

Cuyahoga Valley Initiative Idea Package Summary Community Capacity

The Community Capacity Idea Package seeks to release the tremendous potential throughout the Cuyahoga Valley by outlining how every community can combine its diverse assets and talents with global best practices in such a way that increases individual and community wealth, encourages the development of existing and new businesses, and brings about environmental health.



Introduction

The Cuyahoga Valley community contains a diverse set of stakeholders that includes large public agencies for infrastructure development and open space conservation, local neighborhood development corporations and watershed advocacy groups, companies that contribute to the economy of Northeast Ohio, and residents who make their homes in and around the Cuyahoga Valley.

The Community Capacity Idea Package weds this rich tradition of community empowerment with practices that bring about environmental regeneration and economic development. Continuous community-directed improvement depends on collaboration between a broad and diverse set of stakeholders focused on using their commonalities to guide these various efforts for the Valley. Previously, the pursuit of separate environmental, economic, and neighborhood projects limited progress throughout the Valley. By recognizing that the Valley functions as a holistic system, neighborhoods and communities can undertake organized efforts to produce results that satisfy the various interests in a collective fashion.

Current Conditions

The Cuyahoga Valley includes thirteen communities from as large as the City of Cleveland with nearly half a million residents to as small as Cuyahoga Heights with a population of 599. These communities work under the “Home Rule” structure, which essentially devolves to local municipalities all powers not explicitly denied to them by the state government. This structure tends to limit the kind of regional cooperation that would develop a vision for the Valley as a unifying resource that could result in prosperity for individual municipalities.

Additionally, there are large public agencies that have large investments and infrastructure within the valley and have distinct missions to their agencies goals. Although the need to focus on individual goals is essential to focusing the expertise related to specific infrastructure as deemed critical for projects, it diminishes the reaches of a whole-systems approach to accomplishing a more integrated resource and infrastructure for the Valley moving forward.

Throughout Northeast Ohio, there has been a tradition of grass-roots efforts to bring about positive social change. The settlement house movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century addressed the problems encountered by recent immigrants by combining educational, recreational, and economic programs with philanthropy. Hiram House, the first settlement house in Cleveland, was permanently established on Orange Avenue overlooking Kingsbury Run in 1899. These institutions, largely concentrated around the Cuyahoga Valley, provide an early model of

neighborhood sustainability where social advocacy was combined with economic empowerment as well as improving the urban environment through better housing and industrial pollution standards. Community Development Corporations have continued this tradition by encouraging neighborhood economic development, housing renovation, and community organizing. More recently, groups such as the West Creek Preservation Committee have harnessed community resources to advocate for the urban environment.

Components

In order for the Valley to work sustainably, a significant degree of community consensus should be developed around the core strategies for improving the health of the Valley. Second, there needs to be the capacity within the local, political, institutional, business, technical, and constituent infrastructure to carry the initiative forward. Finally, in order for the human assets throughout the Valley to be fully utilized, an environment of collaboration should be fostered between formerly disparate groups.

The **Living City** component is centered on creating a built environment that facilitates daily interaction, promotes a clean and healthy environment, and utilizes public space for community members to work with one another, become better educated, and interact with public officials and outside organizations. It consists of components already used in other Idea Packages.

- X Living City
- IV Strengthening Neighborhoods
- VII Local Distinctiveness
- II Clean River and Tributaries

The **Using Community Assets for Sustainability** is focused on community building as an organizational practice. It draws from the work of John Kretzmann and John McKnight, who assert that communities work best when they draw from their existing assets and encourage people to work with one another to build their communities

XI. Using Community Assets for Sustainability

- A. Mapping Assets- To some extent, the CVI will broadly map some of the assets available to communities. These include institutional assets, such as schools, public facilities, and neighborhood organizations.

However, there are human assets to be mapped as well. Communities can and should undertake this inventory themselves, since they best know what is available to them.

- B. Building Relationships- This focuses on bringing together different types of capacities to achieve broad, sustainable results. Making connections between everyday citizens, local businesses, and specialized expertise brings out creative solutions. (For example,



combining vacant land, neighborhood residents, agricultural expertise, and corner grocers for urban gardening projects that provide fresh vegetables for retail sale brings about ecological, economic, and social profits.)

- C. Mobilizing for Economic Development and Information Sharing- Developing a thriving local economy is essential to bring about lasting neighborhood and regional improvement. Development should be tailored to both serve the local market as well as retain profits within the community. Using locally built products draws on community resources and keeps wealth close to home.
- D. Convening the Community to Develop a Vision and a Plan- Unlike many other planning projects, the Cuyahoga Valley Initiative will depend on municipalities and communities to develop local plans. However, the broad vision for the Valley will be developed through the Initiative. This sub-component relies on communities taking an asset-based approach and expanding the table to include a broad representation of the community to develop a sustainable plan that is integrated with the economic, environmental, and social systems of the Valley.
- E. Leveraging Outside Resources to Support Locally Driven Development- After communities mobilizes their internal assets, partnerships with outside agencies and institutions can be effectively used to add fiscal capital to projects.

Opportunities

There is a need to link neighborhoods and the groups that represent them with larger organizations that have multi-jurisdictional responsibility. Most of these opportunities focus on how existing organizations can provide networking support for other agencies or neighborhoods to harness their own capacities.

The largest of these groups is the Ohio & Erie Canal Corridor and the Cuyahoga RAP (Remedial Action Plan). These non-public organizations with broad geographic foci could serve as the unifying element for a collaborative community effort throughout the Valley.

The organization of a Cuyahoga Redevelopment Authority branch for collaborative consensus of priorities and project funding for the valley would provide a funding mechanism as well as a central resource for sustainable development.

