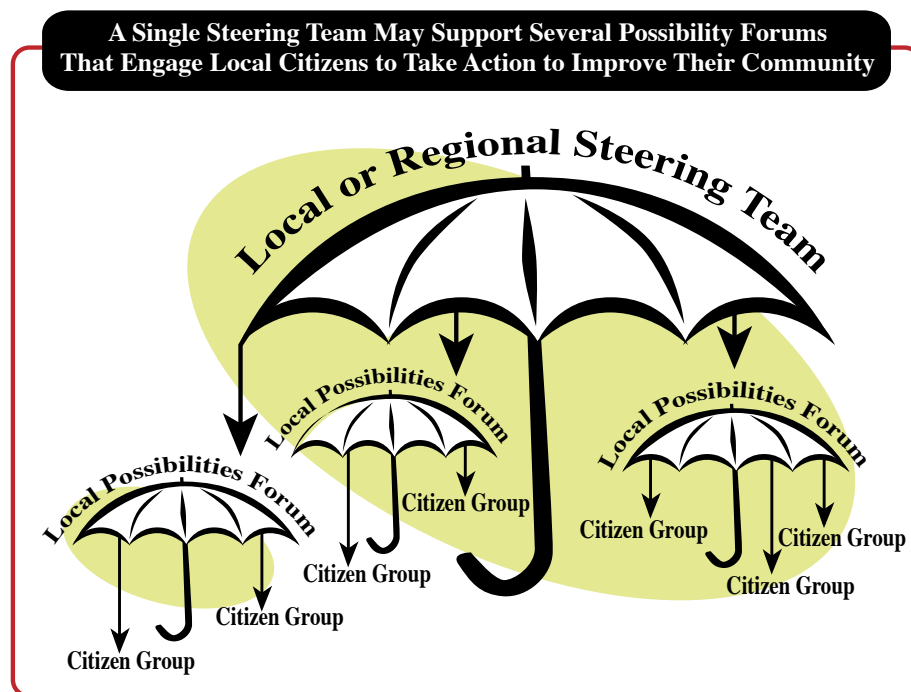
### *Trusting relationships are essential for success*

Trust and behaving in a trustworthy manner are contagious. Being trusted and trusting others allow us to open to what is possible. It allows the best of our abilities and gifts to come forward and be used. Time and time again when individuals working in community groups are asked what they need from others to be able to perform at their highest levels, the number one answer is trust.

## Getting Started: Setting Up the Steering Team

### **The Role of the Steering Team**

The Steering Team is a key to producing successful Possibilities Forums. The Steering Team is responsible for providing the support needed by engaged citizens participating in Possibilities Forums. Responsive assistance to citizens groups working on projects chosen from the initial brainstorming sessions of Possibilities Forums is critical in building trust and sustaining momentum once the citizens are identified and engaged. The model below shows the relationship between the Steering Team, Possibilities Forums and citizens' project teams.



Another important role of the Steering Team is to identify, engage and encourage citizens from various parts of the community, with different backgrounds and experiences to participate in Possibilities Forums. This is a strategic process that requires knowledge of the



community as a whole and contacts from its various sectors. We will discuss the process of identifying and engaging citizens when we talk about setting up Possibilities Forums.

Connecting engaged citizen teams to the resources and supports that they need to be successful is also a role of the Steering Team. Steering Team members serve as partners in linking to internal and external resources needed by Possibilities Forums as they complete their chosen work. These resources range from food at meetings, to providing local meeting space, to identifying trainers and materials, and working with citizens to design and facilitate Possibilities Forum meetings. Steering Team members prepare the environment for citizens to remain focused on identifying possibilities and selecting and carrying out projects to improve their communities.

The Steering Team also serves as a link between Possibilities Forums from different counties by designing opportunities for various Possibilities Forum participants to get together to exchange ideas, and to share their progress and challenges. An added benefit of bringing participants from different Possibilities Forums together is the recognition of the possibilities inherent in working together across traditional boundaries to enhance the development of the larger area. Especially in rural counties, the opportunity for sharing resources and combining energies and ideas to benefit the larger region can result in more attractive proposals. This concept is often referred to as “economies of scale”. By working with more people, small rural areas can begin to compete with larger metropolitan areas that can demonstrate greater impact due to the larger number of people affected by their work. This multi-county approach also increases the likelihood of successful results for bigger, more long-term projects.

### **The Role of Outside Facilitation**

The outside facilitator is a flexible guide to assist the Steering Team and Possibilities Forums in connecting to both internal and external resources, to help in building the capacity of both groups to produce the results that they aim for. They take the community’s lead and provide the support needed to move in the community’s desired direction.



#### **Steering Teams:**

- Identify, engage and encourage Possibilities Forum participants.
- Support the direction/s chosen by each Possibilities Forum.
- Are responsive to the needs of Possibilities Forums.
- Connect Possibilities Forums to the resources and assistance they need.
- Provide opportunities for Possibilities Forums to gather with other Possibilities Forums to share ideas, successes and challenges.

It is important to remember that the content and direction for community improvement are chosen by each local Possibilities Forum. It is the job of the outside facilitator to meet the Steering Team and each local Possibilities Forum in moving from where they are to where they want to be.

The outside facilitator assists both groups in staying focused on the possibilities – What do we want? This is a new way of working and it is natural for groups to sometimes slip into the familiar pattern of complaining about what is wrong and dwelling on why some possibility is impossible or won't work.

The outside facilitator is a strategy partner. The facilitator works with the Steering Team to identify and recruit Possibilities Forum participants. The facilitator serves as a guide to ask questions and to help the group clarify the thinking and rationale behind its choices.



Resources, both internal and external to the community, are essential to the success of Possibilities Forums. The outside facilitator serves as a supportive link to bring materials, contacts and information to the Steering Team and individual Possibilities Forums for their consideration and possible use. The outside facilitator, like the Steering Team, helps local Possibilities Forums identify the resources (information, people, money, etc.) they need to get their chosen work done.

For example, in order to help each local Possibilities Forum figure out where their county had been and where it might be if it continued on its current path, Counties 4 Development Steering Team contracted with facilitator and a researcher to develop County Data Profiles. The facilitator worked with the Steering Team to identify the desired content and the researcher located and compiled the County Data Profiles. Information that told the county's story using census and other data was put together in an easy to read format. A County Data Profile is in the appendix of this manual for your review.

Outside facilitators are skilled professionals that do not reside within the community. They may be independent consultants, public agency staff, university staff such as Extension Agents or staff of private firms specializing in support to communities.

Desirable skills and qualities of an outside facilitator include:

- Expertise in group process (how to help the group function well).
- Neutral – ability to assist the group in making its own decision without injecting personal bias.
- Belief in citizen abilities.
- Knowledge of community development.

- Willingness to study and learn.
- Ability to summarize large amounts of information for group reflection.
- Ability to design an agenda that allows the group to engage in productive activities that lead to results.
- Ability to assist the group in creating a safe and open environment for discussion and decision-making.
- Ability to recognize and help the group deal with disagreements and ‘road blocks’ to progress in a constructive manner.
- Exceptional listening abilities.
- Strong observation skills – the ability to read body language, tone and nuance.
- Tact.
- Discipline.
- Humor.

### **Forming a Steering Team**

Steering Teams should “bubble up”, meaning they should be formed by individuals that are excited about and interested in new strategies for invigorating community and economic development. The Steering Team that began the original Possibilities Forums in West Virginia embodied a four county area and included two representatives from each of the four counties. They were leaders of the local Economic Development Authorities, Family Resource Networks and The Ministerial Alliance. Others were local volunteers that served as directors on the boards of local organizations. There is no magic number or composition to a Steering Team. What is important is that the Steering Team membership shares a combination of the following characteristics:

- A willingness to try new strategies.
- A belief in the skills of citizens.
- Openness to new ideas.
- An interest in guiding and supporting, not controlling.
- A willingness to commit the time needed to support Possibilities Forums teams.
- Knowledge of the geographic area to be covered by the Possibilities Forums.
- A connection to internal and external resources.
- An ability to resist pressure to do the work of citizens.
- An earned trust and respect by local leaders and citizens.
- Belief in the power of possibilities.

### **Outside Facilitators**

- Are flexible.
- Serve as partners with the Steering Team and Possibilities Forums.
- Assist both the Steering Team and the Possibilities Forums in staying focused on the possibilities.
- Link the Steering Team and Possibilities Forums to potential resources.
- Provide meeting facilitation when asked.
- Provide or connect Possibilities Forums to the training needed to move in their chosen directions.
- Help with the development of strategies to achieve the goals set by the Steering Team and Possibilities Forums.

### **Combined Characteristics of Steering Teams**

- A willingness to try new strategies.
- A belief in the skills of citizens.
- Openness to new ideas.
- An interest in guiding and supporting, not controlling.
- A willingness to commit the time needed to support Possibilities Forums teams.
- Knowledge of the geographic area to be covered by the Possibilities Forums.
- A connection to internal and external resources.
- An ability to resist pressure to do the work of citizens.
- An earned trust and respect by local leaders and citizens.
- Belief in the power of possibilities.

### **To Form a Steering Team:**

- Ask members from an existing Steering Team that supports Possibilities Forums to come talk about the process that worked for them.
- Invite people that share some of the common characteristics from your potential target area (county, city, or neighborhood) to come to a meeting to learn more about Possibilities Forums and begin brainstorming possibilities.
- Talk with each other about the possibilities in your area.

Steering Team members are not super heroes. They are simply willing to support each other and the citizens of their communities to try new things, to connect resources in novel ways, and to champion learning by doing as citizens work together to improve the conditions in communities.

To form a Steering Team to initiate and support Possibilities Forums, ask for someone that has served on a Steering Team to come and talk about the Possibilities Forums in their area. Invite some people that share the above characteristics to come to listen, ask questions and discuss the readiness of your community to get Possibilities Forums up and running.

If there is sufficient interest, the new Steering Team can begin the process of identifying and recruiting citizens to participate in Possibilities Forums.

## **Setting Up Possibilities Forums**

### **Composition of Possibilities Forums**

Possibilities Forums should be diverse. They should be made of people with different:

- Ages
- Genders
- Backgrounds
- Experiences
- Economic levels
- Education
- Lengths of residency
- Interests
- Connections

When people of good will come together with their knowledge of life's widely varied opportunities and experiences, the group will have the ability to see many sides of the issues and many options for the future.

It is essential to invest particular time and energy in identifying and involving youth. Those who lack long time experience bring fresh views and a vitality often lacking in older, more experienced members.

At the same time, it is important to note that the original

Steering Team in West Virginia intentionally avoided including elected officials and existing bureaucrats in the membership of Possibilities Forums. Efforts were made to inform public servants of the establishment of Possibilities Forums and their potential to support their work, though the focus remained on engaging those that may not have had significant opportunities to “make a difference”.

A diverse group that listens to one another can envision strategies and options that are more comprehensive and are likely to appeal to a wider range of citizens. Take the time to consider the above areas of diversity as you seek participants for Possibilities Forums.

### **Characteristics of Possibilities Forums’ Participants**

Ideal Possibilities Forums represent a great deal of differences. A broad and diverse set of life experiences among members increases the group’s capacity to function as a team. It is also critical that participants have some things in common. Shared beliefs about the value of envisioning a positive future, working as a team, generating possibilities and creating a positive reality are essential.

Individuals encouraged to participate in Possibilities Forums should share the following attitudes, beliefs and behaviors:

- Positive, can-do attitude
- Optimism about the future
- Works well with others
- A good listener
- Open to new ideas
- Willing to try new things
- Willing to invest personal time and energy
- Willing to share ideas
- Trustworthy, will follow-through on commitments
- Believe in the power of citizens to co-create their own destiny

Possibilities Forum participants are generally positive people that are willing to be a part of a team. Possibilities Forums are not places for those that habitually complain or see the future as a darkened dead end. Chronic nay-sayers and those that are negative about others’ efforts at creating a positive future will bring down the group. As Malcolm Gladwell says in his book, *Good to Great*, “get the right people on the bus, and the wrong people off!”

### **Characteristics of Possibilities Forum Participants**

- Positive, can-do attitude
- Optimism about the future
- Works well with others
- A good listener
- Open to new ideas
- Willing to try new things
- Willing to invest personal time and energy
- Willing to share ideas
- Trustworthy, will follow-through on commitments
- Believe in the power of citizens to create their own destiny





### **Generating Participants for Possibilities Forums:**

- In-person invitation by a known and trusted person
- Word-of-mouth
- Newspaper articles
- Radio advertisements
- Flyers
- Community Access Channel bulletins
- Printed placemats for local diners
- Announcements at local meetings
- Notes in local organizations' and churches' newsletters and bulletins

Take time to think about the general personality characteristics of Possibilities Forum participants. Like the Steering Team, Possibilities Forums participants need to have a light that shines within them. For their light to burn brightly, they need the support of others who share, appreciate and will nurture the light in themselves and others. Take the time to identify individuals that will work with you to create an environment rich in possibilities.

