

National Civic League Community Services

Proven Solutions for Today's Community Challenges

The Community Services Program is dedicated to helping communities and the organizations build collaborative, inclusive, and participatory solutions to the most pressing challenges they face. We use a range of proven approaches to help communities and their diverse stakeholders build new partnerships and strengthen local capacity to create positive, enduring change.

Community Services Can Specifically Help Your Community or Organization to...

- Address the most complex issues in a positive and constructive manner
- Prepare for public meetings on the toughest of issues to ensure quality engagement with a focus on problem solving
- Build a shared vision and strategic plan to become the community they want to be
- Incorporate the structures and practices necessary for moving plans to action and achieving desired results
- Assess and use that information to produce positive change
- Build capacity and teamwork as a part the process of addressing pressing issues (learning by doing)
- Overcome turf battles to build likely and unlikely partnerships and alliances to create meaningful community impacts
- Awaken the human potential within the community and help build a mindset that any community issue can be addressed when addressed properly

How We Do It

Community Services of the National Civic League helps communities achieve its desired outcomes through its effective approaches in facilitation, process design, training, technical assistance and research. Deeply engrained within any of our approaches is our positive attitude and genuine belief in the infinite potential of community members (residents, staff and volunteers in grassroots organizations, local governments, state and federal agencies, education institutions and other service organizations). Our staff combines a unique skill set of technical knowledge on policy development, social issues

and human dynamics with the process expertise necessary to bring together and work with diverse stakeholders to address community challenges. The Community Services portfolio includes work with:

Trainings, Workshops, and Presentations

Community Services offers hands-on, skill-based trainings and workshops in all process aspects of community collaboration, consensus building, and problem solving. Our training programs are tailored to meet the specific needs of our clients and range from half and one-day trainings to week long workshops. Our staff is also available to give keynotes, presentations, and public speeches on civic issues of local and national interest. Popular topics include:

- How to Engage the Community
- Visioning and Strategic Planning
- Community Outreach
- Assessing and Strengthening Our Civic Infrastructure
- Performance Measurement
- Designing Public Forums
- Fiscal Sustainability
- Facilitation

Visioning and Strategic Planning

The Community Services staff has pioneered community-wide and organizational strategic planning processes across the United States. Our extensive experience in visioning and strategic planning work emphasizes a “full spectrum” approach, starting with engaging and convening diverse stakeholders through the final stages of implementing and assessing concrete action plans. (To order NCL’s Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Handbook call (303) 571-4343 or visit our website at www.ncl.org)

Community Engagement Processes

Whether the issue is new development, addressing the fiscal crisis, or facing a turf war, effective and constructive community involvement processes are critical to the overall health of a community. Our staff helps communities and its key entities take the anxiety out of addressing tough issues through our assistance in designing community engagement processes, meeting facilitation, providing capacity building and skills training with citizens, staff, and other stakeholders.

Civic Index Assessment

The *Civic Index* is a tool designed by the National Civic League to help communities assess and enhance their civic infrastructure – those relationships, capacities, and networks that communities utilize to effectively solve problems. Through the Civic Index process, Community Services facilitators convene diverse groups of citizens to dialogue on community issues, identify strengths and weaknesses, and develop action plans to reach desired goals. (To order the *Civic Index* call (303) 571-4343 or visit our website at www.ncl.org).

Public Forums on Pressing Issues

From the local to the federal level, complex public issues are now routinely addressed by convening diverse stakeholders to collaboratively assess the problem develop strategies, policies, programs and initiatives. Community Services staff have a wide range of experience in designing these forums to be safe, interactive and productive. Through our design approaches (set up, questions, procedures), we effectively move participants from being merely problem identifiers to being problem solvers. We also help communities with the next steps of using that information as a tool for action and change.

