Community Improvement Program

Janet Ayres Weitz
What are the costs of the program?
This program is a service of the Indiana Cooperative Extension Service. Some costs may be incurred. For instance, if a mail-out survey is conducted, the community would be expected to pay the costs of postage.

What are the benefits of the program?
The Community Improvement Program can benefit your community by:

**Communication.** Participation in the program helps stimulate and strengthen communication among and between individuals, agencies, and organizations within a community. It challenges local government, private businesses and voluntary organizations to work together.

**Involvement.** The program involves all citizens and organizations who are interested in improving their community.

**Coordination.** The program offers a way to coordinate all ideas, interests, and resources of individuals and organizations.

**Action.** The program organizes for action.

**Leadership.** Citizens acquire leadership skills through program participation. They learn through publications and workshops how to be effective leaders, how to motivate volunteers, how to work together, how to set goals, and how to get things done. The interests of current community leaders are stimulated, and new leadership emerges.

**Community awareness.** Through a citizens' attitude survey, the community learns more about itself — things that the citizens would like to see changed. Citizens become more aware of the potential for their community.

**Pride.** People develop pride in their community because something is being done to make the community a better place in which to live. They are proud not only of the community's efforts but also of the fact that they had a part in it.

**Personal development.** The program develops people as well as communities. They learn about themselves, about leadership principles, to work with others, and about management skills. They achieve many personal rewards and benefits.

**Improved quality of life.** The most obvious benefits of such a program are the improved physical characteristics of the community, whether those improvements be a clean-up/fix-up campaign, better housing, improved medical care services, a new community center, or more recreational opportunities for the youth.

How do you get started?
If you're wondering whether or not to undertake a Community Improvement Program, first discuss the idea with other community leaders. Consider the potential as well as some possible drawbacks for such a program. Approach several community organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Lions Club, or town board, to see if they would endorse the program. If there seems to be considerable interest, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service office. The Extension agent will provide you with more information.

Janet Ayres Weitz, Community Development Specialist, Department of Agricultural Economics, 612 Krannert Building, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907, 317/494-4232.

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**THE INDIANA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM**

What is it?

What do you like about your community? What would you like to see changed? Probably you like several things about your community but, if you live in a typical community, you may feel several things could be improved.

How do you go about addressing community needs? How can you organize to do something about these needs? How can you help the town board, Chamber of Commerce and other organizations coordinate their efforts to better the community?

The Indiana Cooperative Extension Service Community Improvement Program helps the citizens of small Indiana towns answer these, and other, questions. The program helps citizens improve their community by identifying the community's needs, setting specific objectives, and developing a realistic plan to use community resources effectively. It is a voluntary, self-help effort to develop working relationships among community groups (i.e., government, business, religious, civic organizations, and others), and to mobilize community resources.

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The program deals with all aspects of the community — its physical, social, economical, and cultural development. This can include: downtown improvement and business development, economic development, housing, education, community facilities, public utilities, recreation and entertainment, health and safety, community planning and government, environmental issues, and human services.

What kind of community should initiate the program?

Before initiating a community improvement program, ask yourself these questions about your community:
1. Is there a sense of "community?"
2. Is there a feeling of "our community can be better?"
3. Are there responsible leaders in the community who would be willing to commit the time and energy necessary to spearhead a program?

If you can answer "yes" to these questions, then your community may be a likely candidate for this program.

What is the process?

There is no "right" way to develop a Community Improvement Program. Each community must develop a program that best suits its unique needs and is geared to fit its existing organizational structure. There is, however, a basic problem-solving approach which may provide general guidelines for your community. The program involves six basic steps:

1. Organize leadership
2. Analyze community needs
3. Formulate goals and analyze alternatives
4. Develop plans
5. Implement plans
6. Evaluate

Although this order is logical, each community must develop its own program in its own way.

What assistance does Extension provide?

Your local Extension agent and an area community development agent or Purdue University specialist will help you start a Community Improvement Program in your community. Upon your request, the following assistance is available:

Program overview — to introduce the program, advisors can meet informally with small groups or they can make a formal presentation to a larger group. A step-by-step handbook is available.

Getting organized — an educational training session helps you get ready for the Community Improvement Program. It includes descriptions of leadership identification methods and various organizational structures.

Conducting a community attitude survey — assistance in how to organize, design, distribute, collect, analyze, and use a survey. Analysis of the survey will be done at Purdue and a written report of the results will be presented to the community. Examples of surveys conducted, reports presented, and newspaper coverage of surveys in other communities are available.

Identifying resources — assistance will be provided to help you look for local, regional, state, and national resources.

Developing a plan of action — a training session will be held to help you go from identification of the problem to action. This involves setting goals and objectives, analyzing alternatives, and developing a plan.

Training leaders — a series of leadership training sessions can be developed specifically for your community. The focus would be to strengthen existing leadership and to develop new leadership. Decision-making processes, styles of leadership, and topics relevant to your community would be developed. Meeting times and length of sessions would fit the needs of the community.

Relevant materials — a number of publications are available upon request.