

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

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Prairie Communities Create Vision for Their Future

The Situation

Four Prairie communities (Cottonwood, Greencreek, Keuterville, Ferdinand) in north central Idaho engaged in the Northwest Area Foundation (NWA) 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. The Prairie was guided by the Nez Perce County Extension Educator who, in the role of community coach, helped the community stay focused on the “big picture” and worked closely with the program’s steering committee and action team co-leaders.

Our Response

The Prairie communities participated in a Visioning Program in 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 the community coach and the Prairie Horizons Steering Committee.

The Visioning Program was creatively designed and marketed by the steering committee around the theme

Planting the Seeds of our Future. Local publicity efforts included inserts in regional newspapers, flyers sent home with school students, banners posted at entrances to all four communities, hand-signed personal invitations, bookmarks, newspaper columns, and seed packets with informational stickers attached. The Visioning Program culminated in the three hour Vision Rally.



PLANTING THE SEEDS OF OUR FUTURE

Program Outcomes

The Vision Rally

The Vision Rally provided a unique opportunity for residents to come together and create a view of their community’s future direction. This powerful process engaged 231 people, representing 25% of the population providing input for the community vision.

Vision Rally Outcomes include:

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

Two weeks later 30 community members met for a 2-hour Vision Launch. Residents reviewed the community's vision statement and formed Action Teams with co-chairs to help achieve this vision. The major community issues identified include the need for youth activities and leadership skill development, jobs that will support returning youth and young families, assisted living and health care services for the elderly, intergenerational relationship building, and bringing the four communities together. The action teams developed are Welcome to the Prairie, Economic Development, Intergenerational Relationships, and Communication, Coordination & Celebration.

The Prairie Communities are proactive, cohesive, and collaborative communities which **nurture** our citizens and visitors alike. We have a deep commitment to family **values**. We develop leadership skills and abilities in our youth to enhance their future and **contribute** to our community.

The Prairie community provides a **unique** experience with our recreational **heritage** and cultural opportunities. Our Cottonwood Butte is a centerpiece to our **nature** based tourism. We have an entrepreneurial economy with a small town atmosphere where young people can find **success** and seniors can find **security** in retirement. We have built on our value-added agriculture and protected our farming **identity** while marketing in today's economy.

For More Information

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

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