The organization or advancement of a current organization such as the RAP or Canal Corridor to serve as the Volunteer and Outreach network for projects, monitoring, and education.

In addition, the Cuyahoga Valley Region and Northeast Ohio has an abundance of environmental based non-profit organizations. Collaboration of these energetic and innovative groups will pose a central place for policy, projects, education and community advocacy.

Decision Support Resources

In addition to these legal elements, the information infrastructure to guide decision making is not present. Information in the form of natural resource inventory, cultural and historic resources, economic hubs and river activities is either scattered throughout various organizations or do not exist.

The Cuyahoga County Planning Commission has established some data sets for mapping, but is largely concentrated by municipal requests and individual projects goals. In addition, although the information is available to the public, it does not explain what the value of the information and what it can tell about the place for future design, development and restoration initiatives for the Valley.

The development of a web-based GIS decision support network for current conditions, vision concepts and codes, guidelines and practices to accomplish the vision on a place-by place scale basis would serve as a resource for neighborhoods and municipalities seeking information for their own projects, and would provide a way for them to see how actions in one area affects

communities throughout the Valley.

Outreach Community Capacity

The presence of non-profit and community based organizations was mentioned earlier. However, there are sectors and institutions within the Valley that can serve as viable partners in providing the man-power and resources needed to restore the Valley through participating in project implementation, providing information and guidance to valley conditions and advance the efforts needed to work together to accomplish the Valley Vision.

These groups include schools, hospitals and health care centers and restaurants to name a few. There are various environmental education curriculum programs that are provided by groups such as the Ohio Environmental Education Organization and the Great Lakes Education program. However, the hands-on experience for students to fully understand the place-based local issues within their own community is limited.



The efforts of the Land Lab Concept that the Independence Schools utilizes nature within the Valley to get students fully integrated into the natural resources to educate and explore their minds on the local ecology and science. This Land Lab concept however can go a step further through organizing efforts for the students to understand the restoration of a place and the economic and social issues that are associated with other curriculum such as math, social studies, and history.

In addition to schools, the local enterprises all have intellectual and expert skills in a variety of professions that need to be utilized in design process, collaboration efforts and project implementation. Developing a strategy to utilize these unstructured efforts is essential to moving the Valley in a regenerative direction for the future. These individuals are already being active in local non-profits, but could serve a large role in the community.

The Cuyahoga Valley National Park and the non-profit partner, Cuyahoga Valley National Park Association is working on a concept of expanding its efforts in the Environmental Education Center to “provide challenging in-depth educational experiences that utilize the resources of Cuyahoga Valley National Park to inspire adult learners to take better care of the Earth. “ To accomplish this, the concept of developing a Cuyahoga Valley Institute that focuses on areas: 1) Environmental Literacy, 2) Arts, Culture & Environment, 3) Sustainability, and 4) Professional Development for Educators.

This concept is a clear example of providing education to expand the education and awareness of the community within the region and the value of its resources. This concept, however, needs to be expanded to the entire valley outside of the National Park to experience regenerative processes at work and applications in “real world” environs.

Secondarily, the network of professionals that may not live within the Valley but have a huge contribution to the efforts to restore the Valley is ad-hoc and associated with specific project needs and interest. The local societies related to Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Planning, Natural Resource, Cultural resource and Business are not organized in a fashion to serve as a resource that can be utilized on a continuing basis for the Valley efforts. These local professional organizations should be part of the collaborative effort for a full resource base to integrate into the Valley wide effort.

Education

As presented above, there are wide variety of skills that are available to the valley and the restoration to restore the Valley will require new skills and expertise that is only bequest to a few within the community. To fully accomplish the local outreach capacity for project implementation, monitoring and policy decisions, knowledge and techniques will be needed in restoration. ParkWorks of Cleveland is a local organization that utilizes these training efforts for plantings and urban gardening projects for the City. Advancing their work to a fully integrated volunteer training program focused on restoration, would begin to organized a large force of qualified local residents to make changes in their community without government intervention.

Current Efforts and Activities

The Watershed Approach to make changes for communities is an industry that is flourishing throughout the country and world. This approach usually requires multi-jurisdictional communication and collaboration to accomplishing project objectives.

There are numerous initiatives throughout the country to view as sample strategies. However, the commonality of most of these initiatives is an established vision to guide future decisions for land use and its economic, ecological and social interests associated with its use. In addition these efforts require a collective collaboration of expertise from the initial design and public process to the implementation of the Vision as the watershed will always have a variety of interests that need to be heard.

In addition to these efforts of Watershed planning, the concept of Riverkeeper created by Robert Kennedy Jr. for the Hudson River has organized efforts to make change to a body of water and has established a national network to communicate local efforts. Although the local organizations consider themselves as a "Riverkeeper", the concept needs to be expanded to restore the Valley and integrate the environmental goals with the economic and social needs of the community.

Potential Partners and Technical Resources

During the initial development of the Cuyahoga Valley Initiative, organizations that broadly represent the interests of stakeholders throughout the Valley communities should be consulted to help shape the toolbox that local organizations will later use. After the initial development of the Initiative, communities will be able to convene a broad array of stakeholders within their area of influence to make plans for their communities.

Cleveland Neighborhood Development Corporation
Local Community Development Corporations (Slavic Village Dev. Corp., Maingate Business Development Corp., Tremont West Dev. Corp.)
Cleveland Metroparks
Parkworks
Schools (Public and private)
Health Care Institutions
Cuyahoga River Remedial Action Plan
Soil Conservation Service
Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District
Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority
Ohio Department of Transportation
National Park Service

