April 2015



Community Action Guide for Thriving Rural Communities







ABOUT THE THRIVING RURAL COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

Thriving Rural Communities is a partnership of Duke Divinity School, The Duke Endowment, the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, and the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. The Thriving Rural Communities Initiative works to foster thriving rural North Carolina communities by cultivating faithful rural Christian leadership and fruitful rural United Methodist congregations.

The Thriving Rural Communities Initiative foresees and works towards the day when North Carolina's rural clergy, rural churches, rural communities, and rural countryside thrive in the way God intended. Thriving Rural Communities offers a variety of programs designed to help divinity students, pastors, laity, and districts and conferences share and strengthen the gifts found in rural North Carolina.

Duke Divinity School

As the spiritual center of a great research university, Duke Divinity School is the embodiment of Duke University's motto: *Eruditio et Religio* — Knowledge and Faith. Founded in 1926 as the first of the University's graduate professional schools, the Divinity School attracts students from across the nation and around the world. One of 13 seminaries founded and supported by the United Methodist Church, the school has from its beginnings been ecumenical in aspiration, teaching, and practice. With many diverse theological perspectives represented here, students find common ground through immersion in Scripture and the church's tradition for addressing the challenges of faith in contemporary contexts.

The Duke Endowment

Since 1924, The Duke Endowment has worked to help people and strengthen communities in North Carolina and South Carolina by nurturing children, promoting health, educating minds and enriching spirits. The Endowment has awarded over \$3.2 billion in grants since its inception, including nearly \$1.5 billion to Duke University. With assets of \$3.4 billion, the Endowment is one of the nation's largest 501(c)(3) private foundations. Today, more than 83 percent of our total spending goes to grantmaking.

In addition to grantmaking work in four program areas, the Endowment shares its knowledge by publishing resources for grantees and other service organizations, including various publications, reports and evaluations. The Endowment also operates a fellowship program to cultivate emerging leaders in philanthropy.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR EMERGING ISSUES

The Institute for Emerging Issues (IEI), a non-partisan public policy organization, exists to enhance North Carolina's long-term prosperity. IEI connects North Carolinians across sectors, regions, and perspectives for collaborative work on key emerging issues affecting our state's future economic competitiveness. As a unit of North Carolina State University, IEI advances the University's research, service, and outreach contributions statewide.

IEI helps North Carolinians build consensus, and then move to action. Every February, IEI's signature Emerging Issues Forum attracts leaders in business, education, and government to discuss a single issue of significant importance for North Carolina's future prosperity. For three decades, the Forum has helped catalyze the policy reforms, investments, and other proactive responses required to build an enduring capacity for progress in North Carolina.

In 2013, IEI launched the Emerging Issues Commons, an award winning "civic engagement gallery" located in the James B. Hunt Jr. Library on NC State's Centennial Campus. IEI has explosively expanded its connection to citizens and their concerns through the Commons, which includes a digital platform that allows North Carolinians to connect to ideas, data, and each other.

To learn more about the Institute for Emerging Issues, visit www.emergingissues.org.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Portions of this guide were drawn from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's "Community Conversations Toolkit" for mental health.

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¹ http://www.samhsa.gov/community-conversations

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to help individuals and organizations that want to organize community collaboration to achieve three potential objectives:

- Get community members talking about the issue;
- Identify specific community-based solutions; and
- Develop clear steps for turning ideas into action.

This guide includes two main sections:

- Planning for a Community Collaboration, a guide for a small group to plan a larger community conversation; and
- Your Community Conversation, focused on the community conversation and moving to action.

The planning guide shares one recommended approach to organizing a community collaboration. It assumes that you are starting out with a small group of people who will spearhead a larger community collaboration. Of course, your situation and goals may be a bit different, and the process isn't set in stone. Feel free to adapt the process to your community and goals.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Collaboration is what binds a community together. When people collaborate with a shared will and common vision, progress is smarter, more comprehensive, and enduring. Collaboration also helps build networks for people to share ideas, address challenges, and forge creative partnerships. These productive networking activities, which characterize places like Silicon Valley, are the hallmarks of the "innovation capacity" essential for any community to thrive in the global knowledge economy.

