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Community Visioning and Living Action Planning Process (CVLAPP)

Michael Havercamp, State Specialist
Mediation and Group Facilitation
University of Nevada Cooperative Extension
P.O. Box 11130
Reno, Nevada 89520
Phone 775.784.4848
Email: havercampm@unce.unr.edu

Michael Polzin, Administrator
Program on Innovative Employment Relations Systems
School of Labor and Industrial Relations
Michigan State University
418 South Kedzie
East Lansing, Michigan 48823
Phone 517.432.1288
Email: polzinm@msu.edu



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INTRODUCTION

The Community Visioning and Living Action Planning Process (CVLAPP) is a structured group process, designed for groups who are involved with planning or problem-solving. Typically, three to five hours are needed for facilitating and conducting the CVLAPP. Of course, the time frame is dependent on the number of participants and the complexity of the topic. While the following process steps are provided sequentially, the reader is reminded that the precise order in which steps are carried out may vary depending on a particular group's expectations and needs.

The CVLAPP has its historical roots in community and organizational development practice, particularly with respect to group dynamics action learning, organizational change, community development, and alternative dispute resolution. Elements of the CVLAPP have been used and tested by the authors with more than 100 groups and organizations in the United States and internationally on a variety of human and community development topics, including economic development, strategic planning, human rights, and refugee resettlement.

PRIOR TO THE SESSION

Facilitator Selection. When possible, a facilitator (nongroup member) serving as a "neutral," conducts the CVLAPP. When a group addresses a controversial or conflictual issue, it is highly advisable to "poll" the participants to ensure that the recommended facilitator is acceptable. Additionally, it may be advisable to select a facilitator without a background in or knowledge about the conflictual issue, especially if facilitator impartiality is required. Also, consider if the facilitator requires a background in a specific subject, such as community economic development, natural resources, zoning, or sustainable agriculture. The gender of the facilitator and a determination about a possible need for cofacilitators should also be determined prior to beginning the CVLAPP. The ideal facilitators should have experience in group process, conflict resolution, organizational and community development. Finally, facilitators should be flexible and have a sense of humor.

Room Preparation. Table tents, three 4" x 5 ½" paper, black marking instruments, non-toxic glue, scissors, and copies of National Geographic magazines are placed near the center of each table. One or two magic walls (www.ica-usa.org), used for posting paper, are affixed to a wall that can be viewed by participants. Two flipcharts with easel paper are located near the magic wall – one to include the "suggested agenda" and the other one to include the "conversation principles" (ground rules).

SESSION BEGINS

Participants' Seating Arrangement. A u-shape seating arrangement is often desirable for groups involving 25 or fewer participants. For larger groups, consider using round tables that seat no more than eight persons at each table. If they are not familiar with each other, invite participants to write their names on the table tents provided. At this point in the process, do not ask the participants to change their seating arrangement. Such a change may take place at the beginning of the Community Visioning segment of the CVLAPP.

Room Setup for a Planning Session for the Nevada Committee on Foreign Relations with 15 Participants



The following "Suggested Agenda" (posted on a flip chart) is offered for conducting the CVLAPP.

Flipchart Representation of a Suggested Agenda

Suggested Process Agenda
<p><i>Creating a Shared Vision and Action Plan</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Setting the stage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Conduct warm-up exercise □ Review session's purpose □ Review suggested agenda □ Review conversation principles □ Identify community strengths □ Create historical sketch of community ● Community visioning ● Short-term priorities ● One-year action plan ● Summary of mutual agreements, understandings, and highlights

SETTING THE STAGE

The metaphor "setting the stage" is used to suggest the importance of preparing the group for collaboration. Some essentials are needed. They include a warm-up or introductory activity, followed by a discussion of the session's purpose, a brief review of the agenda, and conversation principles. The stage is set after the participants brainstorm a list of community strengths and create a thoughtful historical sketch of the community.

Warm-up Exercise

The session begins with an introductory activity, which may consist of the facilitator asking participants to voluntarily share with the group "something special" that has happened in their life within the past week or something special about their group or organization. Warm-ups are brief, allowing participants to provide something self-revealing, such as a special talent or skill.