### **Generating Participants**

Generating participants for Possibilities Forums can be done in different ways. Word of mouth, news articles and advertisements, radio spots and announcements in local organizations' newsletters and at meetings are all useful options. Consider printing placemats for use in local diners. Word-of-mouth and personal contacts have been the most successful among areas with Possibilities Forums. Research and local experience tells us that people respond best when asked to do something by someone they know and trust.

Figuring out whom to ask and what to say requires some careful thought. So, gather up your Steering Team, plan to spend a couple of hours, and try your variation of the process described in the next section.

### **Figuring Out Whom to Ask**

Figuring out whom to ask is a strategic process. Work together as a Steering Team to make a list of all the small communities and neighborhoods in your target area. The original Possibilities Forums in West Virginia began in four counties, so the Steering Team identified the small communities inside each county. Think about your larger target area and make your list together.

Next, make a list of all the organizations, businesses, groups, churches and informal gatherings that meet in your larger target area. Consider civic groups, scouts, sporting and hobby clubs, neighborhood associations, housing developments, volunteer organizations such as firefighters and others, historical and environmental societies. Write down any group within the small neighborhoods that you can think of in the communities that you generated for your earlier list.



Now, identify the individuals from each of the two previous lists that are trusted and known by others. Make sure that you pay particular attention to the natural leaders, those that are respected and trusted by others, and do not hold any publicly elected positions. A mother of five in a government housing development comes to mind. Her apartment and yard were a natural gathering place. Young parents came to her for advice, children chose to play there and she was frequently heard telling others to pick up the trash in their yards, offering coffee or a ride into town. She is an example of a natural leader. She has the ability to mobilize groups of people because of her relationships with others. People like her are ideal candidates as Possibilities Forums participants.

Once your lists of geographic communities, organizations, and businesses, and individuals are complete someone must make personal contact with the persons that have been identified. Divide the list among Steering Team members. Select those people that connect to the most other citizens first. Once they have become interested and excited about Possibilities Forums, they may assist you in reaching out to others on your list and adding additional people that you might have overlooked.

Give yourselves a timeline to make your initial contacts. Set another meeting to come back and share the results of your efforts. Bring a few more people that want to help invite others to participate.

## What to Say

As a Steering Team, take some time to think and talk about what to say while recruiting. Ask an outside facilitator to help you work through the answers to your questions in a fun and interactive way. The result of that time spent together will leave you with a message that fits your community and applies the concepts of Possibilities Forums.

Answer the questions your friends and neighbors will be asking you:

- What's the purpose?
- Why should I be a part of the work?
- What will we do?
- How long will it last?
- What is expected of me?
- What is in it for me?

## Figuring Out Whom to Ask to Participate in Possibilities Forums:

*As a Steering Team, get together and:*

- Make a list of the small neighborhoods and communities in your larger target area.
- Make a list of all the organizations, churches, businesses, clubs and groups that you can think of operating in the neighborhoods and communities that you listed.
- Within the above two lists, make a list of the individuals that are active, positive and function as natural leaders.
- Assign yourselves to speak in person with each of the key people listed above.
- Set a timeline and a date to get back together, with a few of your new partners, to check out your results.

As a Steering Team, figure out ways to answer the questions that capture people's imaginations. Take the message out to the people and organizations you listed, put placemats at the diners, place flyers around the area. Most importantly, talk to people face-to-face. Ask them personally. Have fun! Create excitement!

## Holding the Forums

### Design Possibilities Forums Meetings That Allow Participants To:

- Interact with one another
- Get to know each other
- Eat together
- See and hear each other easily

### At Forum Meetings:

- Provide food and drink
- Pay attention to the room;
  - Size
  - Location
  - Comfort
  - Seating

### Design

In general, Possibilities Forums meetings should be designed to be highly interactive. Since we know that good work and positive change occur when there are strong relationships among people, Possibilities Forums meetings should provide opportunities for participants to get to know one another, to laugh, learn and produce results. The Steering Team should work with an outside facilitator to design sessions that meet the above criteria. Possibilities Forums' meeting content will be examined more closely in a later section.

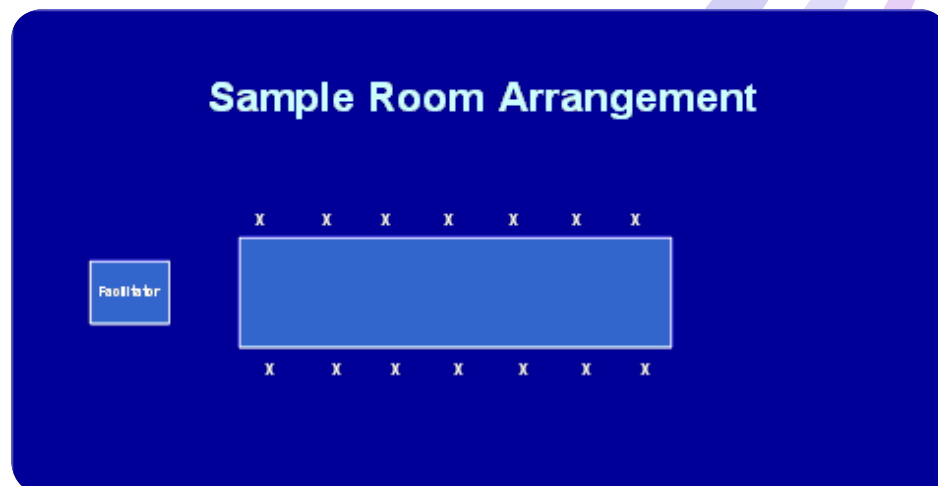
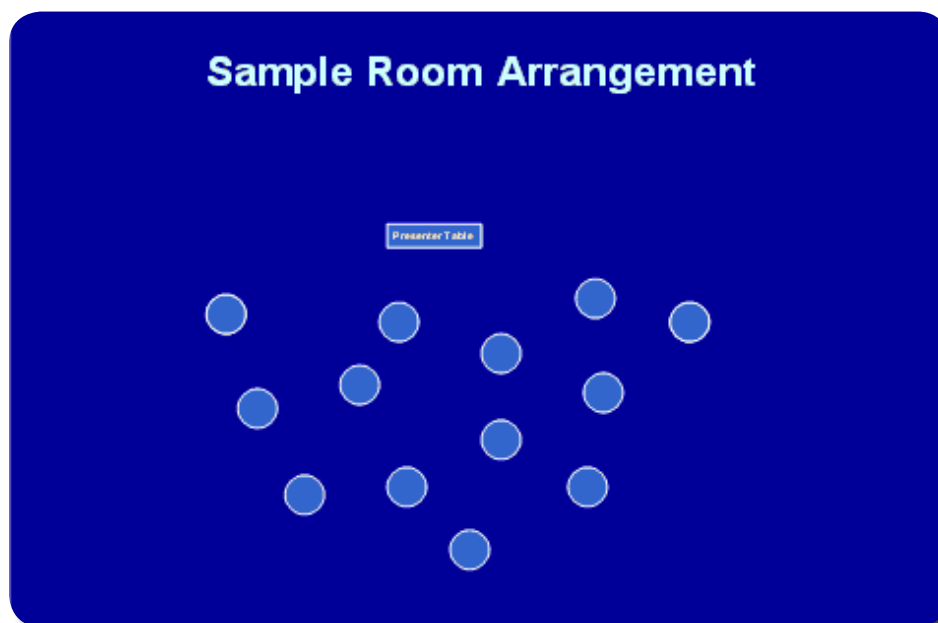
Setting the tone for successful meetings begins with the meeting room itself. Pay particular attention to creating an atmosphere that promotes team work and sharing. Both food and room set-up can go a long way in nurturing relationships among Forum participants. We will start with food.

Food - The importance of food at Forum meetings cannot be overlooked. The last Webster's Dictionary definition of community on page 9, may have seemed odd and out of place. It reads,

[Community is] "Ecology; a group of animal or plant species living together and having close interactions with one another – especially through food relationships"

Food is essential to all life. Food is and has been an important feature of human society from the very beginning. Breaking bread together signifies a bond and a sense of sharing. It promotes good will. Food may be in the form of snacks, sandwich trays or pot luck meals. At the very least, baskets of a variety of chocolates on each table and a selection of beverages will help create comfort. When people are comfortable, their best thinking can come forward.

**Room Set-Up** - The way the room is set up for working together has an impact on the results that people are able to produce together. Forum participants should be seated in a way that they can see and hear each other. Consider a U shaped arrangement or a series of small tables that seat 4 to 8 participants. Arrange the tables and chairs so that participants face one another. It is important that people are able to see the person that is speaking because body language, including facial expressions, is an important part of the message being communicated. Some examples of room arrangements follow.



### **Suggested Timeframe:**

- Monthly meetings
- Evening or weekends
- Two to four hours in length
- Determined by Possibilities Forum participants

### **Timeframe and Context**

Since Forum participants are community volunteers, it is important to be sensitive to the demands on people's time. Monthly, two to four hour meetings that combine learning, relationship building and the identification of desired direction have been most successful. Consider holding evening and weekend sessions to allow people to attend outside of traditional working hours.

These suggested timeframes are intended to provide a guide for your Possibilities Forums meetings. Participants in each individual forum should make the decision about when to meet and for how long. Once actual projects are selected, Possibilities Forums will likely have various teams working on individual projects. Citizen teams often meet in between the Possibilities Forum meetings to complete tasks and make decisions specific to individual projects.

There is a logical sequence to assisting Possibilities Forum participants in identifying the possibilities and acting to bring them into reality in their communities. It is important that participants understand the purpose and principles of Possibilities Forums and that real work and results are integrated with training and concept development from the very first meeting.

In this section, we will cover the following:

- Sample Forum sequence
- Sample session agenda

Sample Forum Sequence - Possibilities Forums should move through a sequence that allows participants to brainstorm possibilities, select priorities for action, and map out the steps for completing priority projects, including who will do what by when. Strategies for communicating the results to the broader community and celebrating successes should also be included.

Information about the communities' past and present; such as employment figures, income and education levels, businesses, schools, and recreational opportunities should be given to participants for consideration when choosing priorities. Specific information about the purpose of Possibilities Forums, community development principles and trends in economic development should be offered in brief, bite-sized morsels to stimulate thinking and build participants' capacity at improving their communities. One of the most important lessons learned from initiating and supporting Possibilities Forums is that all training must be provided at the right moment. Information shared with participants must be the information that they need, when they need it to move their work forward.

Providing opportunities for Possibilities Forums participants to get together with others involved in Possibilities Forums is also important. The original Possibilities Forums in

West Virginia were developed in four counties and supported by a single Steering Team. Possibilities Forum participants from each of the counties were brought together as a multi-county group three times throughout the year. During these meetings, participants were given the chance to share their successes and challenges, to learn from one another and identify additional information that would help them in their work.

A sample meeting sequence might look something like this:

- Meeting One:** Introduction to the Purpose and History of Possibilities Forums
- The Tupelo Model
  - Community Development Principles
    - Brainstorming Possibilities in Your Community
    - The Role and Function of Possibilities Team Participants
    - What to Expect at the Next Meeting
- Meeting Two:** A Review of Your Community Profile  
Economic and Societal Trends  
Selecting Possibilities Priorities for Action  
What to Expect at the Next Meeting
- Meeting Three:** The Community Development Model  
Identifying Teams for each chosen possibility  
Identifying Co-Leaders for each Team
- Meeting Four:** Envisioning the End Result – Defining what ‘it’ looks like when it is successfully completed  
Developing a Map for Getting ‘It’ Done (Work Plan Development)
- Meeting Five:** Identifying the Resources Needed to Complete Project (see the definition of resources in the box on page 3)
- Who needs to know about the project?
  - Whose help is needed to complete the project?
  - What skills are needed?
  - What materials are needed?
  - What funds are needed?
- Meeting Six:** Reviewing Projects’ Progress
- What is working?
  - Where are the challenges?
  - What help is needed?

**Possibilities Forums should move through a sequence that allows participants to:**

- Brainstorm possibilities.
- Select priorities for action.
- Map out the steps for completing the priority projects, including who will do what by when.
- Identify strategies for communicating the results to the broader community.
- Identify strategies for celebrating successes, sharing what was learned and inviting others to participate.