Collaboration is the foundation of civic health: the vitality that a community enjoys when its citizens actively engage in public issues, involve themselves in community institutions, and interact with their neighbors. By collaborating on this issue, your community is not only addressing the issue at hand, but also strengthening your ability to work together to seize opportunities and resolve collective problems in the future.

I. PLANNING FOR A COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

There are many ways to organize collaboration in your community. This guide shares one approach, focusing on key steps such as creating a team, setting goals, and recruiting participants.

At this stage, you probably have a small group of people—maybe just one or two—who want to organize community collaboration on this issue. This section includes key questions and processes for your small group to consider as it organizes a larger collaboration.

You might be tempted to hit the ground running, and start identifying specific strategies now. However, since you and/or your group only represent a small subset of the community, this section focuses on convening the "right" group of individuals and organizations to find community-wide solutions and to move collaboratively to action.

Creating a Team

The first step is to think about who else should be involved in planning your collaboration. Your team will be responsible for:

- Planning the collaboration;
- Recruiting participants;
- Leading the collaboration and/or recruiting a facilitator; and (at least for some of you)
- Supporting action plans that emerge from the collaboration.

You might already have a strong, diverse group of people working to plan your community collaboration. Or, you might have just one or two people. In either case, think about who else should be involved.

This is a practical place to start, and it also sets an important focus on inclusion. At each phase of your collaboration—not just now—consider asking "who is missing" and how you can include those people.

When thinking about your team, consider your community's "stakeholders": community members who have a "stake" or interest in the issue. These might be individuals, organizations and groups who are (a) affected directly (positively or negatively) by the issue at hand or (b) have the power to impact the issue (often through their control of resources). Depending on your issue, they might be:

- Educators K-12, higher education (college, university, community college)
- Economic / workforce development groups, such as your local economic development organization or workforce development board

- Local businesses and the chamber of commerce
- Local workers, including the unemployed
- Students and young people
- Local government officials, both elected and staff
- Foundations with an interest in your issue
- Nonprofit organizations working on the issue of interest
- Houses of worship
- Culturally and economically diverse groups
- People with a lived experience with your issue

Getting some of these individuals and organizations on board at the planning stage can be a great help. It can also make a big difference in attendance at your community conversation as they may have networks into groups in your community whose presence is important in the conversation. People are much more likely to attend an event if invited by someone they know and trust.

The worksheet on "Building Your Team" can be helpful here (see Appendix).

Setting Goals for Collaboration

Once you have a team, you can work to define your goals for your community conversation and the larger collaboration, as well as create a plan for the work to come. Using the "Setting Goals" worksheet (see Appendix), think about outcomes your team wants to see, such as:

- What are your individual goals and expectations for the larger collaborative effort? Why are you each doing this?
- What common outcomes and changes do you hope to see as a result of this effort?
- How your team will work together (how will decisions be made)?
- How do you envision the format and size of the community conversation? (How many people? A single meeting? Multiple conversations over time?)
- Is your team prepared to support implementation of the action plan the collaboration generates? Success is more likely if people are committed to moving from talk to action.

Tips for Building Strong and Engaged Community Teams

- 1. Set clear expectations. What needs to happen, by when, and who is responsible? If people know what they're expected to do and by when, they are better able to develop a roadmap for achieving specific tasks and goals.
- 2. Share skills and talents. In the beginning ask everyone to write down their talents and skills, so that when the group needs to complete tasks, those requests can be based on skills people have.
- 3. Foster a creative environment. Be open and welcome diverse ideas and ways of thinking. Show that everyone is valued and is an important part of the group.
- 4. Continue recruiting volunteers. Even if people were not involved in the initial community conversation about mental health, they may be interested in finding solutions and helping to address challenges.