Purpose of Session

The facilitator should describe the session's purpose and write it on a flip chart. Topics might include developing an HIV school based education campaign; creating a tourism and economic development plan; and creating an Elk conservation plan. To illustrate the overall goal of the session, the facilitator might say to the group, "Now, let's look at the magic wall. Do you see a lot of empty space? When this session is completed, you will have filled the magic wall with your ideas, not mine. You can expect to leave with a vision, set of priorities, and a one-year action plan. Are we a little clearer about the session's purpose? Any questions?" Following a brief discussion of the purpose and overall goal, the participants review the agenda.

Review of the Agenda

Agenda items are reviewed and clarified, and new items are added, if necessary. The facilitator reminds the group that while the agenda is written in "ink," it is really written in pencil. That is, the agenda will serve as a *guide*, changing and adapting to meet the participants' needs as the session unfolds.

Conversation Principles

The conversation principles (or ground rules), which are posted on a flipchart or provided on a written handout, are discussed. Besides principles suggested by the facilitator, the facilitator asks the participants to suggest additional ground rules that would enable the group to create a collaborative environment for the planning and problem-solving. The facilitator asks participants to honor the principles listed on the flip chart. The facilitator might ask, "Is there anyone who has difficulty honoring these principles?" If someone has difficulty, discuss the principle in question.

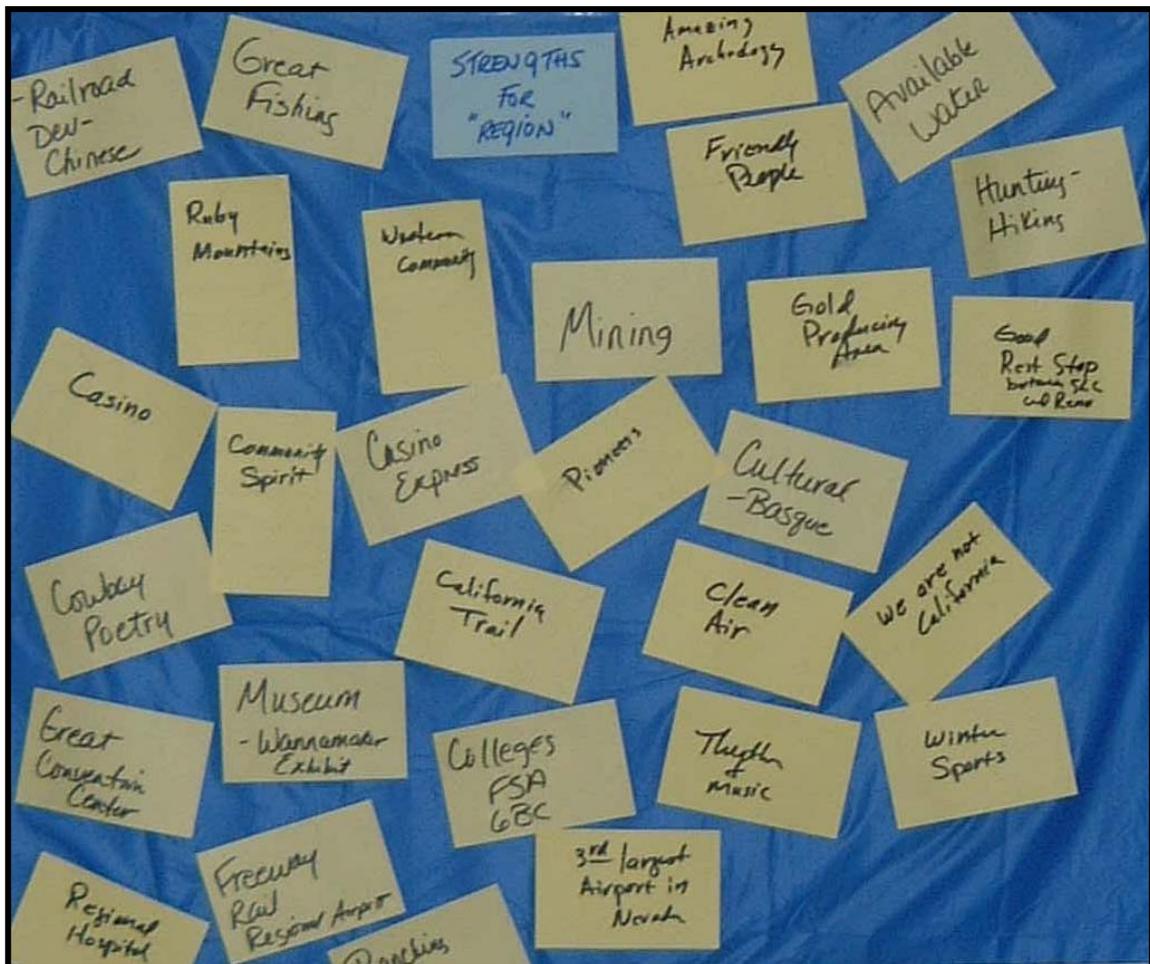
Flip Chart Representation for Suggested Conversation Principles