**Sample Agenda for a Two Hour Meeting**

30 minutes	Welcome and Introductory Activity
5 minutes	Review of the Agenda
1 hour	Learning Content and Project Action
20 minutes	Next Steps and Development of the Agenda for the Next Meeting
5 minutes	Meeting Evaluation

**Meeting Seven:** A Working Session

- Are we on track for completion?
- What help is needed?

**Meeting Eight:** Planning a Community Celebration

- Highlighting successes
- Appreciating supporters
- Inviting new participants
- Publicizing the event

**Meeting Nine:** Planning a Community Celebration

**Meeting Ten:** Community Celebration!

Sample Possibilities Forum Session Agenda - This sample agenda is offered as an outline to assist you in planning the agenda for your Possibilities Forums. The specific content, activities and methods of delivery should be chosen by the Steering Team, with the guidance of an outside facilitator.

Before we get into agenda specifics, it is important to note that especially in the early phases two hour meetings are the minimum amount of time that can result in productive Possibilities Forum meetings. It is important to devote time at the beginning of each meeting to allow participants to getting to know each other better. The middle of each meeting should focus on learning new information and taking action on community projects. The end of each meeting should be spent on identifying next steps and the agenda for the following meeting. Following is a sample agenda for your use.

If participants in your community choose to spend more than two hours in Possibilities Forum meetings, consider providing more time in the middle of the meeting for making progress on community projects. The more time that is devoted to participants working on ways to improve their communities, the more satisfaction and greater achievement they will experience.



Meetings should provide just enough structure to keep participants interacting in constructive ways. Remember the key is for participants to get to know one another; to laugh together, learn together and produce results.

## Supporting Local Possibilities Forums

### Retaining Forum Participants

We are still learning what it takes to keep participants actively involved in the forum process. What we think we have learned so far is that people who come to the initial meetings have a genuine interest in doing something to make their communities better. A focus on “doing” is essential. The sample meeting sequence in the previous section includes suggestions for combining learning the needed skills and information to expand participants’ thinking about community development while completing their desired projects.

We have learned that there is no substitute for frequent and open communication between Steering Team members and Possibilities Forum participants. Participants that are supported by others and counted on to follow through will usually do just that.

Understanding work style preferences is another important part of keeping people engaged in community work. Some people enjoy meetings. They like talking about what is possible and planning how to get work done. Others prefer to do hands on work. Others like telling people what is going on, making connections in the community and asking for support. Allowing people to do what they naturally enjoy and creating a loose structure that permits people to come and go as the requirements of the work change keeps people involved and feeling productive. Experiment, ask for participants’ feedback, and make revisions as you go.

Thank participants for their efforts. Create opportunities to celebrate. People tend to stay involved when they know that their hard work is appreciated.

### Expanding Forum Participation

This is another area that we are still learning about. Communication is important. As citizens see positive

### To Keep Participants Involved:

- Focus on doing real work
- Provide information and training that helps get the work done
- Keep training short and simple
- Let participants know what to expect
- Provide opportunities for participants to share successes and challenges
- Stay in touch with participants between meetings.
- Understand different work style preferences
- Ask participants what they need. Listen and make adjustments.
- Thank people often



changes in their community and hear from participants that are excited about what they are doing others will want to become involved. Excitement is contagious. People want to be a part of success.

Ask your local newspaper to publish articles about what is happening. Ask participants to talk about what they are doing in the grocery store, at sporting events, at church and in other meetings in which they take part. Invite others that are interested to join. Invite the general public as well as likely participants to attend celebrations of project achievements. As more people become engaged and projects are completed, repeat the brainstorming process, revisit priorities and projects identified earlier and amend them as necessary and desirable. Generate new possibilities and undertake new efforts. Consider using a website to post project progress and encourage communication.

### **Connecting to Resources**

- Resources are more than money.
- Look inside and outside your community.
- Research what others have done.
- Talk to your contacts.
- Be creative!

### **Connecting to Resources**

Both internal and external resources are essential to successful community development. Understanding where Possibilities Forum participants are in the process of completing a project will help in identifying and connecting to the appropriate resources at the right time. Participants themselves are resources. They know people and organizations that can assist at various stages of a project. Steering team members and outside facilitators are also useful conduits for linking to the resources needed to complete a project. Research what others have done to complete similar projects anywhere around the world. Use the internet. Remember that we defined resources very broadly on page 4 of this manual. Resources include more than money. They are people, skills, knowledge, information and much more. People invest in those who invest in themselves, so spend some time with each other thinking about what you need. Be creative about ways to combine resources to get the job done.

### **Tools for Possibilities Forums**

Helping Possibilities Forum participants understand their community's history and future economic trends provides a context for their work. Providing citizens with data offers a firm foundation for making informed decisions. County Profiles and national and global economic trends analysis are useful tools.

County Profiles are documents that provide an overview of the county's past as well as an analysis of state and federal statistics that offer a picture of a county's economic base, the make up of its population, current housing, its citizens' socio-economic status, and other demographics. A sample County Profile is available in Appendix B.

While the attached County Profile is simple and brief, it is the result of many hours of analysis and summary. It is recommended that you prepare a tool that can be easily used by Possibility Forum participants. Once the data is collected, organized and displayed, its accurate interpretation is critically important. Use resources as necessary to get the right product and support.

National and global trends analysis offers a projection into the likely future of spending trends and upcoming job growth. In the United States we once had an economy based on farming, today we have an information/technology based economy. We are projected to move beyond that into a conceptual based economy. In order for our communities to provide an appropriate infrastructure, educate their citizens and transition their businesses there must first be an understanding of the need to continually seek new information.

## Taking Stock

### Evaluating Results

Evaluation is an important part of creating a learning environment. Learning what is working and what can be improved is the essence of Possibilities Forums. Since we are encouraging citizens to look at their communities in this way, we must look at both the process of Possibilities Forums and the results that have been achieved.

Process evaluation, **how** things get done, means asking questions about how participants think and feel about the support they receive to complete their identified projects. An evaluation of results, **what** was accomplished, requires that we look at actual projects that were completed and the changes that occurred in communities as an outcome of those projects.

Once evaluations have been completed, the information must be analyzed and a report developed. Most importantly, report findings must be read and revisions made to upcoming work based on what was learned.

Consider posting evaluation results on a website and distributing the report to interested Possibilities Forum participants. This open sharing of information creates trust and reinforces the notion that Possibilities Forums are serious about making things better by learning from successes and mistakes and continuing to support what works.

The Steering Team of Counties 4 Development (C4D) worked with an independent contractor to evaluate years one and two of its efforts. Funds will also be budgeted for



evaluating Year Three. An independent consultant with a background in community work and evaluation talked with Steering Team members about what they wanted an evaluation instrument to measure. A tool was designed and modified based on these conversations. It is important that an independent evaluator work with the Steering Team in the design and implementation of an evaluation. As with planning, you should always be included in the evaluation process. The Evaluation Reports from C4D's Years One and Two can be seen in Appendices C and D.

Another tool that is used to measure the quality of meetings of the Steering Team and Possibilities Forums is a brief evaluation at the close of each meeting. Participants are asked to share what went well with the meeting and what they would change in order to improve future meetings. Participants use individual index cards to share their thoughts anonymously. The group's responses are compiled and included in the notes that are distributed to all members following the meeting. This information can be used to help participants shape the direction and tone of their meetings. It can also provide guidance to outside facilitators and others charged with supporting the groups' work. A sample meeting evaluation is available in Appendix E.

### **Results of Actual Possibilities Forums**

We will take a look at the dynamics existing in each of the four West Virginia counties that initiated Possibilities Forums. We will also summarize the results from evaluations of Years One and Two.

It is important that your Steering Team and Possibilities Forum participants recognize that each county has its own unique set of circumstances and as with the four counties in West Virginia, progress will vary. Every county will be at a different level of readiness and you simply begin where you are in your community.

Below, you will find a brief background of the West Virginia county with some of the information contained in their County Profile. Next, you will see a review of their identified progress using the concept of Possibilities Forums.

#### **Doddridge County, West Virginia**

*Background:* Present day Doddridge County, West Virginia was established in 1845 (as part of Virginia). Just prior to the Civil War (1856) the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad expanded into the county bringing economic growth and a steady stream of additional settlers. Oil and gas production is an important part of the local economy supplemented by some coal and timber production.

Doddridge County had a population of 7,403 persons at the time of the last census (2000). It is a rural area with 23.1 persons per square mile. 25% of the population is under the age

of eighteen years and 14.8% is over the age of sixty-five years. A significant portion of the population over age five years is disabled (23.3%). There are 2,845 households in the county.

For jobs that are available in the county, the average annual wage is relatively good (by West Virginia standards) at \$27,130. However, a significant number of county residents do not have sufficient income. The poverty rate is high at 19.8% (over 7 percentage points higher than the national average).

There is relatively little retail business conducted in Doddridge County. Most retail transactions (purchase of goods and services) by people are made outside the county. Only one-third of the workforce residing in Doddridge County works in the county. Forty-five percent work in neighboring Harrison County.

*Possibilities Forums Results:* Despite active involvement by two Steering Team members, last year there was not enough momentum in the county to establish Possibilities Forums. A survey was developed by Steering Team members and another interested citizen and an outside facilitator as a way to determine public interest and to identify a strategy to get citizens actively engaged. The survey contained questions about what was important to citizens in their community and what they were interested in seeing made available in their community. The goal was to determine how the citizens viewed community and economic development within Doddridge County. The Doddridge County High School Learn-n-Serve Club distributed the surveys to the community. They were paid \$1.00 per completed survey. There were 200 surveys returned. Surveys will be analyzed and the results compiled and presented to the public.

Recently, it was announced that a new high school will be built in Doddridge County. There is interest around this issue. Steering Team members noticed this and convened a community meeting. Youth that attended gave ideas on uses for the old high school. A follow-up meeting, facilitated by local Steering Team members, was held. Meeting invitations were given to Board of Education members, family, friends and citizens in general. Door prizes were given and youth presented their ideas for uses of the old high school building and grounds.

Using the survey results and the interest in identifying uses for the old high school as leverage, it is hoped that Possibilities Forums can be established and supported around citizens' interests.

### **Gilmer County, West Virginia**

*Background:* Oil and natural gas was discovered in Gilmer County around the turn of the twentieth century and the industry continues to contribute to the local economy today. Other contributors to the local economy have historically included, farming (including some tobacco), coal, and timber. The WV State Folk Festival was started in Glenville in



1950 and has become a huge summer event bringing many visitors to the town to celebrate Appalachian culture, folk music and crafts.

Gilmer County had a population of 7,160 persons at the time of the last census (2000). It is a rural area with 21.1 persons per square mile. There are somewhat fewer young people (under age 18 years) residing in the county than the state average (20.3% in Gilmer vs. 22.3% statewide). 15.3% of the population is over the age of sixty-five years. Slightly less of the population over age five years is disabled (21.2%) than the state average but this is still significantly more than the national average of 17.7%. There are 2,768 households in the county.

Total income per person in the county is \$17,531 which is well below the national average of \$30,413. Low wage jobs tend to be the norm in Gilmer County. The average annual wage is not good (even by West Virginia standards) at \$20,113. This is little more than half (58%) of the national average. The unemployment rate also exceeds the state and national averages at 6.7%. There is a high rate of poverty in the county (25.9%) which again, significantly exceeds the state and national averages.

This rural county is not a commercial trade center. Retail business conducted in Gilmer County is less than half the state average. Presumably, a significant portion of the retail sales activity of residents in the county takes place in larger commercial areas since the state average per capita retail sales is \$7,743.

*Possibilities Forums Results:* A photo contest was held. It was designed to get citizens involved by taking pictures of Gilmer County to identify the assets and needs of the county and its smaller communities. There were only a few entries. The winner of the photo contest donated the funds to the “flower project”.

Local volunteers held “The Flower Project” to beautify downtown Glenville with hanging baskets and flowers for the annual Folk Festival held the 3rd Thursday in June.

Last year’s Possibilities Forum participants identified and selected projects for completion. Teams were not sustained and no projects were completed. Citizens tried again the second year. The Multi-County Meeting of Counties 4 Development for the four counties engaged in Possibilities Forums held its May meeting in Gilmer County. Interested citizens and potential Possibilities Forum participants were invited to hear the successes and challenges of Possibilities Forums in the other three counties. Gilmer’s Steering Team members used the event as a kick-off for reestablishing Possibilities Forums in their county. A Possibilities Forum was held at the end of the month with facilitation of the meeting series provided by an outside facilitator using the sequence outlined in this manual.

In subsequent meetings, a citizen group, comprised mostly of Steering Team members, was formed. The decision was made that to be effective Steering Team members providing



support to other citizen teams in the future, and to show the broader community that they were committed, the Steering Team must complete a project themselves.