 Allowing new people to join brings in new energy, a new network, greater inclusion, and a stronger sense of ownership of the effort.
- 5. Celebrate progress.

Recruiting Participants

Community collaboration benefits from broad participation. When recruiting for the full-scale collaboration, strive to include representatives of many groups, including those you may be less familiar with. Think about the following questions:

- How many people do you need to involve to reach your goals?
- What groups do you need to involve?
 - Look back to "Creating a Team," and your team's list of possible community "stakeholders," Even if you didn't ask some of these groups to join the team or they were unable to take part, consider whether they should be participate in the conversation.
- What might prevent people from attending?
- Who on the team is best placed to reach out to these groups?

<u>Discuss invitation methods</u>: Various groups may prefer face-to-face invitations, while others are fine with phone calls, emails, presentations, websites, or flyers.

<u>Key information to communicate</u>: Regardless of the method, your invitation should answer these questions:

- What are we doing? (Hosting a community collaboration about...)
- What are we trying to accomplish? (We want our community to have...)
- Why does this matter to the particular person/group you are inviting?

Use the "Recruiting Participants" worksheet (see Appendix) to write down a list of who to invite. Before you start inviting, take a look at the next section and firm up some logistics—especially location and date—to include in the invitation.

Planning Logistics

Determine a meeting location, date and time. The right location is an important factor. Try to pick a location that feels welcoming to all and will not be perceived as favoring one group over another. Think about how long the collaboration will take to organize and check out if there any important conflicting community events. Then decide on a firm date.

Possible sites might include:

- Libraries
- Schools or colleges
- Large meeting rooms in corporate or government buildings
- Neighborhood association buildings
- Houses of worship
- Social service agencies
- Private or civic organizations

Consider whether your location:

- Is easy to find,
- Has sufficient room for your group,
- Is accessible by public transportation,
- Has plenty of parking,
- Has public restrooms, and
- Has elevators and ramps for easy access.

Consider logistics. In addition to location and date, discuss:

- Whether to engage a trained facilitator
- Needed supplies and furniture
- If speakers are needed and how to prepare them
- Creating a meeting evaluation form if you intend to evaluate your impact
- Deciding if/how to track registrations
- What materials might be needed for participants

- Childcare
- Translators
- Refreshments
- Carpooling, pickups, or other transportation arrangements
- Arrangements for hearing or visually impaired participants

You may want to return to this step after determining the agenda, since some of the logistics will depend on your activities. For example, you may want to provide:

- Copies of worksheets
- Copies of attendance sheet and evaluation forms
- Flip charts, easels, and markers for brainstorming
- Projector, screen, computer, and remote for slideshows

Planning the Agenda

The structure of your collaboration will determine what you get out of it. Look back to your goals. Consider what questions you want participants to answer and how you might organize participants in order to achieve your goals. Always keep your ultimate goals in mind as you plan, and always ask what each activity will contribute to achieving them.

The next section—"Your Community Collaboration"—includes some key steps for the full-scale collaboration. These steps provide a basic structure for the path your collaboration might take. How you translate these into specific activities is up to you. Setting an appropriate amount of time to let these conversations unfold is important to a successful outcome. Depending on the number of participants and how familiar your participants are with each other and the issue, you can condense the process. If you engage a larger group (more than 20-30), and many participants are new to the issue and each other, consider holding multiple meetings to devote the recommended time to working through the process outlined in the next section.

II. YOUR COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

This section includes key steps for the community conversation event. This is what you've been waiting for, the culmination of all the work your team put in during the planning phase. These steps will help you get the most out of your collaboration.

The materials in this section can be used in two ways. First, strive to include these key steps as you work on an agenda. Second, consider using the recommended materials in this section, especially the worksheets, during the meeting itself. In general, your conversation should:

- Give participants an opportunity to share how the issue impacts them;
- Discuss challenges to dealing with the issue;
- Generate ideas on how the community might respond; and
- Prioritize among potential responses and map out some next steps towards making those ideas become reality.