Topics and Areas Addressed

NCL has helped institutions and communities address specific topics in an civically engaged approach that has produced many tangible results. These topics include but are not limited to the following:

- Community Sustainability
- Budget Challenges
- Service Priorities
- Race Relations
- Immigrant Integration
- Economic Development
- Redevelopment
- Education
- Health
- Recreation
- Downtown Revitalization
- Transportation
- Transit Oriented Development
- Environment
- Historic Preservation
- Leadership
- Partnership Building
- Volunteer Recruitment
- Neighborhoods
- City Council Relations
- Council/Staff Relations

Recent Work

Transit Oriented Development, City and County of Denver

The City and County of Denver is in the midst of planning for the expansion of its light rail service and asked the National Civic League for help in getting the community involved in the design of specific stops in two historically underserved neighborhoods in Denver. The residents rose to the occasion, participating at every planning meeting providing their input into the redevelopment planning that has now been included in the station/neighborhood plans. The process also had a secondary impact among city departments and organizations where communication in the planning process broke down the silos that had existed for so long (e.g., Economic Development, Planning and Housing Authority). These departments and organizations continue to meet to help further the collaboration among each other.

Sustainability Planning, City and County of Broomfield

The City and County of Broomfield wanted to update their Environmental Stewardship chapter of their 2005 Comprehensive Plan, a product of a process NCL facilitated. Convening a stakeholder committee of residents representing the wide-ranging perspectives of the issue, the initial challenge was the wide gap of understanding on the issue of sustainability. To bridge that gap, NCL partnered with the University of Colorado-Denver to help the committee build a shared understanding of the highly technical topic and how it played out in the Broomfield. Once a vision of sustainability was agreed on, the committee focused on “the how” by developing new policies and strategies in the areas of Economic Development, Transportation, Natural Resources and Community Education.

Fiscal Accountability and Community Engagement

In the fall of 2009, the National Civic League Board of Directors met in Denver, Colorado, one agenda topic focused on the pressing issues facing local governments today. One board member stated that the economic crisis was so severe that he predicted it would forever change how local government operated. It was a strong statement and the discussion that it sparked was rich and far reaching. Seeing how the one point initiated such a lengthy discussion among very smart and engaged people, NCL staff began to wonder what people on the front lines felt about the economic crisis and its impact on local government.

Staff identified a number of city and county managers from coast to coast, north and south, and in America’s heartland to interview about this topic. These managers were non-board members with NCL, but had been managers of past project sites or from communities of past All-America City Award® designees or finalists. These managers were all very experienced and well versed in the many factors and dynamics that helped and hindered their ability to manage towns, cities and counties.

Their insights and suggestions and how the issue relates to community engagement have sparked additional forums and articles. In addition, NCL has worked with municipalities on development of community processes to help them address the issue with residents in a productive manner.

Strategic Planning Examples

Gladstone, Missouri

Gladstone is a suburban community in the northland of the Kansas City metropolitan area. Like many communities after the 9/11 attacks, they suffered a significant decrease in sales tax, at one point dropping 13% in one quarter (and at that time it was 30% of their revenues). This revealed that the city government was very susceptible to economic downturns being so dependent on sales tax. A few years later city officials

convened Gladstone on the Move, a community-based strategic planning effort facilitated by the National Civic League.

During the assessment phase, residents who served as stakeholders in the project uncovered the economic vulnerability of the community. As a part of the plan, they developed diversification approaches for revenue in place to strengthen its financial infrastructure of the city and community.

One of the strategies recommended by the stakeholders was a property tax increase – there had never been an increase in Gladstone’s 54-year history and tax increases had been avoided at all costs – “political suicide” was what it had been called by staff and elected officials. However, the resident stakeholders knew change had to occur to strengthen the community and drove the property tax campaign themselves. With residents driving the initiative, it passed handily, the first property tax increase in Gladstone’s history.

The measure not only helped strengthen the city’s finances, it helped pay for a new community center and aquatic facilities (a collaborative effort with the North Kansas City School District. Ambulance service and infrastructure improvements were additional benefits that residents experienced.

The diversification strengthened the community’s economic health and has significantly helped Gladstone effectively deal with the latest economic recession that hit all communities at the end of this decade. The city has not had to lay people off, cut back on services nor stop any projects. With residents and the trust they share with city staff, they continue to be vigilant and move forward in creating the shared vision they created together.