The group decided to raise money to establish a community development fund. Funds raised are to be granted, through an application process, to other community groups wishing to engage in improvement projects. Gilmer County's citizen team has developed a work plan to guide their project. A grant application package has been completed and grant application training is planned for interested applicants. As of this writing, the team has raised \$6934.52 by planning and conducting community bingo games. The earnings have been placed in the community fund. Technical assistance has been received from an area foundation about how to properly set up and conduct a community fund.

### **Pleasants County, West Virginia**

*Background:* Pleasants County, West Virginia was established in 1851 by the Virginia General Assembly. Fur traders visited the area throughout the 18th century having access via the Ohio River but the area remained a wilderness until after the civil war. By 1851 there were about fifteen hundred people living in Pleasants County. St. Mary's, the county seat was founded in 1834. By the turn of the century (1900) there were 9,345 people residing in Pleasants County. As of 2000, earnings from employment in manufacturing, public utilities, state and local government jobs, and services accounted for most of the overall earnings from jobs available in the county.

Pleasants County had a population of 7,514 persons at the time of the last census (2000). It is largely a rural area with the population clustered along the Ohio River. The population density of 57.5 persons per square mile is larger than many counties in West Virginia but it does not reach the average population density of the state (75.1 persons per square mile). The portion of the population under age 18 years (23%) and over age 65 years (14.9%) are both very close to the state averages for those age groups. The portion of the population over age five years that is disabled (17.3%) is less than the state average and very close to the national average. There are 2,887 households in the county.

Per-capita income in Pleasants County is close to the state average at \$21,249 but lags significantly behind the national average (\$30,413). The average annual wage per job is good (by West Virginia standards) at \$33,741. This is close to the national average and it exceeds the state average by over \$7,000. The unemployment rate is, however, higher than both the state and national averages at 8.1%. The poverty rate for county residents is 13.7% which is well below the state average and only a little more than the national average.

While there is more retail business conducted in Pleasants County than in the other C4D counties (Ritchie, Doddridge, and Gilmer), it is not a commercial center. Thirty-five percent (35%) of employed county residents work across the Ohio River in bordering Washington County, Ohio or in the Parkersburg, WV area in bordering Wood County. Consequently, some

of the retail commerce transacted by county residents is probably carried out in these areas. About half of the workers residing in Pleasants County are employed at jobs located in the county.

*Possibilities Forums Results:* There were 35 original projects identified in the first “brainstorming session”. Out of the 35, three were chosen for action. Projects were chosen that could be easily completed and were highly visible to citizens throughout the community.

The first project was planting flowers in the street medians of the community of St. Marys. The project was completed after numerous volunteers spent two Saturdays in the spring planting 900 daylilies. A local nursery provided the flowers at near wholesale cost. A local hardwood company donated approximately \$400 worth of mulch to complete the project. The City of St. Marys provided traffic control. Plans were shared with City and State Department of Highways’ officials and replacement daylilies were planted on a Possibilities Forum participant’s farm for use the following fall. Volunteers have kept the daylilies weeded.

The second project was the planning, compilation and printing of the Pleasants County Business Directory. The project was initiated by a Possibilities Forum team, but the initiative grew to include the Pleasants County Area Chamber of Commerce and the Pleasants County Development Authority. The Chamber assumed the lead with the compilation. The Development Authority applied for and was awarded a grant to engage the Mid Ohio Valley Regional Development Council in the development of new municipal maps. The directory is a pocket sized spiral notebook that contains various business listings with a copy of a city map folded in the back. Members of the local Chamber of Commerce received a full page ad; non members had directory information listed. The goal of the Directory was to promote business participation in the local Chamber.

The third initiative was the street sign project. The team hosted an “Operation Cooperation” picnic and invited county officials, businesses and residents as a way to inform the community about the project. The Possibilities Forum team stressed that its members would raise all funds necessary to complete the project and would not ask local officials for monies from existing budgets. Municipalities were requested to install their new signs.

Pleasants County had just completed its Emergency-911 addressing. A great deal of help for the project was received from 911 officials related to the newly named and renamed roads and lanes. A clear focus was kept on minimizing potential emergency response times to every residence and business in the county.

Each county and municipality was given the opportunity to make choices related to the color, logo, and type of sign each wanted. The team took bids on the signage and equipment from various vendors. Volunteer Fire Departments agreed to help install the signs in non-municipal areas and the regional power company, Allegheny Power, donated labor and equipment to help install signs.

The team then began the task of raising the \$77,000 needed to complete the project. Team members focused on getting the word out to the broader community about the project and the need for it. When people began talking about the project, the money began coming in from businesses, individuals and organizations. Once people saw the momentum behind the project, they wanted to become involved. The team acknowledged EVERY donation in the newspaper with the donor's name and picture. At this time, around \$80,000 has been raised and plans have been made to put the excess funds back into the community. The Possibilities Forum team also has plans to auction off the old signs to community members as a part of St. Marys' history. To date, 80 of the 120 road and street signs have been placed. The next shipment is due to arrive in the coming weeks. A celebration of the project is planned for the next meeting.

Challenges faced during the project included determining the location of roads; new names for roads; learning and complying with Federal rules and guidelines; and securing and managing hundreds of volunteer hours.

### **Ritchie County, West Virginia**

*Background:* By 1830, the county had a population of about 1,500 people and the only town of any note was Ritchie which later became the town of Harrisville. Ritchie County, West Virginia was established in 1843 by the Virginia General Assembly. The Ritchie County economy has historically been agriculturally based with cattle raising operations and some crop production. Oil and gas production supplemented the farming operations during the early to mid 20th century. More recently (mid to late 20th century) manufacturing facilities have been an increasingly important component of the local economy.

Ritchie County had a population of 10,343 persons at the time of the last census (2000). It is largely a rural area located in north central West Virginia. US Route 50 cuts through the county providing access to larger population centers - Parkersburg to the West and Clarksburg to the East. The population density of 22.8 persons per square mile is similar to other largely rural counties in the state and much less than the state and national average population density. The portion of the population under age 18 years (23%) and over age 65 years (15.2%) are both very close to the state averages for those age groups. The portion of the population over age five years that is disabled (23.6%) is a little more than the state average and much higher than the national average of 17.7%. There are 4,184 households in the county.

Per-capita income in Ritchie County is \$18,805. Per-capita income (the average income per person residing in the county) lags behind the state average and is significantly less than the national average (\$30,413). The average annual wage per job of Ritchie residents is \$22,053. This is less than the state average and much less than the national average. The unemployment rate is at 8.1% and is significantly higher than both the state and national averages. The poverty rate for county residents at nearly 20% of the population (19.1%) is a percentage point above the state average and nearly 7 percent higher than the national average.

Average retail sales per county resident (per-capita retail sales) are significantly below the state average. This would suggest that a significant amount of retail business is transacted outside Ritchie County. This is not unexpected as the county is located mid-way between the two larger commercial centers of Parkersburg, WV and Clarksburg, WV. The majority of employed county residents (60.5%) work in Ritchie County. Most of the remaining workers commute to surrounding counties. About 20% of the workers residing in Ritchie County are employed in Wood County.

### ***Possibilities Forums Results***

Four projects were chosen from the initial brainstorming of possibilities for Ritchie County. Three projects were considered to be highly visible and more easily accomplished, while one was considered longer term.

The long-term project was the establishment of a Community Development Corporation (CDC). The process moved slowly at first as the team explored the need for the corporation and learned how to be deliberate in its formation. They learned that there must be a strong commitment from those involved in the process and focus is essential. After several meetings a mission statement and name for the CDC were developed. The mission of the Ritchie Progress Alliance is to enhance the lives of county residents by enhancing relationships through communications, collaborations, and capacity building between the 6 partners/organizations involved in the CDC and the communities surrounding them. The Ritchie County High School Art Class is designing the CDC logo; there is a web domain set up, an interim Board of Directors has been established and they have hired a consultant to advise them on IRS regulations governing CDCs. The CDC is expected to be operational by 2008.

The second project is known as Community Challenge Mini-grants. Nine communities within the county have applied for and will receive mini-grants for projects ranging from \$300 to \$750. Projects vary from beautification of a community building to landscaping for an elementary school. Local community groups that applied for funding were required to provide dollar-for-dollar matching funds. The “seed” monies provided by the Possibilities Forum team gave leverage to each local project. Possibilities Team participants raised the original seed monies from a local manufacturer, Simonton Windows and from the C4D Steering Team’s support grant from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation. Because of the “matching funds” requirement, the \$2,500 became \$10,000.

The third project was designed to support communications between elected officials from the various communities and municipalities within Ritchie County. This project was envisioned as a two-fold process: 1) bring the municipal councils together on an occasional basis to share information, mentor new elected officials and explore possible cooperative projects; and 2) bring the county’s five water and sewer providers together to explore eventual consolidation.

The water and sewer providers met in the spring of 2007 to discuss ways to cooperate and whether there was interest in consolidation. Some providers were enthusiastic about the need to consolidate, while others were cautious. All agreed more information was needed, and that they would need to have a clear view of a strategy for consolidation, and a clear understanding of its impact in order to proceed.

The Possibilities Forum concluded that the ideal organization to facilitate this effort to improve communication and cooperation among town councils and service providers would be the Ritchie Progress Alliance, the newly developed Community Development Corporation (CDC).

The fourth project involved improving resources for the county's young people. The Possibilities Forum identified two actions relating to this: 1) explore the establishment of a Boys & Girls Club in the county; and 2) support the Ritchie County Parks & Recreation Commission in its work to develop a youth sports complex along North Bend Lake near Harrisville. The exploration of the Boys & Girls Club has not brought results, and the Possibilities Forum's involvement with the youth sports complex has been limited, although the project itself is moving along successfully.

#### Evaluation Results Summary - Years One and Two

In year one, only participants in Ritchie and Pleasants Counties Possibilities Forums were surveyed electronically since Doddridge and Gilmer Counties had more ground work to do before citizens would participate in Possibilities Forums. In year two, representatives of the C4D Steering Team as well as those that participated in multi-county meetings and local Possibilities Forums across all four counties were invited to complete the survey. The same instrument was used both years. Complete evaluation reports are available in Appendices C and D.

The survey instrument is designed to examine Possibilities Forum participants':

- Experiences,
- Attitudes and beliefs about local development through the Possibilities Forums,
- Perceptions of community capacity within the county, and
- Perceptions of levels of community capacity across seven domains that include:
  - Health and well-being of local people
  - Skills, knowledge and abilities of local people
  - Relationships and interpersonal communication
  - Community initiative, responsibility, and adaptability
  - Cultural diversity and quality of life
  - Investments in community and financial resources
  - Sustainable healthy ecosystems with multiple community benefits

### 2006 Results Compared to 2007 Results:

- Possibility Forum participants who responded to the survey in December of 2007 feel more hopeful about the county's future and more connected to others in the community as a result of their participation in the Possibilities Forum process.
- Almost all Possibilities Forum participants see their county as part of the larger region and all participants disagreed with the statement "our county has little in common with neighboring counties". This perception changed very little from year one to year two.
- Confidence in leadership abilities was reported at a higher rate the second year.
- A slightly smaller percentage in 2007 said that they felt more a part of the decision making process in their communities.
- A smaller percentage reported that they "use data and information more to identify needs" than was the case in 2006.
- All 2007 participants agreed that they had trust in the judgment of other forum participants, and most participants agreed that they had "spent time reflecting ... in order to improve their work".
- All but one of the 2007 survey respondents agreed with the statement "I feel more hopeful about the county's future than I did a year ago", yet only 75% of the respondents felt they had made progress on community projects during 2007. A higher percentage (86%) of participants responding to the survey in 2006 believed they had made progress on local projects during the first year of work by possibility forums.
- 2007 survey responses were somewhat more positive about outside assistance than was the case in 2006. 70% of the respondents in 2007 felt outside facilitation was helpful (as compared to 59% in 2006), and 85% felt information provided by consultants helped them better understand community issues (as compared to 73% in 2006).
- The perception of overall capacity across the seven capacity domains within the C4D counties increased slightly though the increase is not considered to be significant.
- Environmental capital (sustainable healthy ecosystems with multiple community benefits) was seen as stronger in year two than year one.
- Investments in the community were seen as slightly better the second year.
- Health and Well Being of Local People, and Community Initiative, Adaptability, and Responsibility were seen as slightly worse the second year.

### **Opportunities and Challenges Facing Possibilities Forums**

The initial draft of this manual had separate sections for challenges and opportunities. As the list began to take shape, it became apparent that they were often hard to separate. Most items belonged in both lists as there were both challenges and opportunities present within each. Just as the Chinese ideogram for crisis is comprised of the symbol for danger at the top and the symbol for opportunity at the bottom, so are the situations that face us in our communities.



