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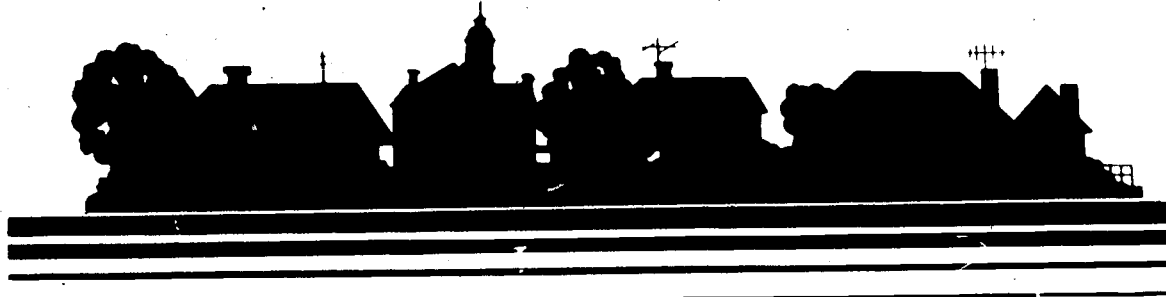
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ABSTRACT

Many communities have economic development efforts, which are generally undertaken in an attempt to create productive employment opportunities and to strengthen the local tax base. Unfortunately, the economic development efforts of many communities, especially rural communities, are not productive ones. Many rural development efforts fail because they are unrealistic. This publication provides some guidelines for evaluating community potential for different types of economic development, assuming that no formal economic development program is operative. Two forms are provided for gathering information. The first form, "Community Profile," elicits information on the following: location, population, climate, community facilities, education, medical, recreation facilities (public), communications, government, financial institutions, utilities and service, labor analysis, transportation, taxes (tax year 1981), available industrial properties, and major employers. The second form provides 36 questions to be used by individuals in rating their community. (AH)

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SMALL TOWN STRATEGY

Community Evaluation for Economic Development

Many communities have economic development efforts, which are generally undertaken in an attempt to create productive employment opportunities and to strengthen the local tax base.

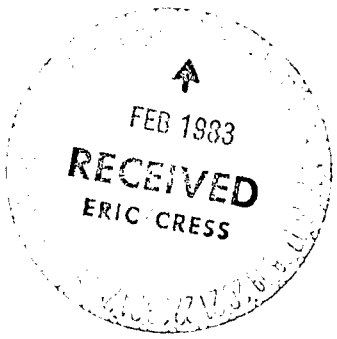
This publication provides some guidelines for evaluating your community's potential for different types of economic development. We assume in this publication that the community does not have a formal economic development program.

Unfortunately, the economic development efforts of many communities, especially rural communities, are not productive ones. There are several reasons for this. Many rural development efforts fail because they are unrealistic—because the town only wanted light, clean, industry but didn't have the labor, transportation, capital, or whatever else it would have taken for such an industry to be profitable in that location.

Rural areas have unique development problems: what works in urban areas will not necessarily work in rural areas. (Another publication in the

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A regional center for applied social science and community development cooperating with Land Grant Universities in Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming



Small Town Strategy series, entitled "Helping Small Towns Grow," may be helpful.) For economic development efforts to succeed there must be planned integration of the social, political, and economic environments of the community. For example, the chamber of commerce may be at odds with the city council. They may disagree about what should happen economically. Or, they may disagree over who should have the leadership role in economic development. Ironically, they may well agree that the problem is unemployment or insufficient tax revenues.

Another area where planned integration must occur is the programming of public and private expenditures for the common good. If, for example, a town has poor recreation facilities it could hardly expect to attract an industry with a large number of management employees, because they would expect that those sorts of amenities would be in place, available, and well maintained.

Another reason for failure of many rural economic development efforts is a common misunderstanding about economic development being solely a process of locating new manufacturing facilities. (For a basic discussion of industrial development theory, see Chapter 5, *Bringing In the Sheaves*, by John R. Fernstrom, Oregon State University Extension Service.) Economic development can also involve generating jobs and tax revenues in a number of areas such as tourism, agriculture, government services, retail trade, and service businesses.

