

The FUTURES FESTIVAL

An Intergenerational
Approach to Community
Participation



A FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

PENNSTATE



College of Agricultural Sciences • Cooperative Extension

OVERVIEW

The “Futures Festival” is a special event designed to engage people of all ages in constructive dialogue about community development issues. It is geared primarily toward youths and older adults, two population groups whose opportunities to participate in community activities are typically limited. Through murals, models, photographs, theatrical displays, and other communications media, the Futures Festival brings community residents and public officials together to share their ideas about community development. All participants get the chance to answer (and learn how others answer) the all-important question: “What would you like to see in the future of your community?”

There are various ways to conduct a Futures Festival. It can be organized as a separate event or incorporated into another event, such as an annual fair, for which a strong local tradition exists. This latter approach may be more feasible in rural areas where people have greater distances to travel. Futures Festival activities can be focused on development possibilities for the entire community, or the focus can be limited to the development of a

particular setting, such as a local park, or to specific issues of concern. No matter how they are organized, Future Festival events provide fun, nonconfrontational activities that stimulate critical reflection and constructive dialogue about the physical, social, and psychological dimensions of community living and development.

It takes a team effort to conduct a successful Futures Festival event. At the core of the team, there must be an official event coordinator and a home base for operations. Extension can play a central role since extension agents maintain strong ties to county agencies and organizations and have access to information about other planning discussions happening in their area. There are several similarities between the objectives of the Futures Festival (see page 3) and the work objectives of extension agents, particularly community development agents.

Three stages in the development of a Futures Festival

1. Event planning: 2–4 months
2. The event itself: 1 day
3. Post-event organizing: 2 weeks



OBJECTIVES

1. To give community residents an opportunity to learn how local development decisions are made.
2. To increase participants' understanding of their community and the needs and concerns of its residents.
3. To heighten participants' sense of civic involvement and responsibility.
4. To provide civic leaders and community development professionals with additional information about residents' concerns.

BASIC CONCEPTS

- sense of community
- citizenship and community participation
- community planning and "visioning"
- democracy
- intergenerational communication
- history as a living, ongoing process

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

- critical thinking about land use
- working as part of a group
- communicating and planning
- recognizing and appreciating alternative perspectives
- being resourceful with materials
- public speaking

SUPPLIES/RESOURCES NEEDED FOR EXHIBITS AND ACTIVITIES (suggested)

- Name tags
- Decorations
- Stage area
- Newsprint
- Sketching: paper, pencils, markers, etc.
- Mural painting: large sheets (about 8 by 4 ft) of homosote (a condensed cardboard-like substance), dozens of sketch pads, pencils, paint (assorted colors), paint brushes, and paint thinner.
- Model building: 5 model bases (pieces of hardened cardboard, baseboard, foamcore, or other form-holding substance at least 4 sq ft in area), various types of paper, cardboard, clay, markers, and miscellaneous arts and crafts supplies, including materials that can be brought from home (pipe cleaners, cotton balls, toilet paper rolls).

- Land-use mapping: 5–10 copies of an outline map of the community, aerial photographs of the community (current and historical), crayons, pencils, rulers, compasses, colored stickers or pushpins, and masking tape. (Maps can be obtained from local development agencies.)

EVENT PLANNING

Step 1: Organize an event coordination team.

Planning a successful event will require the involvement of many people, particularly those who work with children, youth, and older adults. The first step is to establish an event coordination team. Members of this group will be responsible for recruiting participants, exhibitors, and presenters; publicizing the event; and coordinating, facilitating, and evaluating activities on the day of the event.

In organizing the planning team, contact a broad array of community professionals and volunteers. Here are some examples of places to contact:

- County extension office (in particular, the community development extension agent)
- Public and private schools (elementary, junior high, and high): Teachers and resource specialists can use the Futures Festival event, and preparation for it, as a way to supplement curricular lessons in many areas, including social studies, civics, architecture and design, history, and communications.
- County, regional, and municipal planning officials, including community board representatives
- Elected officials¹
- Department of Parks and Recreation
- Civic organizations such as block associations, local history groups, etc.
- Youth organizations such as the YMCA/YWCA, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, 4-H clubs, Boy and Girl Scouts, and church/synagogue youth groups
- Senior citizen organizations, including senior centers, local AARP chapters, senior volunteer organizations, senior housing facilities, etc.

¹In order to increase the chances that Futures Festival activities will contribute to "official" community planning discussions and efforts, it is important to involve municipal and county planning and public officials early on.

- College/university resources, including faculty, students, and staff involved in design fields (architecture, city planning), social sciences (sociology, gerontology, education, community/environmental psychology), communication arts (photography, film), and environmental sciences
- Local library
- Volunteer groups: Try to recruit volunteers with skills and interests in environmental design and development (perhaps retired architects, city planners, construction managers, etc.), community history, photography, public affairs, etc.

Step 2: Determine event location and date.

- Location:** The event should be held at an accessible park or in a large, spacious, indoor facility.
- Date:** Choose a date that will give the event coordination team plenty of planning time. Also, choose a time that allows those who work to attend (like a Saturday morning). Alternatively, the Futures Festival can take place throughout an entire day to give people more opportunities participate.