Setting Guidelines and Sharing Personal Experiences (recommended time: 90 minutes)

Issues affect different communities in different ways. Perhaps this issue feels very scary to your stakeholders, or perhaps it feels like a great opportunity. Giving participants an opportunity to share how the issue impacts them and the community is a powerful first step towards creating a successful collaborative effort. Our personal experiences are strong motivators. By sharing, we can better relate to one another and create a common understanding of the issue that is crucial to collaboration.

What guidelines or ground rules do you want to set for your discussion? Here are some examples:

- Listen with respect.
- Each person gets a chance to talk.
- One person talks at a time. Don't cut people off.
- When sharing, speak about yourself and your personal experiences.
- It's OK to disagree with someone else—in fact, it can be helpful—but personal attacks are never appropriate.
- Help the facilitator (if there is one) keep things on track.

Starting the discussion:

- Have each person introduce themself and say a little about why s/he wanted to be part of this discussion
- Question for participants: What does [this topic] mean to me? To us as a community?
- Question at end of this section: What new insights did you gain from this discussion? What themes kept coming up? What haven't we talked about?

What are the Challenges and Factors We Should Consider? (recommended time: 90 minutes)

To make progress on issues, you need to think strategically about the challenges you are facing and the factors that have the greatest influence on your topic. This part of the discussion will help you consider some of those challenges and factors and begin thinking about how to address them.

Objectives of this session:

- Take a look at some of the data about your topic.
- Identify the challenges you face as a community in addressing these issues.
- Identify underlying factors that are important to dealing with this issue.
- Examine your different beliefs about the issue and how you can find common ground to overcome challenges

Prepare a fact sheet of information that provides data (including local data, if available) and other facts regarding your topic, including underlying causes, impacts on individuals and communities, and "best practice" strategies for how to address it.

First, examine the fact sheet and ask:

- What are your reactions to the information presented?
- Are there items you don't agree with? Is there anything you want more information on? (this is especially important to ask of those with lived experience who are in the room; ask if the other participants have questions of them)

What is being done already, especially in the community, to address this issue?

- What resources (people, coalitions, agencies, funding, etc.) are already addressing this issue in your community—or could be brought to bear on the problem?
- Are there promising—or proven—strategies already in use?

Next, consider any challenges that keep individuals, groups and the community from developing a common understanding and consensus about next steps to address the issue. Even the best intentioned efforts can fail without identifying and addressing important challenges that stand in the way.

• What might these barriers be? How might we address them?

Brainstorming and Prioritizing Ideas (recommended time: 90 minutes)

Now that you share a common understanding about the issue, it's time for the fun part. What actions might your community take to address this issue?

Think of this step as the brainstorming stage. The more ideas you generate, the more likely you will be able to identify ones that are both feasible and effective. Depending on the size of your meeting, we suggest:

Step 1: Individual Brainstorming

- Breaking the large group into smaller groups of 4-5 people
- Have each individual person take time to write down several ideas using the "Generate Ideas" worksheet (see Appendix). These can be ideas already mentioned, ideas that support existing efforts, or completely new ideas.

Step 2: Small group discussion and prioritization

Using the "Prioritize Ideas" worksheet (see Appendix), share ideas together in small groups with an eye toward the following:

- Will the idea address the issue?
- Is the idea likely to be effective?
- Is it feasible?
- Will it bring lasting change?

Have each group report out their top 1-3 ideas (depending on the number of small groups and time allotted for this step, consider fewer/more ideas for the report outs), explaining their choices in terms of the questions posed above.

Step 3: Whole group prioritization

Considering the list of ideas your small groups just generated, which one or two is your community ready to initiate? Which are most feasible? Which are most effective?

Think about how each idea would use community assets identified earlier. Be open to synthesizing and modifying ideas, and make sure you aren't defending an idea just because it's yours or because others agree on it.