The environment is never static, as is so with nature. Changes are always underway. In West Virginia, like elsewhere, we are growing and changing. The events in the list below offer both opportunity and challenges to Possibilities Forums. We will be able to tell you, as time tells us, whether or not we were able to rise to these challenges and accept the gift of opportunity.

- The Federal Home Loan Bank – Pittsburgh brought the Blueprint Communities Program to West Virginia. Largely because of the Possibilities Forums and Ritchie Progress Alliance, Ritchie and Gilmer Counties were selected as two of ten communities to participate. The program required that eight community members from each county attend four workshop sessions to receive training in community and economic development. The Ritchie and Gilmer County Blueprint Teams were filled largely with Possibilities Forum members. Gilmer and Ritchie Counties Possibilities Forums and the Ritchie Progress Alliance are well-positioned to sustain the Blueprint goals that were established in each county. The Possibilities Forums will focus on involving new participants; brainstorming; exploring new ideas, opportunities and challenges; and planning. The Ritchie Progress Alliance will be the implementation hub for Ritchie County’s projects identified in the Blueprint plan and in future Possibilities Forum sessions. Gilmer County’s Possibilities Forum Steering Team will help coordinate activities there.
- The demanding Blueprint Communities Program schedule made regular meetings of the Possibilities Forum and Steering Team difficult during this second year. It also had an impact on the ability of the Steering Team to be focused and forward looking. Attendance was lower and attention to the future and how to support the work of local citizen teams and the larger Possibilities Forums was weakened. On the flipside of that, more funding institutions are aware of the work in these counties. The importance of Possibilities Forums as vehicles for engaging and reengaging citizens has become clearer. Possibilities Forum participants plan to enlarge their circles and are discussing changing the format from a “meeting” setting to a more relaxed and informal conversational setting.
- The Community Development Gathering (CDG) has been working on a state-wide level in West Virginia developing a model and set of processes to better support communities by aligning the community development resources available to West Virginia communities. While this work was already underway during the writing of this manual, the group’s decisions, principles and processes were piloted during the year and evaluation results became available in December 2007. In fact, the Blueprint Communities Program served as the pilot for the work of CDG. Many of the concepts and processes presented in this manual, though compatible and in some cases identical are called by different names and referred to using different terms. This will be confusing to people trying to navigate the system of resources to find help as they work to develop their communities. Work during the coming year for Counties 4 Development will include updating this manual and aligning terms

to be more consistent with the larger, state-level effort. See Appendix F for CDG's Development Model.

- Steering Team members recognize the importance and unique power of Possibilities Forums as vehicles for engaging and reengaging citizens. New research from the Case Foundation, along with impressive development work from local researchers on a model for citizen engagement through the use of targeted communications offers a great deal of promise. The Steering Team has committed to focus on these areas in the upcoming year.
- Recruiting and sustaining new Possibilities Forum participants in the initial counties is critical. As one supportive outside consultant said, "The work of Possibilities Forums is exciting. And while the projects completed here in the first year are impressive, there is really nothing new about a group of citizens coming together to complete a finite set of projects. The promise in Possibilities Forums is the potential to engage and reengage citizens to complete exciting projects over time."
- More communities heard about, became excited about, and engaged in Possibilities Forums. The Steering Team made presentations to several groups and ten new counties are either currently engaged in or plan to become engaged in Possibilities Forums in 2008. Support to these groups becomes critical. The development of materials and documented processes to sustain new communities is a priority as the Steering Team explores avenues to identify an appropriate entity to manage what is becoming a growing, state-wide program.

## Afterword

We hope that this manual has been useful and will continue to serve as a guide. The ideas and strategies offered for your consideration in starting and supporting Possibilities Forums will undoubtedly have been modified by you and all of us as we learn more about the process of supporting citizen engagement in community development.

Remember, each community is different. No one knows communities like its citizens. Revise, revamp, add to, and create new strategies to try in your communities. Share what you have learned. Add to the knowledge base. Feel free to contact us. We are interested in what you are doing. Best wishes as you work with others to improve the world in which we live.



toolbox

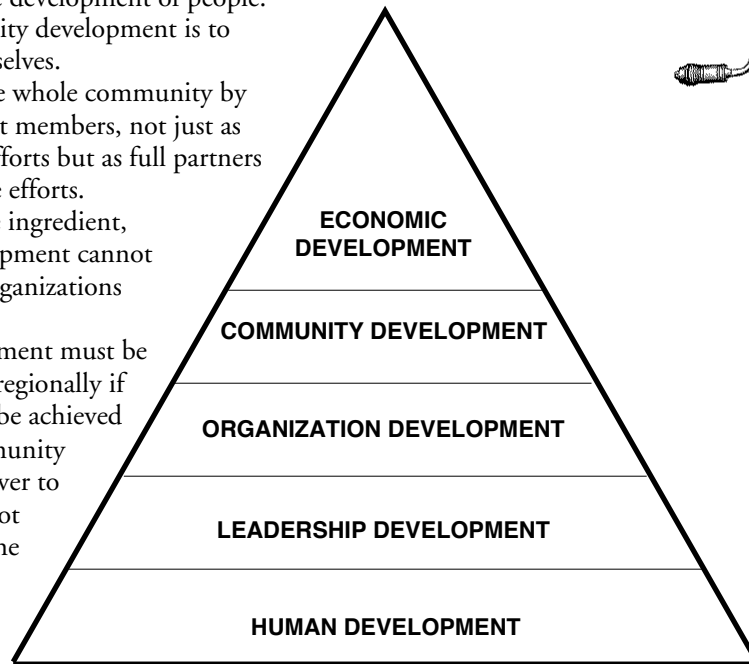
# The Tupelo Model

From the case study *Hand in Hand: Community and Economic Development in Tupelo* by Vaughn Grisham and Rob Gurwitt.

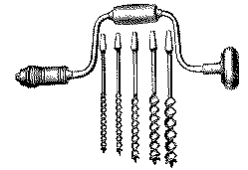
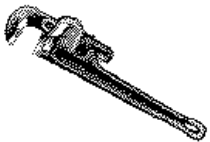
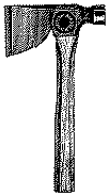
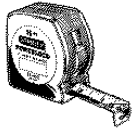
The Tupelo model, illustrated by the figure below, outlines the successful building of an economically viable community with a broad base including all the human resources in the community. "Economic development . . . came about because community development - the ability of citizens to identify and work together on issues of common concern, their dedication to educating children and adults, their constant search for ways of providing each other with the resources and skills they need to help themselves both as individuals and as communities - made it possible" (p. 29).

## Guiding Principles of the Tupelo Model

- Local people must address local problems.
- Each person should be treated as a resource. So the community development process begins with the development of people.
- The goal of community development is to help people help themselves.
- Meet the needs of the whole community by starting with its poorest members, not just as targets for top-down efforts but as full partners in helping design those efforts.
- Leadership is a prime ingredient, but community development cannot be achieved without organizations and structure.
- Community development must be done both locally and regionally if the full benefits are to be achieved
- Never turn the community development process over to any agency that does not involve the people of the community.
- Expenditures for community development are an investment - not a subsidy - and will return gains to the investors. So people with money have both the responsibility and an interest in investing in the development of their own community.



Before a community can build and/or attract economic development, it is critical to work developing its people. As Grisham and Gurwitt show, "people were not so much the answer to (Tupelo's) problems as they were the raw material from which an answer could be crafted . . . Developing the community — connecting its people and its institutions—lays a base for balanced and sustainable economic development." To build the kind of economic development that is good for a community, developing the community itself must be the first step.



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### Counties 4 Development

## Doddridge County Profile

### Introduction and Brief History

Present day Doddridge County, West Virginia was established in 1845 (as part of Virginia). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the area was used by Native Americans as hunting grounds and there were few white settlers. During the early part of the 19th century white settlers formed the town of Lewisport (now West Union). Just prior to the Civil War (1856) the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad expanded into the county bringing economic growth and a steady stream of additional settlers. The early 20th century was a time of an oil and gas boom in the county and the industry grew rapidly until the stock market crash of 1929. Oil and gas production has remained an important part of the local economy supplemented by some coal and timber production.<sup>1</sup>

### Summary of Current Conditions

#### **County Residents**

Doddridge County had a population of 7,403 persons at the time of the last census (2000). It is a rural area with 23.1 persons per square mile. 25% of the population is under the age of eighteen years and 14.8% is over the age of sixty-five years. A significant portion of the population over age five years is disabled (23.3%). There are 2,845 households in the county. The Data Appendix at the end of this profile summarizes these basic demographic descriptors and compares them to the statistics for West Virginia and the United States.

#### **Housing**

There are 3,661 total housing units in Doddridge County and 2,845 occupied units. Two hundred eighty-eight or thirty-five percent (35.3%) of the unoccupied housing units do not have complete plumbing facilities. Not all of the occupied housing units have complete plumbing facilities either (3.4% are without complete plumbing) or telephone service (5.24% have no telephone service). A little over one percent (1.2%) of households in the county has no kitchen facilities in their house. Most of the occupied housing units in the county are heated by natural gas (78.8%). Eight and a half percent (8.5%) are heated by electricity and about five percent (5.3%) rely on wood to heat the home. See Data Appendix for summary of Doddridge housing statistics.

### **Socio-Economic Description of County Residents**

Per-capita income in Doddridge County is well below the state and national averages. Total income per person in the county is \$16,724 which is only little more than half the national average. Additional income received by county residents from government sources (known as transfer receipts) amounts to an average of about \$3,600 per county resident. These “transfer payments” are government payments made to individuals such as retirement and disability insurance benefits, unemployment benefits, public assistance, etc. About eighteen percent (18%) of the total income of county residents is from government benefits of some type. This is less than the average for the state but more than the national average of 11%.

There is relatively little retail business conducted in Doddridge County. Most retail transactions (purchase of goods and services) to people are made outside the county. The average amount of retail sales per county resident (per-capita sales) made in Doddridge County in 1997 was only \$946.00 per year.<sup>2</sup> This is only about one-tenth of the national average. Undoubtedly, the high rate of persons working outside Doddridge County (particularly in Harrison County) is a significant factor that limits retail sales. Only one-third of the workforce residing in Doddridge County works in the county. Forty-five percent work in neighboring Harrison County.

For those jobs that are available in the county, the average annual wage is relatively good (by West Virginia standards) at \$27,130. A significant number of county residents, however, do not have sufficient income. The poverty rate is relatively high at 19.8% (over 7 percentage points higher than the national average).

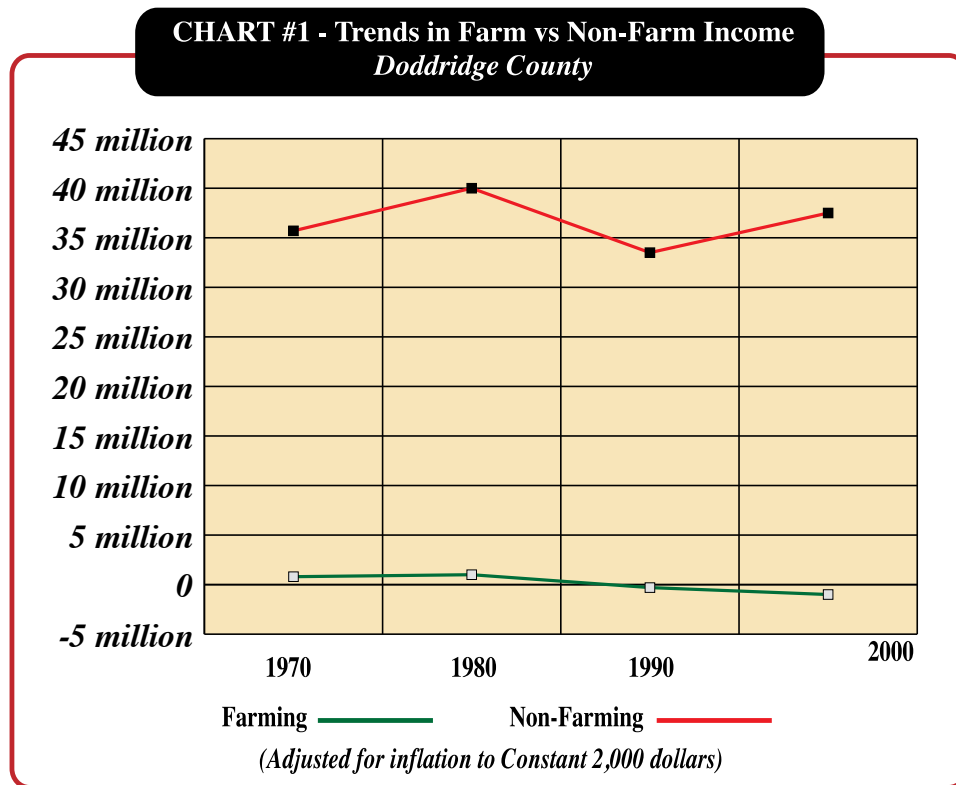
The workforce in Doddridge County is somewhat under-educated. Over thirty percent (30%) of county residents over age twenty-five did not graduate from high school and only about ten percent (10%) are college educated.<sup>3</sup> Recent statistics seem to indicate that more young people are considering a college education. A little more than sixty-five percent (65.2%) of Doddridge County graduates in 2003 took the college entrance exam (ACT test) and the average composite score on the ACT exam was consistent with the national average.<sup>4</sup>

### **Recent Population and Employment Trends**

The turn of the century (1900) saw an increase in population and economic activity in Doddridge County with the development of an oil and gas industry. In 1900 the county population was 13,689. By 1950 the population of the county had declined by 34% to just over 9,000 people and by 1960 the total number of persons residing in the county had declined to 6,970 (half the population at the turn of the century). The population has remained relatively stable since 1960.