Suggested Conversation Principles
<p><i>Creating a Shared Vision and Action Plan</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All ideas count, even the "crazy" ones • Avoid personal attacks ("soft on people, hard on the problem") • Stay on schedule • Limit side conversations • Encourage creative spelling • Use the "bin" (items requiring additional discussion) • Obey the facilitator (smile)

Community Strengths

Participants are asked to think of one word that represents *something very special* about their community. The facilitator might ask, "What would you brag about if someone who is not familiar with your community asked you what is so special about your community?" Participants write the word on the paper provided to them. A volunteer is invited to begin the discussion by reading their written word and provide a self-introduction, if such introductions are needed. Allow participants to list more than one word on the paper to describe, if necessary. This perceived strength is affixed to the Magic Wall, which enables ideas to be moved on the wall. The facilitator then asks if someone has the same word or a similar word. These additional words are arranged near the previous strength, creating a potential theme or grouping of similar suggestions. Additional strengths are invited and posted as quickly as possible by the facilitator. When all of the participant strengths are posted on the magic wall, the facilitator asks if there are additional strengths that come to mind. These strengths are posted as well. If appropriate, the strengths, for example, are organized in a pattern suggested by the group. The exercise is completed when participants discuss the themes that emerged as a result of the community strengths activity.

Economic Development Workshop. Brainstormed List of Community Strengths for a Northern Nevada Region



Historical Sketch of Community

Participants are asked to identify social, economic, and demographic conditions that appear to characterize each of the three previous decades. Participant responses for each decade are quickly recorded on a flip chart. The facilitator encourages limited discussion. This exercise provides the group with a brief overview about how their community has *changed* and *stayed somewhat the same* over 30 years.

Flip chart Representation for Recording Participant Responses for a Historical Sketch

1970s	1980s	1990s

COMMUNITY VISIONING

Participants are asked to divide into groups of five to eight. If a diverse mix of participant characteristics is needed, participants seated next to each other may be asked to "number off" by saying aloud "1," "2," or "3," and so on, depending on the number of small groups required for the exercise. Following the numbering-off exercise, participants are then asked to sit at the table with the table tent corresponding to the number they announced. The community vision process begins with an individual activity. In situations where groups feel polarized, it may be advisable to have the polarized groups meet separately to complete the following exercises associated with developing a community vision.

- ✓ **Individual activity.** Participants are asked to cut out pictures from National Geographic magazines. The facilitator might ask, "Let the pictures speak to you about your image for your future community. Clip from a magazine those pictures that express your vision – what you would like your community to look like five or 10 years from now." Ask if there are any questions about this task. Remind participants to work silently for approximately five minutes. The facilitator walks around the room, observing the groups and checking to see if anyone has any questions. When the individual clipping activity is completed, the facilitator instructs participants to post their pictures on the flip chart next to their group's table. If flip charts are not available, place a large piece of paper – approximately the size of the flipchart – on each group table.
- ✓ **Group activity.** Participants then glue the pictures to flipchart paper in whatever manner they choose. They may decide to organize the pictures in a pattern or simply affix them without any prescribed order.

While they glue the pictures, the facilitator gives each group another piece of paper (approximately 8 inches by the width of the flip chart paper). On this piece of paper, the facilitator has written, "As a group, agree on five words which represent five themes emerging from the posted pictures." Instruct the groups that they are not to share their five written words with other groups, at this time. "It's secret," the facilitator smiles.