The old adage to "pick the low-hanging fruit" is important to keep in mind. Are some ideas worth considering because they can be accomplished relatively quickly, even if the impact is less than ideas that will take much more time to implement and show results? As you narrow your focus, make sure you're prioritizing ideas that can actually happen. Being able to see progress is important to building and sustaining momentum.

After the whole group discussion period has ended, allow each participant to vote (with a check mark, or use of sticky dots) to vote for his/her top three ideas.

 Given the voting results, is there consensus about where the community should focus its efforts?

If the room is divided, ask how much enthusiasm there is for working on the top priorities. It makes sense to concentrate on the ideas that have the most willingness among participants to get involved in making the idea happen. As you weigh your top vote getters, consider if working on more than one idea is feasible. Will you be competing for the same (scarce?) resources, including money and the attention of the same stakeholder groups?

Developing an Action Plan

Almost there! This last step is the most important of all.

Now that you have an idea or two ready for implementation, you must create an action plan. Most of all, you need next steps.

As a group, use the attached "Action Plan" worksheet (see Appendix) to begin transforming your idea into an action plan. Consider who wants to participate among those in the room, who needs to be involved but is missing from the conversation, and who might want to be on the team to lead this effort. Which community assets might be used and what resources do you think will be needed? Furthermore, think about how to measure success. How will you know if your idea is working?

To move this idea toward reality, starting with careful attention to creating a full fledged action plan, give thought to immediate next steps to convene a leadership team, including approaching those implicated by the content of the "Action Plan." Who will do what and when to invite these individuals/groups to participate?

These elements of an action plan can be sketched out in your community conversation but it will likely take a subsequent meeting of a new leadership team to flesh out more of the details. Most importantly, the new team will need to work through the attached "Next Steps" worksheet (see Appendix) to list next steps for the group and individuals who volunteer to be a part of the collaborative effort.

Following Up

One last note for the original planning team:

It is important to maintain momentum after the meeting. Even with tangible actions and next steps, it is natural for participants to return to their "regular lives" and allow daily pressures to get in the way of implementation. Here are some ways you—and then the new leadership team—can maintain excitement and focus.

- Identify key collaborators and points of contact who can mobilize their groups.
- Distribute a summary of the meeting shortly afterwards. Focus on reminding participants of next steps.
- Follow up on next steps. Keep in touch with key collaborators to ensure that everyone is taking action.
- Identify groups or individuals who are unresponsive or who are having trouble with their next steps. Help them and motivate them!

Congratulations! You've accomplished a lot.

Appendix: Worksheets

This appendix contains worksheets that support the planning and execution stages of a community collaboration.

Worksheet: Building Your Team

Use this worksheet to list potential team members. Refer to the list of stakeholders in the "Creating a Team" section for some starting suggestions. Think outside the box, and strive to include diverse groups on your team. Decide who is best positioned to contact each person/group and how.

Who Will Contact?						
Why Important?						
Title/Organization						
NAME						

Worksheet: Setting Goals for Collaboration

Once your team is in place, use this worksheet to brainstorm as a group, share your individual goals, and define your common goals and purpose. Feel free to make copies of this worksheet and take some time to think about these questions individually, then come to agreement on each point.

	nd expectations for collaboration? f you doing this?
What specific common outcomes and changes do you hope to see as a result of your collaboration?	What process will your team use to make decisions?
How do you envision the format (a single meeting? multiple ones?) and size of your community collaboration?	Is your team prepared to support implementation of the action plan that the collaboration generates? Chances of success are greatly enhanced if people are committed to moving from talk to action.

Worksheet: Recruiting Participants

Use this worksheet to plan outreach and recruitment activities. Refer to the list of stakeholders in the "Creating a Team" section for some starting suggestions. Think outside the box, and strive to include diverse groups in your collaboration. Decide who in your team is best positioned to contact each person/group and how.