Although the county's total population has remained steady over recent decades, it is aging. In 1950 13.5 % of the people in Doddridge County were 20 to 29 years of age. By 2000, the number of young persons in this age range had declined to 10.4% of the total. The portion of the population made up of persons over the age of 65 years residing in the county has increased in recent decades from 10.4% in 1970 to 14.8% in 2000.<sup>5</sup>

Trends in employment within Doddridge County over the past 30 years (1970 to 2000) show declining income from farming and little real gains in income from non-farm employment. The data shown in Chart 1 is adjusted for inflation to constant 2000 dollars for comparison purposes. As can be seen in Chart 1, income from farming within the county has been quite small for three decades and farming activity has shown a net loss in recent years.

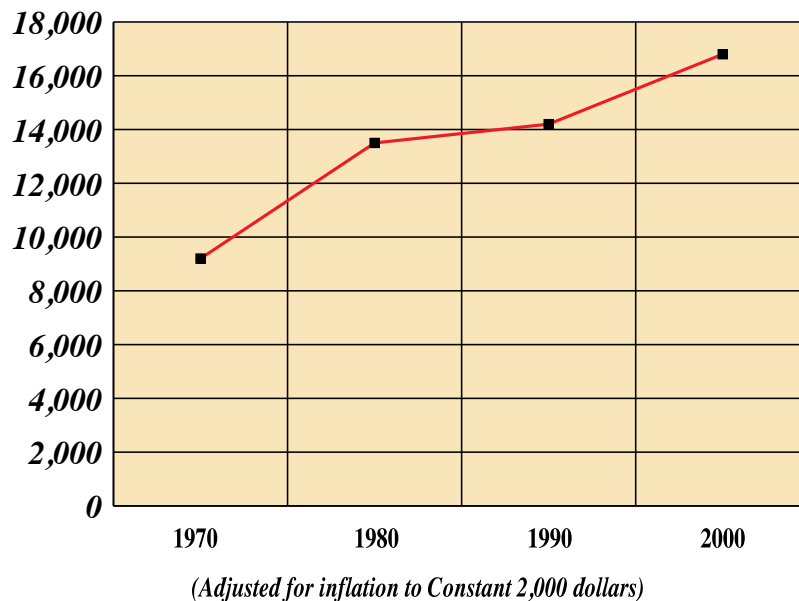


The overall trend in total income from employment within the county over the past thirty years is relatively stable with no real overall growth in the local (county-based) economy.

In real dollar terms, total earnings within Doddridge County rose during the decade of the 70s only to fall during the 80s. They rose again between 1980 and 1990 but again fell by 2000. When adjusted for inflation, the total net income from employment (farm and non-farm jobs) of all jobs in the county in 1970 was \$35,950,000 and that total income from employment within Doddridge County has increased only negligibly over the past 30 years to \$36,624,000.<sup>6</sup>



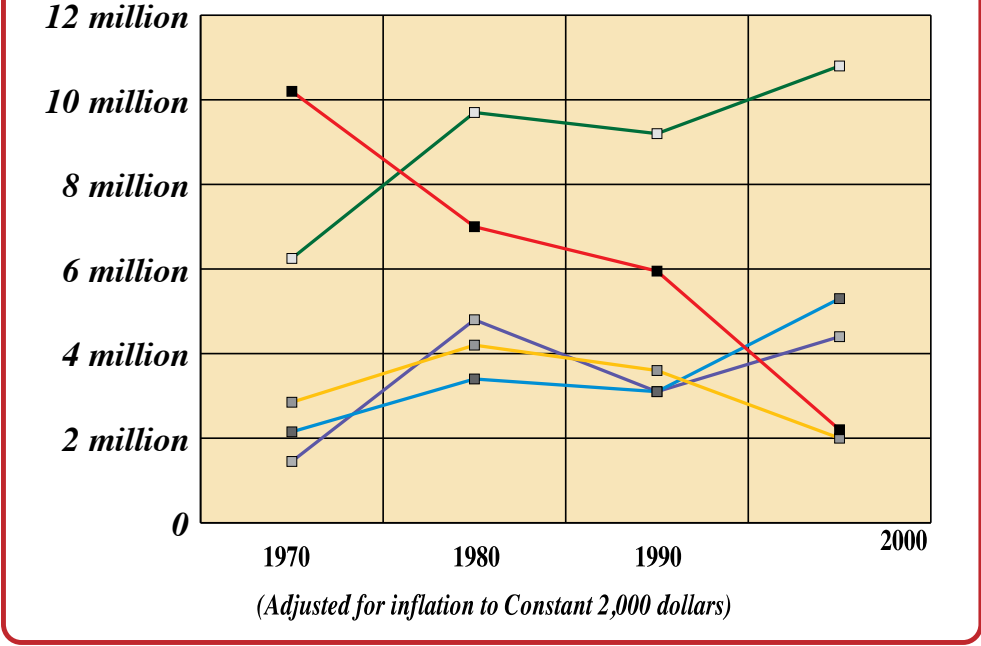
**CHART #2 - Trends in Personal Income**  
*Doddridge County (1970-2000)*



Per Capita income of county residents (adjusted for inflation) has increased over the thirty year period from about \$9,400 to \$16,700. Although there has been little change during the period in the local economic conditions within Doddridge County, the high percentage of county residents who seek work outside the county (particularly in Harrison County) has resulted in an increase in per-capita income for county residents over the period. Nevertheless, the average per-capita income of county residents continues to lag significantly behind state and national levels.

By analyzing earnings from employment in Doddridge County by industry type (see chart 3), we can get a feel for the economic activity within the county. This analysis is based on wages within major employment sectors in Doddridge County and does not reflect the total income of county residents employed outside the county. We see that jobs in state and local government account for a substantial portion of overall economic activity within the county. We also see that the total of all wages for these jobs are increasing as are the total of wages in service jobs and oil and gas production. The transportation and public utilities sectors of the economy (not shown in chart) contribute about \$5.5 Million to the local economy (2000). However, this sector has shown no real growth (in inflation adjusted dollars) over the thirty year period.

**CHART #3 - Trends in Earnings from Selected Industries**  
*Doddridge County*



Total personal income from work in the construction and manufacturing sectors within the county has decreased significantly over the thirty year period.<sup>7</sup>

The economy within Doddridge County is highly dependent on state and local government jobs.

**Future Trends and Projections**

***“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”***  
***– Albert Einstein***

The West Virginia University Bureau for Business and Economic Research attempts to make long term forecasts of economic conditions in West Virginia and the most recent available projections are not particularly encouraging. A few selected quotes:

“Job growth in the state is expected to lag well behind the national rate”.

“At 2.0 percent per year, real per capita personal income growth falls well behind the expected national growth rate”.

“The income gap with the nation is expected to rise from 22.7% to 26.2% by 2014”.

“The forecast calls for slow job growth combined with modest income growth to produce little or no net migration into the state during the next decade”.

“The forecast calls for the state’s population under age 18 to fall by 23,000 from 2004 to 2014”. “The state’s population age 18-44 is forecast to fall by 33,000”.

The long range forecast for the state calls for very little annual growth in employment (0.6%) with that growth coming primarily from the service sectors.<sup>8</sup>

Recent trends in Doddridge County outlined in previous sections of this paper seem to be consistent with the forecast above. Unless we do things differently, we can expect a continuing aging of the population and a continuing trend toward seeking work outside the county boundaries. The dramatic decline in recent decades in manufacturing and construction employment within the county coupled with the more modest rise in service sector, government, and oil and gas jobs does not give us a great deal of confidence in an economic revitalization within the county.

International Transactions Accounts Data from the U.S. Department of Commerce-Bureau for Economic Analysis provides us with no reason to expect an increase in manufacturing and goods producing industries either. The data on international trade balances over the past forty years shows a clear pattern of an increasing negative trade balance on manufactured goods. The global economy drives goods producing industries to nations where those goods can be produced at low cost for sale in the United States and other more developed nations. The total U. S. International trade balance for manufactured goods is a negative (imports exceed exports) 452 billion dollars per year and rising. The total trade balance (all goods and services) is a negative 378 billion and the total negative balance has tripled over the five year period 1995 to 2000.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, if it can be made in the Far East and imported for sale to the U. S. consumer it will be.

Tourism and travel is a growing sector of the West Virginia economy and is an area that the Doddridge County Possibilities Forum may wish to look at closely. A recent study of comparative economic data during the period 1980 to 2002 related to tourism and travel in West Virginia reached the following conclusions:

“During this period the economic contributions of the mining and manufacturing sectors declined in relative importance. On the other hand, traditional travel and tourism sectors showed sustained growth, particularly after the events of September 11, 2001. Selective evidence on some key parts of the industry illustrates the continued investments being made in the (tourism) industry.”<sup>10</sup>

It is clear that more of the same is not going to produce different results. Creative thinking about new possibilities is necessary if the local economy is to grow within Doddridge County.

## Data Appendix

### Doddridge County

<b>DODDRIDGE COUNTY - TABLE 1 - Basic Demographic Data<sup>11</sup></b>			
	Doddridge County	West Virginia	United States
<b>Demographic Descriptors</b>			
Total Population of County	7,403	1,808,344	281,421,906
Population Density	23.1	75.1	79.6
Population Under Age 18 Years	25.00%	22.30%	25.7
Population Age 65 years or older	14.80%	15.30%	12.4
Number of Households	2,845	736,481	105,480,101
Number of persons 5 years of age and over that are disabled	1,725	410,781	49,746,248
Percent of Population that is Disabled	23.3%	22.7%	17.7%

<b>DODDRIDGE COUNTY - TABLE 2 - Basic Housing Data<sup>12</sup></b>	
	Doddridge County
<b>Housing Descriptors</b>	
Total Housing Units	3,661
Occupied Housing Units	2,845
Vacant Housing Units	816
Percent Vacant Without Complete Plumbing Facilities	35.30%
Percent Occupied Without Telephone	5.24%
Percent Occupied Without Plumbing	3.44%
Percent Occupied Without Kitchen	1.23%
Percent Heated with Utility Gas	78.80%
Percent Heated with Electricity	8.50%
Percent Heated with Wood	5.30%

### DODDRIDGE COUNTY - TABLE 3 - Basic Socio-Economic Data<sup>13</sup>

	Doddridge County	West Virginia	United States
<b>Socio-Economic Descriptors</b>			
Per Capita Income	\$16,724	\$21,900	\$30,413
Per Capita Transfer Receipts	\$3,622	\$5,141	\$3,840
Per Capita Retail Sales	\$946	\$7,743	\$9,190
Average Wage per Job	\$27,130	\$26,335	\$34,718
Unemployment Rate	4.7%	5.5%	4.8%
Poverty Rate	19.80%	17.90%	12.40%
Percent High School Graduates	69.40%	75.20%	80.40%
High School Graduation Rate	81%	84%	
Percent College Graduates	10.20%	14.80%	24.40%
Percent age 25 years and over with less than High School Education	30.60%	24.80%	19.60%
Average Composite ACT Score	20.9	20.3	20.8

### DODDRIDGE COUNTY - TABLE 4 Trends in Farm and Non-Farm Jobs and Earnings<sup>14</sup> Earnings by Place of Work

<b>Not Adjusted for Inflation</b>				
	1970	1980	1990	2000
Total Farm Earnings	\$86,000	\$339,000	-\$238,000	-\$936,000
Total Number of Farm Jobs	244	330	348	367
Total Non-Farm Earnings	\$7,850,000	\$17,348,000	\$24,632,000	\$37,560,000
Total Non-Farm Jobs	1,424	1,490	1,587	1,943