One of the easiest ways to avoid these problems is to conduct an evaluation of your community's readiness to undertake economic development. Although such evaluations can be performed by local people, an outsider can be more objective and honest. They can leave after the evaluation is finished, but a local person will continue to live in the community. The outsider can make constructive comments about sensitive topics such as local politics or inept people in key positions. Also, the saying that "a prophet is without honor in his own country" is all too true. The same comments a local person might make will have much more acceptance if they are made by an outsider.

In this publication, we will look at evaluations performed for communities by outside resource people, how they might be done, and what kinds of things should be examined.

How do you get started? First, someone must request the evaluation. That could be a chamber of commerce, a city council, a county commissioner, or another elected official. It might be an active and concerned service club like the Rotary or the Lions, or it might be simply an interested individual. Next, of course, there must be someone to whom the request can be made. That could be a local Extension office, the faculty of a nearby university, a state economic development office, or a professional group of economic developers. In Colorado, for example, the Economic Developers Council (EDC), an organization of professional economic development practitioners, will perform such an evaluation at no charge for any community that requests it. In New Mexico, the Cooperative Extension Service will do the evaluation.

Usually, the evaluation is done by a team of three or four members, chosen on the basis of their own expertise and the appropriateness of that expertise to the task at hand. The evaluation process described here normally consists of the following stages:

1. Identification of need by local person or organization;
2. Contact with organization which will do evaluation, and selection of team leader;
3. Team leader recruits team members;
4. Team leader contacts host community and requests written information, sends questionnaire;
5. Questionnaire returned, off-site evaluation meeting for team to review written information. (Can be done by conference call.)
6. Team leader contacts host and makes logistical arrangements;
7. On-site evaluation, interviews, and tours;
8. Presentation of findings.

When the contact has been made between the community and the evaluator, any available printed information on the community should be

sent to the team leader in advance so the team can get a feel for the community and its assets and liabilities. This may be a formal economic development document or it may be simply a collection of data such as census figures, unemployment, retail sales, sales tax, school enrollment, building permits, and postal receipts. A community profile such as the format developed in New Mexico (see pp. 5-8 of this publication) is useful for such information. Another publication in the Small Town Strategy series, entitled "To Grow or Not to Grow: Questions about Economic Development," may also be helpful.

With this information in hand, the team leader can proceed to identify areas of concern. These areas of concern will help the team leader determine what to emphasize during a field visit; they may also help in the selection of various team members to participate in the on-site evaluation. For example, if lack of capital seems to be a deterrent to economic development, the leader might seek out a team member skilled in finance.

A simple questionnaire might also be useful (see "Rate Your Community," pp. 9-10 of this publication). By asking the host community to assume responsibility for getting a representative sample of local residents to fill out the questionnaire, the team obtains valuable information about how residents feel about their community, a wide range of residents are involved in the evaluation process, and the team knows that the community is serious about its request for an evaluation because it has followed through on a task. The evaluation team might ask the community members to pass out the questionnaire, then pick them up, tabulate the results, and send only the results to the evaluation team.

When the data for the community profile has been accumulated and the questionnaire results have been returned, the evaluation team should get together prior to the on-site visit to discuss what the numbers mean. At this meeting, team members should also decide on an appropriate role to assume during the evaluation. One possibility is to assume that the team is a company site-selection team, there to evaluate the town's potential for an industrial relocation, commer-

cial establishment, or other form of economic development.

When the off-site evaluation has been completed, the team leader should contact the host community and make arrangements for an on-site visit by the team. These arrangements should include individual appointments for the team members with key community leaders, as well as details about where to stay, where to eat, whether to drive or to fly, etc.

It is often helpful to have your host take the team on a guided tour to familiarize them with the town and its environs. It is essential, however, that the team members also tour the area on their own. The fresh perspective is what is needed, and the team may well identify problems which local people no longer see because of their familiarity with the area. Also, the host may not show the team the seamier side of town.

After team members have surveyed their particular areas of expertise, conducted their interviews, and been on a tour, the team should gather privately at a central point, such as their motel, to compare notes and prepare their presentation to community leaders. It may be that further checking will be required the next morning; in that case, the presentation can be delayed until lunch or supper. If the team feels it is finished, a breakfast presentation is often advantageous because it avoids schedule conflicts.

