

## Leadership Development

- Do you find that a few people continuously hold leadership positions in your community?
- Are volunteers getting burned out from having too much responsibility?
- Are you looking for new ideas and energy?
- Do many youth leave your community to pursue other opportunities?  
If so, you may need to cultivate new leaders in your community.

### Why Train New Leaders?

Community development can only be sustained over the long term if there are motivated and committed local residents who keep the momentum going. Even if your community is thriving right now, volunteers and local leaders may feel burned out in the future. You need to ensure that a constant supply of new people are being trained and encouraged to assume leadership positions.

As federal and state agencies downsize their programs, more responsibilities are being turned over to our local governments. Especially in rural areas, this may mean that more volunteer work is required to meet these new demands.

Many rural areas find that their "best and brightest" youth leave because they cannot find work. Community development activities can provide opportunities for young people to get involved and have a direct impact.

### Tips to Recruit New Leaders

#### ***Seek out underrepresented groups***

1. Leadership development is important in securing broad, diverse participation in your community's decision making. In economically-depressed areas, certain segments of the community may be chronically under-represented. To better understand the needs and concerns of these segments, it is worth taking the extra effort to engage them and seek out individuals who can represent their issues before the larger community.

#### ***Start with schools***

2. The future of a community lies with its youth, so why not engage them early on? As you plan community activities, think of ways that school children can participate and learn about local issues. Provide opportunities for youth to organize their own activities and reward those efforts. Make presentations at the local schools and incorporate school administration in community development plans.

#### ***Look for useful skills***

3. When you are looking for new volunteers, think about what skills different individuals could bring to a task or project. Don't just think about who they are or what they might have been involved in before. You may be surprised at who can provide resources you need. This exercise helps draw in individuals who may not otherwise participate.

#### ***Appeal to self-interests***

4. When you are recruiting new volunteers and leaders, try to relate to their particular interests. Instead of just saying that it will be good for the community as a whole, mention how their involvement can help them learn new skills, meet new people, or whatever seems to appeal to them.

### ***Cast a wide net***

5. When you are seeking out new recruits, don't limit yourself to those people whose skills and interests satisfy your immediate objectives. Encourage people who may only be able to contribute in small ways, because it will foster long-term viability of the community. All skills and contributions are valuable and should be viewed as such.

### ***Involve by degrees***

6. Start cultivating new leaders by giving your volunteers small tasks they can easily handle. Over time, their confidence and ability will grow and they will be able to take on larger responsibilities. People from historically disadvantaged segments of the population may need strong encouragement before assuming a leadership role.

### ***Define tasks, clarify expectations and goals***

7. Before you ask someone for help on a project, be sure to define the task clearly. Early clarification will prevent future misunderstandings. Be specific about the end products that you desire and provide the contacts or resources that are needed to get the job done.

### ***Use people's time efficiently***

8. Community members may be volunteering their time above and beyond work, school, home, and other responsibilities. Make sure their time is well spent so they will continue participating in community activities. Prepare in advance to make sure your meetings are focused and productive. Set a time frame for the meeting and stick to it. Establish clear goals and follow through on commitments.

### ***Offer rewards for participation***

9. Let people know you value their participation and reward them for their efforts. You could have an annual recognition dinner or provide letters of recommendation. People who have not been in the workforce can obtain valuable experience, so be prepared to provide them documentation about tasks performed and skills learned.

### ***Publicize your successes***

10. Keep other community organizations, such as churches, schools and civic associations, informed about your activities. Maintain a good relationship with your local media so that your successes will be publicized throughout the community. Over time, this will establish a good reputation for your organization and attract additional people.

### ***Additional Resources***

- Community colleges
- USDA extension services

*Additional copies of this Technote are available from the Office of Community Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Room 701, 300 7th Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20024 (1-800-645-4712). Copies may also be obtained at*

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