### DODDRIDGE COUNTY - TABLE 5 - Trends in Private Earnings by Job Type<sup>15</sup> Earnings by Place of Work

	1970	1970	1980	1980	1990	1990	2000
	1970	1970	1980	1980	1990	1990	2000
<i>Adjusted for inflation (2000 Constant Dollars)</i>	<i>dollars</i>	<i>2000 dollars</i>	<i>dollars</i>	<i>2000 dollars</i>	<i>dollars</i>	<i>2000 dollars</i>	<i>2000 dollars</i>
<i>Inflation factor</i>		4.53		2.29		1.34	1.00
Mining (Primarily Oil and Gas)	\$326,000	\$1,476,780	\$2,067,000	\$4,733,430	\$2,335,000	\$3,128,900	\$4,314,000
Construction	\$2,242,000	\$10,156,260	\$3,042,000	\$6,966,180	\$4,435,000	\$5,942,900	\$2,326,000
Manufacturing	\$619,000	\$2,804,070	\$1,855,000	\$4,247,950	\$2,714,000	\$3,636,760	\$2,053,000
Transportation and Public Utilities	\$1,215,000	\$5,503,950	\$1,791,000	\$4,101,390	\$2,470,000	\$3,309,800	\$5,504,000
Retail Trade	\$1,101,000	\$4,987,530	\$1,652,000	\$3,783,080	\$1,195,000	\$1,601,300	\$3,083,000
Finance, Insurance, Real estate	\$116,000	\$525,480	\$448,000	\$1,025,920	\$1,202,000	\$1,610,680	N/A
Services	\$468,000	\$2,120,040	\$1,480,000	\$3,389,200	\$2,327,000	\$3,118,180	\$5,350,000
Total Government & Government Enterprises	\$1,635,000	\$7,406,550	\$4,828,000	\$11,056,120	\$7,738,000	\$10,368,920	\$12,130,000
State and Local Government	\$1,385,000	\$6,274,050	\$4,274,000	\$9,787,460	\$6,820,000	\$9,138,800	\$10,784,000

## **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup> *Doddridge County History*, West Virginia County Histories, <http://www.polsci.wvu.edu/wv/history.html>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau Doddridge County Quick Facts, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/54/54017.html>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> WV State Department of Education, *College Entrance Testing Information*.

<sup>5</sup> *Historical Census Browser*, University of Virginia Library, <http://fisher/lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/php/county.php>

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau for Economic Analysis, Data Set CA-05.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau for Economic Analysis, Data Set CA-05.

<sup>8</sup> *Long Term Forecast Update*, Bureau of Business and Economic Research, College of Business and Economics, West Virginia University, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> *U.S. International Accounts Data*, US Department of Commerce, Bureau for Economic Analysis, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Witt, T. & Fletcher, M., *Tourism and the West Virginia Economy*, 2005

<sup>11</sup> All data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.

<sup>12</sup> All data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000; USDA Economic Research Service; and the WV Department of Education.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau for Economic Analysis, Data Set CA-05.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau for Economic Analysis, Data Set CA-05.



### Counties 4 Development

## Evaluation of First Year Activity and Progress

### *Background*

The Counties 4 Development Project was established to further community and economic development efforts in a four county region of West Virginia that includes: Pleasants, Ritchie, Doddridge and Gilmer counties. A steering committee was convened with representation from each of the counties and “Possibility Forums” were established in each county in order to engage local citizens in planning and action to improve community conditions. During the first year of the project (2006) a local community group (Possibility Forum) was active in two of the four counties – Pleasants and Ritchie. Efforts in Doddridge and Gilmer counties were less successful and the possibility forums were not sustained in these counties.

### *Methodology for Evaluation*

Evaluation of first year efforts is based on information derived from:

- Review of expected outcomes and indicators of success adopted by the Steering Committee
- Review of meeting notes
- Survey of possibility forum participants

An independent evaluator was contracted by the C4D steering committee to conduct a review of year one activity as documented in meeting notes and determine if expected outcomes were met. The evaluator also designed a survey to gather information from possibility forum participants about their experiences during the first year of the project, changes in attitudes and beliefs of forum participants, and their perception of community capacity within the county. The survey instrument also captured participant recommendations about anything they would do differently and general comments about their possibility forum experience.

### **Findings Related to Achievement of Established Outcomes**

Based on the “indicators of success” established by the C4D Steering Committee, expected outcomes were generally achieved in Pleasants and Ritchie counties. Outcomes were not met in Doddridge and Pleasants counties due to an inability to establish and maintain a local Possibilities Forum.

Findings for each outcome are listed below:

1. Each of the four counties has a well functioning “Possibility Forum Team” (PFT) in place.

***Findings for Outcome 1:***

- Well functioning PFTs were established in Pleasants and Ritchie Counties.
- Gilmer and Doddridge counties were not able to establish well functioning PFTs.

2. Local PFT participants accept their defined role as local “catalysts” for positive development.

***Findings for Outcome 2:***

After some initial attrition of invited participants, a core group of PFT participants has met regularly in Ritchie and Pleasants Counties. The core group in each county has operated in manner consistent with the defined indicators of success.

3. The C4D Steering Team facilitates networking opportunities among local PFTs.

***Findings for Outcome 3:***

- Facilitated meetings were held with PFT participants from Ritchie and Pleasants Counties during year one of the project.
- Communication tools were not developed during year one.
- Goals for year two have not been established in a way that sustains a four county structure.

4. Local community members are informed of the purpose and role of local PFTs.

***Findings for Outcome 4:***

Local community members have been informed of the purpose and role of local PFTs in Ritchie and Pleasants counties.

5. Second year funding is secured to support county PFTs and Steering Team activities.

***Findings for Outcome 5:***

A second year of funding was awarded by the Benedum Foundation.

A list of the indicators selected by the Steering Team that were used to assess each outcome is provided in Appendix B.

## **Findings from Survey Analysis**

Surveys were completed by a total of twenty-two persons participating in the C4D project. Nineteen of the survey respondents identified themselves as a participant in the local Possibility Forum in either Pleasants or Ritchie County (9 in Pleasants and 10 in Ritchie). Two of the remaining respondents were members of the C4D Steering Team representing

Doddridge or Gilmer County. One survey respondent did not identify a county or provide responses to questions related to basic demographic descriptors; thus, this survey was not included in the analysis of county-based responses. Survey results were analyzed separately for Pleasants County and for Ritchie County.

The survey is made up of a series of statements and respondents are asked their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement on a five point Likert scale. The survey was designed to assess:

- Possibility Forum participant's experiences during year one.
- Forum participant's perception of community capacity within the county.

Section II of the survey focuses on participant experiences during the first year of the possibility forums process. Forum participant experience is summarized independently for Pleasants County and Ritchie County.

Section III of the survey are statements related to community capacity across seven domains that include:

- Health and well-being of local people
- Skills, knowledge and abilities of local people
- Relationships and interpersonal communication
- Community initiative, responsibility, and adaptability
- Cultural diversity and quality of life
- Investments in community and financial resources
- Sustainable healthy ecosystems with multiple community benefits

Three statements relating to each of the domains of capacity were included in the survey allowing the evaluator to provide some degree of assessment as to the level of capacity forum participants believe to be present for each domain. Such an analysis is based on the opinion of the key informants participating in each possibility forum. The validity of using such an approach as a measure of county-wide or local community capacity has not been tested; thus, it is not intended to be a valid measure of the actual capacity present within each of the counties. Nevertheless, it should provide useful information to each local forum about their perception of community capacity and where forum participants believe capacity may be strong or weak.

In order to determine whether or not forum participants believe a particular domain of community capacity is present or not present in the county, an average response of less than 3 is interpreted as no agreement that capacity is present and a response of more than 3 as agreement that capacity is present. A higher average response (on the five point scale) would indicate a stronger belief that a particular area of capacity is present. For an explanation of the components that make up each capacity domain see the framework in Appendix B. Findings are based on only three responses from each participant for each capacity domain (total of 21 responses from each survey respondent). This methodology is intended only as a

rough guide to the level of capacity that may be available to forum participants as they work to improve local conditions.

An opportunity was also provided on the survey form for participants to make suggestions about what they would do differently based on their experience with the forums thus far and any general comments they might wish to offer.

A copy of the survey instrument is provided as Appendix C.

## **Summary of Survey Findings - Pleasants County**

A total of nine completed surveys were returned from Pleasants County. All surveys were completed during the month of December, 2006. Six respondents were female and three were male. The number of months each person has participated in the local Possibilities Forum ranges from 12 months to 3 months; however, over two-thirds of the participants have participated for eight months or longer. All respondents have lived in Pleasants County for a number of years ranging from 7 years to 47 years.

### **Pleasants Possibility Forum Participant Experiences**

Pleasants County participants feel more hopeful about the county's future and more connected to others in the community as a result of their participation in the local forum. They also see their local community and Pleasants County as part of a larger region. Other changes reported by participants include:

- 88% use data and information more to identify needs
- 77% believe the level of citizen input in decisions about development has increased during the past year
- 77% have an increased level of confidence in their ability to organize and lead others

Most participants in Pleasants County also expressed a high level of trust in the judgment of other forum participants (8 of 9 agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement: "I have trust in the judgments and opinions of other possibility forum participants"). All participants agreed that they had "spent time reflecting ... in order to improve..." and, there was widespread agreement that progress had been made.

Issues related to outside assistance during the first year of the forum reflected slightly more disparity in the responses. A few participants did not see the outside assistance provided as particularly useful; however, a majority agreed that outside assistance had been helpful. Five of nine participants agreed or strongly agreed that the information provided by consultants had been helpful to them in understanding the issues facing the county and six of the nine respondents agreed or strongly agreed that outside facilitation had been helpful in moving the process forward.

### **Pleasants Forum Participant Perception of Community Capacity**

Participants in the Pleasants County Possibility Forum seem to believe the strongest area (domain) of community capacity in the county is Community Initiative, Responsibility, and Adaptability (average score of 4 on 5 point scale). This domain addresses such things as vision, leadership, planning, community improvement, and hope for the future. It is not surprising that the forum participants see this domain as relatively strong since they are currently involved in a process (the possibility forum itself) that addresses building these areas of capacity.

Other areas of capacity are not perceived by forum participants to be as developed as they might be. Although five of the remaining six domains are perceived to be somewhat present in the county, the survey responses would indicate that all six could be enhanced. The one domain that is currently seen as particularly deficient (not present) is the Health and Well-being of Local People (average score of 2.89 on the five point scale).

The other four domains of community capacity are seen as being available to some extent within the county but none are seen by the forum participants as particularly strong. These domains are:

- Skills Knowledge and Abilities of Local People**
- Relationships and Interpersonal Communication**
- Cultural Diversity and Quality of Life**
- Investments in Community and Financial Resources**
- Sustainable, Healthy Ecosystems with Multiple Community Benefits**

Average ratings range from 3.15 to 3.74 indicating that forum participants as a group see these four areas of capacity somewhere between having no opinion and as being somewhat present.

### **Summary of Survey Findings - Ritchie County**

A total of ten completed surveys were returned from Ritchie County. All surveys were completed on November 28, 2006. Seven respondents were male and three were female. The number of months each person has participated in the local Possibilities Forum ranges from 12 months to 6 months; almost all (9 of 10) participants have been involved for eight months or longer. Survey respondents have lived in Ritchie County for a period ranging from 2 years to 51 years. Forty percent (4) of the Ritchie County respondents are relative newcomers to the county having been there for 2 to 4 years.

### **Ritchie Possibility Forum Participant Experiences**

Ritchie County participants expressed a high degree of trust in the judgments and opinions of their fellow forum participants and they feel more connected to others in the community as a result of their participation in the Possibilities Forum. Ritchie participants also feel more hopeful about the county's future. Other changes reported by participants include:

- 80% indicated that they use data and information more to identify needs
- 70% feel there is an increased level of citizen input in decisions about development
- 60% have more confidence in their ability to organize and lead others

Participants see their local community and Ritchie County as part of a larger region and all disagreed with the statement "Our County has little in common with neighboring counties". Ritchie Possibility Forum participants clearly see the county in the context of a larger multi-county region of the state.

Most participants (70%) agreed that they had "spent time reflecting ... in order to improve ability to get things done" however, one participant disagreed with this statement. Sixty percent (6 of 10 participants disagreed with the statement "We have not made much progress on our community projects over the last year" but 4 people had no opinion about the statement. These responses suggest that some forum participants may not clearly see results from the forum efforts.

Nine of the ten participants agreed that information provided by consultants had helped them to better understand the issues facing the county; however, one person disagreed with the statement. A majority (60%) of the participants agreed that outside facilitation of meetings had been helpful in moving them forward over the past year, three people had no opinion, and one disagreed with the statement.