- ✓ Group reports. The facilitator begins by stating that while discussing a particular group's community vision picture participants in that group should remain quiet while the others discuss what they think are the themes in the picture. Then, the members of the group that prepared the "picture" discuss the words on their piece of paper. The facilitator concludes this activity by asking that group, "How well did the rest of us do in identifying the themes determined by your group?" The remaining group reports are discussed in a similar manner.
- ✓ Common themes. Following the group reports, the facilitator leads a discussion with all participants, asking, "What were the words that were used more than once to identify themes?" These words are affixed to the Magic Wall under the category titled "community vision." Participants are also invited to list *new* words that were not previously mentioned during group reports. These additional words are also posted to the Magic Wall under the community vision category. The conversation concludes with a general discussion about what these words mean in terms of establishing a vision.

2010 Business Development Vision for a Grocery Store in Kabul, Afghanistan



SHORT-TERM PRIORITIES

Participants are invited to engage in an activity to identify a set of short-term priorities that are based on the community vision. The facilitator instructs participants to take another piece of paper and says: “Envision a community celebration taking place in the not too distant future (set a time frame; for example, two years) in which you and many, many people associated with your organization are at a party. Thousands of people freely want to celebrate *something special* that has occurred during this time period. Yes, *something special* has happened! That *something* could be *new and different* or it may be *something special that you have retained in your community*. You might even feel goose bumps. Your heart is filled with anticipation and joy. You can't wait to celebrate that ‘something special.’ Write that something special on your piece of paper using as few words as possible.

The facilitator pauses for a few moments while the participants reflect on what to write; perhaps repeating the instructions. After everyone has completed the task, the facilitator asks for a volunteer to share an idea and posts the participants’ ideas on the magic wall under the heading of "Short-Term Priorities." The facilitator may say, "We simply need to understand what someone has posted." Ideas don't need to be evaluated at this time.

After all these ideas are posted, the facilitator asks participants if there are ideas that are *somewhat similar* or *about the same*. If so, similar ideas are arranged together. The facilitator then asks if any of the ideas require clarification. Following this question, the facilitator writes a number or letter of the alphabet on each idea. Next, the facilitator distributes three "ballots" (colored Post-its or dots) to each participant. Participants quietly write a different number or letter on each Post-it, corresponding to one of three most important ideas that they wish to celebrate. Remind them, "After reflecting on all of these ideas, select three ideas that you think are *most important*, and write the number (or letter) on the ballot associated with these ideas. Three ideas, three numbers!" When everyone is finished writing on the ballots, ballots are collected and the scores are posted on the magic wall. A brief discussion follows regarding what the votes may imply in terms of a one-year action plan.

If a break hasn't already occurred, take one at this time.

ONE YEAR LIVING ACTION PLAN

The following exercise is carried out by all participants or by self-selected participants who form work groups based on each priority. Flipcharts or magic walls are used in the development of the action plan. Pre-arranged action planning categories are posted near the top of the magic wall or on a flip chart. The categories will vary depending on a group's objective: Actions and Activities, Resources Needed, Success Indicators, Person(s) Willing to Carry Out Action/Activity, and Timeline.

The action planning discussion begins by participants’ brainstorming (“all ideas count!”) actions and activities that are needed in order to address *each priority*, one priority at a time. Possible resources that may be needed to complete each task are identified. Participants may also brainstorm what they consider to be indicators of successful implementation of a specific action or activity. For example, the participants may determine to try to raise \$10,000 (action/activity), and a “success indicator” might include submitting a grant application.

Participants also determine a time frame for carrying out the actions and activities. When the action plan is completed, participants may be asked to write their names next to the action or activity that they are willing to work on. This activity concludes with a self-selection of persons to serve as coordinators for priority work

areas. The facilitator reminds the participants that the action plan must live, allowing it to change and be modified throughout the year to fit emerging ideas and strategies.

Twelve-month Action Plan for a Grocery Store in Kabul, Afghanistan



SUMMARY OF MUTUAL AGREEMENTS, UNDERSTANDINGS, AND HIGHLIGHTS

Summary of Mutual Agreements, Understandings, and Highlights. The facilitator concludes the Community Visioning and Action Planning Process by asking participants to discuss what they consider to be the *mutual agreements*, *understandings*, and *highlights* from this session. Through this concluding activity, participants summarize in their own words what they perceive to be the agreements and common understandings related to the planning session. They also have the opportunity to quickly discuss special highlights, such as the one that we hear frequently, "It was nice to see that we have so much in common." The facilitator may end the session asking the participants to pat themselves on the back for a "job well done!"

FACILITATION RESOURCES

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