

# IMPACT

University of Idaho  
Extension

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## North Idaho Communities Create Vision for Their Future

### *The Situation*

Twenty six rural North Idaho communities engaged in the Northwest Area Foundation (NWAFF) Horizons program aimed at creating prosperous communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Throughout the program, the communities increased their knowledge and understanding of poverty and leadership as community issues. Horizons focused on community mobilization and momentum to engage many and build a sense of hope and movement. Horizons helped communities build on their assets, rather than focus on what was missing and to build from their own strengths and create a vision for their future.

### *Our Response*

Each Idaho Horizons community participated in a Visioning Program during September and October 2007. The Visioning Program consisted of a Vision Rally and a Vision Launch. The Vision Rally was led by David Beurle, of Innovative Leadership Australia. The Vision Launch was led by a team of coaches and/or key community steering committee members.

Visioning Programs were creatively designed and marketed by each community's Horizons Steering Committee. Themes included: Paddling with a Vision, Be the Vision, Roots to Riches, Pennies to Prosperity, Your Piece Matters, and Planting the Seeds of our Future. Local publicity efforts included direct mail, flyers, banners, personal invitations, letters sent home with school students, bookmarks, news media, newsletters, buttons, magnets, announcements in city water bills, and presentations

at local service organizations and elected officials meetings. Activities including luncheons with business and elected leadership, youth leadership meetings, surveys, and coloring contests/projects for younger community members. The Visioning Programs culminated in the 3 hour Vision Rally.

### *Program Outcomes*

#### **The Vision Rally:**

The Vision Rally provided a unique opportunity for residents in each community to come together and create a view of their community's future direction. This powerful process engaged a total of 4,751 people who attended one of the 14 different community sessions. In each community, at least 15% of the population provided input for the community vision. In 5 communities, 128 community members provided input during special luncheon or afternoon meetings. A total of 1,590 youth from 9 communities gave input at junior and senior high school assemblies and meetings with school leadership. Coloring contests and activities helped 743 children depict their vision. The 3 hour rallies were attended by 1,555 community residents.

Vision Rally Outcomes include:

- A community discussion about responsibility for their future and the importance of community context and culture.
- Specific discussion about each individual community and how to create a community where everyone has an opportunity to thrive.
- An assessment by community members of their community's strengths and weaknesses.

- A community vision statement was created, printed and distributed to all participants on the night of the rally. This vision statement integrated the new thinking and ideas that emerged during the rally.
- Identification of specific Action Areas to help turn the vision into a reality.

### **The Vision Launches:**

Within 2 weeks of the Vision Rallies, a total of 515 community members met for a 2-hour Vision Launch in each location. Attendees expressed interest in serving on Action Teams that would turn the vision into reality. Residents reviewed the community's vision statement and formed 3 to 7 Action Teams per community to help achieve this vision. Action Teams held individual team meetings, discussed the need for an inclusive team, identified others to invite to join their Action Team and reported back to the larger group at the end of the meeting.

### **The Action Teams:**

A total of 57 Action Teams were created to help communities turn their vision into a reality. Each team developed a work plan in January 2008 to help guide their work.

Common areas of interest that emerged were:

- *Economic development*
- *Entrepreneurship*
- *Community pride*
- *Communications/Relationships*
- *Leadership*
- *Youth & Education*

Each community received \$10,000 for capacity building. Funds were used for trainings, technical assistance, learning tours and program sustainability. Several regional trainings were offered in partnership with UI Extension including: non-profit development, strengthening communities through building social capital, grantwriting, community center development, entrepreneurship, E-commerce and leading community conversations. A Horizons Partnership Summit connected communities with relevant organizations, agencies and consultants. Each community was guided by a community coach or community builder who helped communities stay focused on the "big picture" and worked closely

with community steering committees and action team co-leaders.

The following are comments from Community Coaches about Horizons and the Action Teams:

*"It is rewarding to be at the Action Team meetings and observe new leaders applying what they learned in Study Circles and Leadership Plenty. It is exciting to watch the teams move forward and accomplish community projects with more of the community involved."*

*"I have been very gratified lately as I see more and more people realizing the benefits of the Horizons programs and their assistance to the communities here. They say they've been hearing the talk and going to the meetings for 25 years since the mill closed, and now they say that thanks to this program and its support and training, things are actually happening."*

### **Idaho Horizons Communities 2006/08:**

The fourteen Horizons clusters (comprised of 26 communities) are: *Bonnors Ferry, Silver Valley (Kellogg, Pinehurst, Smeltonville, Wardner), Coeur d'Alene Reservation (Desmet, Plummer, Tensed, Worley), UpRiver (Fernwood, Santa, Emida), St. Maries, Bovill, Troy, Kendrick/Juliaetta, Prairie (Cottonwood, Keuterville, Greencreek, Ferdinand), Kooskia, Stites, Grangeville, Riggins, and Cascade.*

Visit the University of Idaho Extension Horizons website: <http://extension.ag.uidaho.edu/horizons>.

### ***For More Information***

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