### **Ritchie Forum Participant Perception of Community Capacity**

Ritchie County Possibility Forum participants do not appear to believe that any of the domains of community capacity are particularly strong in the county. One area is perceived to be particularly weak – **Health and Well Being of Local People**. This area received an average rating of 2.87 on the 5 point scale. Survey responses would indicate that forum participants do not believe this area of capacity is present within the county. Although responses indicate some support for local public education, access to healthcare and family economic security are seen as weak areas.

All other domains of capacity are perceived to be present to some degree but not strong. The average rating for these domains ranged from 3.00 to 3.53. This range of response indicates that forum participants recognize some level of capacity within the county across these domains but do not appear to believe that there is a significant level of capacity present within the county for any of the areas defined by these domains. Capacity domains



related to **Cultural Diversity and Quality of Life, Relationships and Interpersonal Communication, and Community Initiative, Responsibility, and Adaptability** are believed to be somewhat more present than the remaining domains (religious values and recreational opportunities are two of the more recognized components of capacity in Ritchie County).

Survey responses indicate very little belief among forum participants that other areas of capacity are present to any significant degree within the county: These areas fall under the following domains:

- **Skills Knowledge and Abilities of Local People**
- **Investments in Community and Financial Resources**
- **Sustainable, Healthy Ecosystems with Multiple Community Benefits**

Average ratings for these domains were clustered around 3.00 (3.00, 3.09, & 3.17) indicating that forum participants as a group neither agreed nor disagreed that capacity is present in these areas.

Forum participants did tend to believe that good business ideas would be supported in the county but they disagreed with the statement “Businesses in this county generally do well and people support local merchants”.

## **General Comments and Recommendations from Forum Participants**

Open-ended comments from forum participants about their experience thus far were very positive. Forum participants seem to feel that the process has been productive and exciting. Several expressed that they were grateful to have been included.

When forum participants (across all counties) were asked what they would do differently if they were to organize a possibilities forum in another county a wide range of suggestions were offered. Several suggestions focused on finding ways to involve participants more in the early stages of forum development and limiting the time spent in training and classroom type activity. Several participants seemed to enjoy the brainstorming and idea generating activities more than the presentation of information and concepts. As one participant said: “I think there would be benefits to letting ideas flow”. On the other hand, several comments indicated that participants had learned from the information presented and valued that learning.

A few comments expressed some concern about attrition but others recognized that some attrition was to be expected as the group became more focused on specific projects.

Other suggestions included:

- Spend more time and effort identifying forum participants.
  - I would use personality style to get a more rounded group.
  - Advertise it more.
  - Approach the dropouts and see why they stopped attending.
  - At times I felt out of my element (my ability to contribute) when I knew nothing about how to do the project.
  - Steering committee and consultants needed to step back sooner and give participants more rope.
  - Develop consistent staff support.
  - Monitor success more carefully.
  - Do not expect major projects to be conceived and completed overnight.

## Conclusions

The possibility forums in Pleasants and Ritchie County have been successful during their first year of operation on several fronts:

- Participants generally are engaged and excited about the work they are doing
- Citizens have become more involved in decision making related to local development projects.
- Individual capacities (skills, abilities, knowledge, and self confidence) have been increased among forum participants. Positive change was reported in areas of leadership development and the use of data and information to make decisions and establish priorities.
- Social capital has been increased within the Possibility Forums and consequently within the larger community. Increased knowledge, connectedness, and trust were reported.

Other conclusions reached from the evaluative data include:

- Community capacity (as it is perceived by forum participants) needs to be built across several domains in both Pleasants and Ritchie counties.
- Some changes in how local forums are organized and supported should be considered to the extent that changes will encourage good results.

*This report was prepared by:  
Steven Heasley, Independent Evaluator*

*Analysis of evaluative data and report findings and conclusions are for the use of the  
C4D Steering Committee and local possibility Forums associated with the C4D Project.*

### *Counties 4 Development Possibilities Forums*

## **Evaluation of Second Year Progress January, 2008**

### ***Background***

The Counties 4 Development Project was established to further community and economic development efforts in a four county region of West Virginia that includes: Pleasants, Ritchie, Doddridge and Gilmer counties. A steering committee was convened with representation from each of the counties and “Possibility Forums” (PFs) were established in each county in order to engage local citizens in planning and action to improve community conditions. During the first year of the project (2006) a local community group (Possibility Forum) was active in two of the four counties – Pleasants and Ritchie.

An evaluation of C4D activities and progress based on established goals was conducted near the end of the first project year and a report on the evaluation findings was provided to the C4D Steering Committee in January of 2007.

Evaluation of first year progress was based on survey responses solicited from C4D Possibility Forum participants. The steering committee was interested in repeating the survey at the end of the 2007 project year and comparing the year one responses from PF participants to year two responses to determine the extent of changes in attitudes and beliefs about local development and also any changes in PF participant perception of local capacity during the second year of the project.

### ***Methodology***

Year two evaluation is a pre and post survey design based on repeating the survey of possibility forum participants that was administered at the end of year one. Survey responses solicited during December of 2007 are compared to survey responses in December of 2006 to determine if PF participant experience was different in year two of the project and if participants have changed their attitudes and beliefs about local development. Post survey responses (Dec. 07) were also compared to pre survey responses (Dec. 08) in order to identify any notable changes in respondent’s perception of community capacity.

An independent evaluator was contracted by the C4D steering committee to conduct the post-survey, compare survey responses to the pre-survey conducted in December of 2006, and develop a report summarizing findings and conclusions.

The survey instrument is also designed to capture participant recommendations and general comments about their possibility forum experience. Thus, recommendations from PF participants were also reviewed and summarized.

Surveys were completed by a total of twenty-two PF participants in December of 2006 and by thirteen participants in December of 2007. More than half (7) of the survey respondents in 2007 were steering team members and four of the remaining six respondents have been participating less than one year. A total of four surveys were completed by PF participants in Doddridge County, four in Ritchie County, three responses were received from Gilmer County and two from Pleasants County.

The 2007 survey data will be summarized based on all thirteen responses and the 2006 data will be compared to the 2006 data in order to determine if PF participant views have changed in any notable way during the 2007 calendar year.

The survey is made up of a series of statements and respondents are asked their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement on a five point Likert scale. The survey was designed to assess:

- Possibility Forum participant's experiences,
- Attitudes and beliefs about local development through the Possibility Forums, and
- Forum participant's perception of community capacity within the county.

The survey statements related to PF participant's perceptions of levels of community capacity across seven domains that include:

- Health and well-being of local people
- Skills, knowledge and abilities of local people
- Relationships and interpersonal communication
- Community initiative, responsibility, and adaptability
- Cultural diversity and quality of life
- Investments in community and financial resources
- Sustainable healthy ecosystems with multiple community benefits

Three statements relating to each of the domains of capacity were included in the survey allowing the evaluator to provide some degree of assessment as to the level of capacity forum participants believe to be present for each domain. Such assessment is limited to the views of those PF participants who responded to the survey.

An opportunity was also provided on the survey form for participants to make suggestions about what they would do differently based on their experience with the forums thus far and any general comments they might wish to offer.

A copy of the survey instrument and further explanation of the capacity domains examined was provided as appendices to the report on the 2006 project year. The same survey was used for the 2007 assessment.

## Summary of 2007 Survey Findings and Comparison to 2006

### *Participant Experiences*

Possibility Forum participants who responded to the survey in December of 2007 feel more hopeful about the county's future and more connected to others in the community as a result of their participation in the PF process. All but one participant (92.3%) indicated they feel more hopeful than they did a year ago and 11 of the 13 respondents (84.6%) indicated they feel more connected to others in the community. The percentage of survey respondents indicating they felt more hopeful was higher in 2007 than in 2006; however, a slightly smaller percentage felt more connected in 2007.

Almost all PF participants see their county as part of the larger region and all participants disagreed with the statement "our county has little in common with neighboring counties". This perception changed very little from year one to year two.

*"I would take time to be part of the team and stress team work not just one or two people doing something everyone does not feel strongly about"*

*- 2007 PF participant*

Survey results in December of 2006 continue to provide evidence that individual capacity is enhanced among PF participants. 85% of respondents are more confident in their leadership abilities and 75% feel more a part of the decision making process in their county. Confidence in leadership abilities was reported at a higher rate than in 2006, but a slightly smaller percentage of those persons completing the survey in 2007 indicated they felt more a part of the decision making process.

A smaller percentage (75% as compared to 82%) of 2007 respondents reported they "use data and information more to identify needs" than was the case in 2006. This may be due to less attention having been paid to the community profile during the second year of the project than was the case in year one.

All 2007 participants agreed that they had trust in the judgment of other forum participants, and most (11 of 13) participants agreed that they had "spent time reflecting ... in order to improve their work".

All but one of the 2007 survey respondents agreed with the statement "I feel more hopeful about the county's future than I did a year ago", yet only 75% of the respondents felt they had made progress on community projects during 2007. A higher percentage (86%) of PF participants responding to the survey in 2006 believed they had made progress on local projects during the first year of work by possibility forums.

2007 survey responses were somewhat more positive about outside assistance than was the case in 2006. 70% of the respondents in 2007 felt outside facilitation was helpful (as compared to 59% in 2006), and 85% felt information provided by consultants helped them better understand community issues (as compared to 73% in 2006).

### **Possibility Forum Participant Perception of Community Capacity**

The survey was designed to assess PF participant perception of the level of community capacity across seven domains or areas of influence affecting the capacity of the local community to carry out local projects and improve community conditions.

The perception of overall capacity within the C4D counties by survey respondents in 2006 was compared to the perception of capacity of the 2007 survey respondents in order to provide some indication of whether or not there was a change in how PF participants see the capacity within their local counties. Based on survey responses, there was a small increase in the overall perception of local capacity across the seven capacity domains. Given the relatively low number of responses to survey questions and the small level of change noted, this change in perception of local capacity among the PF participants represented in the survey responses is not considered to be significant.

There was a somewhat more notable change in the way PF participants viewed their environmental capital (sustainable healthy ecosystems with multiple community benefits). 2007 responses were more positive in this area than the 2006 responses. Investments in the community were also seen in a slightly more positive light; however, health and well being and community initiative, adaptability, and responsibility were seen slightly less favorably than was the case in 2006.

### **Comments and Recommendations from 2007 Forum Participants**

When forum participants (across all counties) were asked what they would do differently if they were to organize a possibilities forum in another county the following comments were offered:

*“New counties should be aware that as more people get involved and understand the bigger picture that new groups will be formed. It is critical for them to work together for the good of their county.”*

*- 2007 PF participant*

- More access to experts in appropriate disciplines.
- More brainstorming sessions.
- Make sure everyone’s thoughts and ideas are valued.
- Be sure the PF group works with other development groups in the county.
- Share lessons learned (both successes and failures) early in the process.
- Fledgling organizations need serious help, financial and otherwise, during years 1-3.



Other open ended comments offered by 2007 participants focused on (1) positive experiences and relationship building with other forum participants and, (2) the challenges related to recruiting and retaining citizen participation in the process.

### ***Conclusions***

- The possibility forums continue to be successful in engaging local citizens and building individual capacities in participants.
- 2007 survey responses indicate a slight increase in perceived levels of community capacity in some areas while perceived capacity in other areas declined.
- There appears to have been some loss of momentum during year two as compared to year one based on the survey responses of PF participants. A higher percentage of survey respondents expressed a lack of progress on local projects during 2007.

*This report was prepared by:  
Steven Heasley, Independent Evaluator*

*Analysis of evaluative data and report findings and conclusions are for the use of the C4D Steering Committee and local possibility Forums associated with the C4D Project.*

## Appendix E: Sample Meeting Evaluation

### Check Out

Participants were asked to share what went well with the meeting and what they recommended changing in order to improve future meetings. Participants used individual index cards to share their thoughts. Following is the group's collective responses. This information can be used to guide participants in helping to shape the direction and tone of their meetings.

What went Well?	What would you Change?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Yea! Projects picked</li><li>• Good energy</li><li>• Great facilitator</li><li>• Great sharing</li><li>• Movement</li><li>• Progress</li><li>• Keeping a schedule</li><li>• I was impressed and feel we got somewhere</li><li>• Communication</li><li>• Ideas</li><li>• Open-minded</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continuity of participants</li><li>• Ways to draw in co-workers</li><li>• Opportunity to share local events or activities</li><li>• No suggestions at this time, was quite happy</li><li>• Attract more support</li><li>• Bring in more participants</li><li>• Good enthusiasm</li><li>• Achievable goals</li><li>• Encourage more attendance</li></ul>

## Development Model for West Virginia

*Adopted by the Community Development Gathering - August 31, 2006*

# Development Model

*Continuously Improving West Virginia Communities*