	,			•	 •	
Who Will Contact?						
Why Important?						
Title/Organization						
NAME						

Worksheet: Generating Ideas

Break out into small groups and have each person write down ideas to address the issue in your community. The categories listed below are just a starting point and designed to stimulate thinking—feel free to go in other directions. After brainstorming, work together to pick one or two of your small group's best ideas using the "Prioritizing Ideas" worksheet. Or pick a new or merged idea that emerges from the small group conversation.

Ideas that will connect people	Ideas that will impact under-served groups
Ideas that will still be relevant in 20 years	Ideas that could start happening tomorrow
,	
Ideas that could create a new	Other ideas
industry/business	
industry/business	
industry/ business	
industry/ business	
industry/ business	
	one or two are your best ideas?
Looking at all of your ideas, which	n one or two are your best ideas?
	n one or two are your best ideas?
	n one or two are your best ideas?
	n one or two are your best ideas?
	n one or two are your best ideas?
	n one or two are your best ideas?
	n one or two are your best ideas?
	n one or two are your best ideas?

Worksheet: Prioritizing Ideas

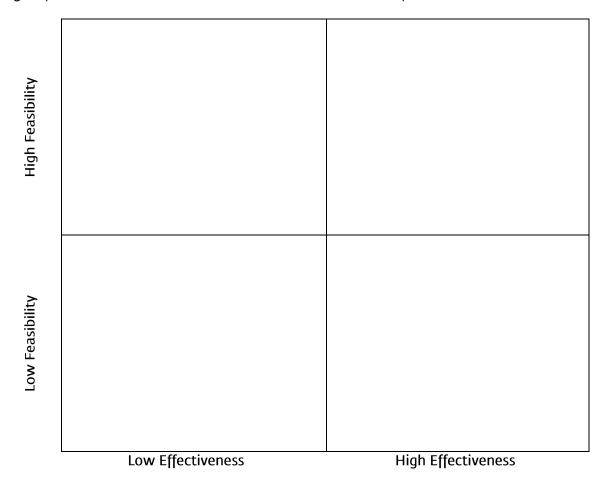
Use this worksheet to help identify your most promising ideas.

<u>In Small Groups</u>: Share each of your top idea(s). Strive for an honest evaluation of these points:

- How <u>feasible</u> is the idea? What makes it feasible or not?
- How <u>effective</u> is the idea? What makes it effective or not?
- Is the idea likely to lead to lasting change?
- Is the idea likely to <u>show quick results</u>, even if it is not necessarily the most effective? (give these a special identification mark below)

Use the chart below on a flip chart or sheet of paper to evaluate each idea. Write each idea into the appropriate square.

Whole Group Prioritization: Do the same evaluation of each group's best idea(s). Place each idea in the appropriate square on a large board or flip chart for the whole group to see. Note ideas that could have a short-term impact.



Worksheet: Developing an Action Plan

Use this worksheet to develop your idea into an action plan. By now, you have examined the issue from many sides, thought about what it would take to address it, and identified a consensus idea to move forward. Now think about all the resources it would take for your idea to come to fruition.

Leaders/Participants: Who fro and the participants can lead t else can/should participate, c including those not in the	his idea?Who or even lead, e room?	need to	Who are the key partners we help champion this idea?
Resources: If this idea	IDI	ĒΑ	Assets: What existing
requires funding and other resources, where might we get them?	(put your i	dea here)	community assets could we build upon?
Threats: What could stop thi	s idea from		nat will success look like, and
happening?		how	will you measure it?

Worksheet: Next Steps (for a new leadership team)

Now that there is a concrete idea and a committed group of leaders willing to move this effort forward, they need to determine what their next steps are for moving from idea to action. Use this worksheet to list concrete next steps. We suggest making a copy for each individual to keep, so you can all keep track of team goals and note your own individual tasks.

Implementation Tasks

Who is responsible?

In the next week	In the next week
In the mant we suite	Lin the constitution and he
In the next month	In the next month
In the next three months	In the next three months
In the next three months	In the next timee months
In the next year	In the next year
, ,	, ,