Step 3: Recruit exhibitors/presenters and generate community interest and excitement.

Develop and distribute a call for presentations flyer (see Appendix A for a template) and, subsequently, an event press release (see Appendix B for an example). The information should be distributed as widely as possible, using such methods as postings on local bulletin boards and notices in community organization newsletters. Outreach efforts might also include presentations at meetings of various school and community organizations. Personal social networks should also be used to reach out to local educators, community organization administrators, human service professionals, and local development agency administrators.

Step 4: Provide assistance in exhibit/presentation preparation.

Every group and organization concerned about local community development or quality-of-life issues should be encouraged to develop some sort of exhibit or presentation for the Futures Festival. This includes all groups and organizations noted as potential participants on the event coordination team (see Step #1 above).



All exhibits, presentations, and performances should be developed with three basic principles in mind:

- Convey an *Atmosphere of Discovery*: Exhibits and performances should educate participants about various ways of thinking about and planning for their community. Where possible, give participants the opportunity to ask questions of presenters and find out more about the information being presented.
- Create *Opportunities for Participation*: Exhibits and presentations should be designed to encourage participants to articulate their own needs, concerns, and ideas for community development. For those exhibits designed to provide information about “official” plans for local development, encourage participants to share their own views and opinions.
- Stimulate *Intergenerational Dialogue* about community issues: Exhibits and presentations should be structured to provide active roles for children, youth, and older adults as participants, discussants, commentators, and recorders.

THE EVENT

A distinctive feature of a Futures Festival event is that it employs a wide array of communications media to help people express their concerns and hopes for the future of their communities. Choose one, two, or any combination of the following activity, exhibit, and presentation formats:

1. Mural painting

This activity can be structured as follows:

- Break participants into intergenerational groups and assign a “facilitator” to each; this person should have the skills to promote interaction/negotiation between muralists.
- Have facilitators engage participants in group discussions and preliminary sketching exercises aimed at illustrating ideas for community improvement. As they develop their mural plans, encourage participants to consider recreation, education, housing, shopping, and city services, and to accommodate the needs and desires of residents of all ages in the themes of their murals. Also encourage participants to be creative in their planning in terms of visualizing new community



settings, transportation systems, services, and industries.

- c. Have each mural group develop an overall sketch of their plan.
- d. Begin painting.

2. Model building

This activity can be structured in much the same way as the mural-painting activity above, except instead of painting murals (step d), participants develop three-dimensional models to display their community development visions.

3. Theatrical displays

Invite participating groups and organizations to develop theatrical skits to perform during the festival. These skits could dramatize quality-of-life concerns, highlight new ideas for community improvement, arouse feelings about places of sentimental value, and promote a sense of civic awareness and responsibility. Participatory styles of theatre, such as improvisational techniques that give the audience opportunities to complete open-ended scenarios, might be particularly appropriate considering the community participation emphasis of the event.

4. Photography exhibits

Encourage participating groups to display photos, old and new, of favorite landmarks and other locations of significance. Images of existing and desired future settings can be taken from newspapers, magazines, drawings, and existing unpublished photographs, then woven into collage-like displays. If the festival takes place indoors, slide shows also may be prepared.

5. Land-use mapping exercise

- a. Set up groups of 4–6 participants, with one baseline map per group.
- b. Orient them to the map. (One technique: choose a landmark that everyone knows and ask participants to find it on the map).
- c. Have them agree on a system for categorizing different ways in which land is used. For each land-use function, choose a color to represent that function on the map (for instance, residential areas in yellow, recreational areas in green).
- d. Have the groups color in as much of their maps as possible.



- e. Compare the land-use mapping decisions made by each group to other available data on land-use (“official” aerial photographs, historical maps, etc.).
- f. Facilitate discussion about the community, including consideration of the community’s assets and deficits, and patterns of change.

6. Display plans for new facilities

County, regional, and municipal planning officials and business representatives can use the event as an opportunity to inform the public about future developments. Encourage the displaying of sketches and models to illustrate plans for new facilities.

7. Traditional games (for display and play)

Encourage active older adult volunteers to bring in traditional games (the games they played when they were young). If appropriate, have materials on hand so that children and youth can build their own games.

8. Community study

Encourage community agency representatives and citizen groups to display charts, tables, and summary lists derived from their community investigation activities. This is a good opportunity to share research results and the outcomes of community action campaigns.



9. Other

- *Videotape documentaries* about local conditions
- Presentations of *song*, *poetry*, and *dance* to highlight local hopes and concerns
- *Debates* on issues for which there are opposing viewpoints
- Student-conducted *oral history interviews* with older adult volunteers or oral history reports
- *Community forum* discussions about problems such as vandalism, drug use, and safety concerns

POST-EVENT ORGANIZING

The Futures Festival provides residents with a preliminary civic engagement experience. However, it does not need to be a one-shot deal—several key follow-up actions can be taken to capitalize on the momentum gained at the event and during the months leading up to it.