Broomfield, Colorado

Broomfield, once a bedroom community, is located just north of Denver in the metropolitan region. After a series of annexations in the 1970’s, Broomfield eventually found itself in four different counties. This led to challenging logistical issues for the citizens, service providers and local government when attempting to build consensus, coordinate services and address community concerns. In addition, residents regularly left the city to neighboring communities to work, shop and play.

Citizens, with the participation of government officials, businesses, and community organizations, convened a grassroots visioning effort formally adopted by the City Council. The National Civic League was asked to assist the community in helping combine the many plans and ideas into an implementable strategic plan. A part of the plan addressed the need to develop “a sense of community” and urged the creation of the City and County of Broomfield as one of the important objectives. Doing so would be a daunting task. No City and County had been formed in Colorado since 1902 when the City and County of Denver was formed. Creating the City and County of Broomfield

would also require statewide approval of the voters. They chose to press forward. Shortly after the adoption of the vision, a strategic planning committee created a specific plan of action, including creating a city and county. The implementers, comprised of city staff, council, businesses and citizens, carefully followed the action plan designed by the strategic planning committee. On November 2, 1998, Colorado's voters by a resounding margin approved the formal creation of the City and County of Broomfield, the first change in the state map in 94 years.

Broomfield is no longer just a bedroom community, but a destination site for the Denver metropolitan region. They have recruited large corporations to make their headquarters home in the community, built a newest retail shopping mall, restaurants and event center in the region (attracting headline performers and events). Broomfield itself has become a community where residents sleep, work, shop and play.

Lee's Summit, Missouri

Over the last 16 years, this suburb of Kansas City has worked repeatedly with the National Civic League to involve large numbers of people in developing and implementing objectives for the community. These planning initiatives were a response to the challenges the city faced in the early 1990s, when rapid growth produced mistrust and factionalism and citizens routinely rejected ballot initiatives to finance local improvements. The initial community-based planning effort in 1993 produced 47 shared strategies, and the community was able to implement 40 of them within six years. Results included new growth ordinances, new police and fire stations, infrastructure improvements, and Legacy Park (a large complex of fields and facilities that is now the envy of the region). In 1998, the update resulted in new health facilities and programs, partnerships between schools and local government, a senior center, a new city hall, and a revitalized downtown. These outcomes have created a profound belief in civic participation – as illustrated by Lee's Summit being 30 for 30 at the polls over the past 16 years. Over 270 people made up the core group in the 2008 update community-based strategic planning effort.

Jay County, Indiana

The National Civic League just on the latest of its many Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Projects. Rural America faces a unique set of dynamics and challenges to those in suburban and urban settings. Jay County, a community of 10,000 residents in rural eastern Indiana, has demonstrated remarkable commitment and determination over the past six months in designing their future. "Planning in tough economic times is even more important because we must become more targeted and strategic than ever," says Doug Inman, Chair of 20/20 Vision and Director of the local community foundation. The plan, neatly interwoven through four different topic areas unique to rural conditions, will provide the county with a clear strategic direction for years to come.

Quotes

“(NCL’s approach) surprised us that by sharing power with residents, we actually gained so much credibility. As a result, we are able to get things done as a result of the participation, support and trust of the citizens. We used to spend our energy selling ideas and fighting it out only to get hammered in the end. Now we work together. It is still hard work, but we have proof in knowing the effort is worth it. Literally, we’re talking about a shift in our community and government culture.” *Curt Wenson, City Manager, Liberty, Missouri*

“The National Civic League led us in changing our community culture to one of active problem solving, creating solutions and striving for excellence. We are now a community that embraces change and we are far better for it.” *Karen Messerli, Mayor, City of Lee’s Summit, Missouri*

Who Do I Call?

Community Services staff are located in our national headquarters in Denver, Colorado. For more information, contact **Derek Okubo, Senior Vice President at (303) 571-4343 or dereko@ncl.org**

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