Write a post-event press release to highlight community concerns. For example, at the event, residents might have expressed misgivings for the first time about certain local development plans. This media coverage can convey the human interest angle that is a vital yet often ignored part of bricks-and-mortar (physical environment) development. At the same time, public officials get the chance to learn more about residents' hopes and concerns.

If there is interest in establishing the Futures Festival as an annual event, a good time to solicit agreements and commitments is during the weeks following the event, when people are more aware of the fun, exciting, and educational outcomes associated with the event than of the work that went into planning it.

Also, with new relationships forged between school administrators and older adult organization

representatives during the festival preparations, these groups are likely to be more receptive to other proposals for intergenerational program activity. One model that in effect extends the community participation focus of the Futures Festival is "Neighborhoods-2000," a six-month, school-based curriculum in which older adult volunteers visit a school on a weekly basis to engage schoolchildren in a series of communication, community exploration, and community service activities (Kaplan, 1994).

EVALUATION

For each Futures Festival event, ask one or two members of the event coordination team to circulate and conduct brief interviews with participants before they leave. The interview is simple, asking one basic question: "What did you learn from your experiences today?" If necessary, prompt respondents to describe what they learned about the community, what they learned about the needs and concerns of local residents, and how they feel about their role in the community as a result of this new knowledge.

Keep a record of each Futures Festival event. Note the date, collaborating agencies, number of participants, number and nature of exhibits and activities offered, and the ideas expressed for community development and change during the course of the festival. (See Appendix D.)

REFERENCES

- Kaplan, M. (1994). *Side-by-Side: Exploring your neighborhood through intergenerational activities*. San Francisco: MIG Communications.

APPENDIX A: CALL FOR PRESENTATIONS FORM (TEMPLATE)

(Name of Area) FUTURES FESTIVAL–(date of event)

Call for Presentations about Community Possibilities

Your group is invited to display an exhibit or conduct a presentation at the “Futures Festival” event, which will take place on (date) at the (place). This special event, sponsored by (sponsor name), aims to bring together children and adults, and all generations in between, from (name of area) to discuss local development concerns and possibilities.

We welcome all exhibitions that generate dialogue and new ideas for the future of (name of area). Here are some ideas:

- visual exhibits (drawings, banners, photographs, maps, models, collages, and murals)
- performances (poetry recitals, stories, songs, raps, and skits/dramatizations that highlight residents’ ideas for community improvement)
- films or videotapes that provide information and stimulate critical thinking about community planning issues
- organized discussion groups focused on specific issues, areas, or improvement ideas

Please contact (name of contact person) to reserve space at the (place) Futures Festival or to discuss your presentation ideas. Either (name) or (name), who are working on this project, will be available to work with your group’s members in developing displays or presentations before this event.

We hope you choose to take advantage of the (name of area) Futures Festival as a tool to promote civic awareness and concern among your members. Also, because we will be inviting elected representatives and others who currently are working on plans for (name of area), this will be a good chance for your group to participate effectively in the community planning process.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE OF EVENT PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

**Contact: P. R. King
798-6671**

Request for Coverage

EVENT: Mount Vernon "Dreams for the Future" Festival

DATE: August 12, 1989

TIME: 11:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.

PLACE: Hartley Park Playground Area

The "Dreams for the Future" Festival, sponsored by the Mount Vernon Youth Bureau, will be a daylong look at the year 2000 in Westchester's southernmost city. The event is designed to give people who live and work in Mount Vernon a chance to share their thoughts and concerns about the city's future.

All community groups and organizations have been invited to develop displays, presentations, and workshops that will help to promote civic awareness and communication about life in Mount Vernon.

A ceremonial tree planting will commemorate the festival. Also planned is an intergenerational bocce tournament, a puppet show about recycling, and a children's workshop. Highlighting the day will be a performance by the Mount Vernon High School Black Unity Gospel Choir. A group of Mount Vernon teens also has organized a set of performances. The Mount Vernon Department of Planning and Community Development will display sketches of several new buildings and other projects now under way.

Everyone who cares about Mount Vernon is invited to participate!

Background: The festival is being held as part of the Mount Vernon-2000 project, in which local senior citizen volunteers join elementary school students in exploring local planning issues. For the second consecutive year, the project will operate out of the Washington School beginning in the fall.

APPENDIX C: EXAMPLE OF AN INTERGENERATIONAL VISIONING PROCESS IN ACTION

The Place

Kaneohe, on the Windward side of the Hawaiian island of Oahu.

The Dialogue

The children asked: Do you think skateboarding is something you might like to do? Senior adults responded: No. Children: What would it take to get you to support a skateboard park-type facility in Kaneohe because you know we really need one of these?

This led to a lengthy discussion about what a park would look like if it was designed for people of all ages.

The Outcome

A group of Kaneohe children and older adults built a model of the Kaneohe All Ages Park and presented it to the community board and the Parks Department as their statement about the kind of park they would like to see built in Kaneohe. In addition to facilities for skateboarding, the park includes shuffle board and gateball courts, picnic areas, a garden, and a braille trail.

The Point

It's important to have intergenerational discourse at the beginning of the community planning process.



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agricultural and extension education**

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