At the formal presentation, the team presents its findings to the community leaders in whatever form seems most appropriate. A format which has been successful in Colorado is as follows.

- A. Opening Remarks (Team Leader)
 1. Brief discussion of the economic development process
 2. Introduction of team members
 3. Outline roles of each member
- B. Specific Needs of the Community (Team Member 1)
 1. Unemployment data
 2. Negative trends (migration, employment, etc.)
 3. Dependence on a single industry
 4. Etc.

- C. Need of Industry (Team Member 2)
 1. Transportation
 2. Utilities
 3. Labor
 4. Land, sites, available buildings
 5. Etc.
- D. Specific Assets and Liabilities (Team Member 3)
- E. Specific Recommendations and Summary (Team Leader/Members)
- F. Questions and Answers

It is often useful for both the town and the team to record this meeting on tape. That provides a reference document without requesting that the team members—who might be volunteering their time—spend the time to write reports.

A community evaluation can be very useful for communities which are too small to have the resources for a full-time economic development program. It is also a rewarding experience for those who participate on the team, giving them a chance to practice their skills in a new setting.

Prepared by George H. Gault, development coordinator, Delta County, Colorado, and Robert O. Coppedge, professor and Extension economist, New Mexico State University. This publication is part of the Small Town Strategy series produced by the Western Rural Development Center. Other titles in the series include:

- Helping Small Towns Grow
- To Grow or Not to Grow: Questions about Economic Development
- Hiring a Consultant
- Identifying Problems and Establishing Objectives
- Basic Grantsmanship
- Marketing the Uniqueness of Small Towns
- Socioeconomic Indicators for Small Towns

Copies may be obtained from the Extension Service at cooperating universities or from the Western Rural Development Center, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon 97331. Two related series of WRDC publications might also be of interest: the Coping with Growth series and the Municipal Bonds series. Please write to WRDC for a complete list of available publications. WRDC programs are available equally to all people.



Community Profile

Compiled By: Date:

Location

Other Area Marketing Centers	Distance in Miles
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.....
.....
.....
Average Elevation.....

Population

	1981 (Est.)	1980 (Prov.)	1970	1960
County
City
Estimated Present Population (30 mi.)			

Climate

	Annual Average	Monthly Average
Temperature	.....	January
		July
Annual Mean Rainfall (inches)	.....
Annual Mean Snowfall (inches)	.....
Prevailing Winds	.....

Community Facilities

Churches (Number): Protestant

Catholic Jewish Other

Number Motels Total Rooms

Number Hotels Total Rooms

Number Shopping Centers

Banquet Facility (Seating Capacity)

Education

	No. of Schools	No. of Teachers	Grades	No. Enrolled
Kindergarten	.....	.....	.....	.....
Elementary	.....	.....	.....	.....
Jr. High	.....	.....	.....	.....
Mid High	.....	.....	.....	.....
High School	.....	.....	.....	.....
Pvt. & Parochial	.....	.....	.....	.....
Vo-Tech	.....	.....	.....	.....
College(s) (State or Private)	.....		
Libraries	Number	Total Volumes.....		

Medical

Hospitals: Number Beds

Clinics: Number Beds

Doctors Dentists

Recreation Facilities (Public)

Auto Race Track Skating Rink

Bowling Ball Field

Indoor Movie Swimming Pool

Outdoor Movie Tennis Court

YMCA Golf Course

YWCA Amateur Theatre

Number of Parks Local Other

Other Recreation Facilities (country club, auditorium, museums, etc.)

Transportation

Highways Serving Area
Distance Nearest Interstate Interchange to City Limits

Railroads:

Name
Piggyback Service
Frequency of Switching Service

Motor Freight Carriers:

Name Terminal Facilities (or miles to nearest)
.....
.....
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Air:

FAA Station or Tower
Nearest Airport
Runway Length Surface
Commercial Service

Bus Service:

Name
Intracity Service Yes No
Parcel Service

Taxes (Tax Year 1981)

Manufacturers Real Property:

Asses. Ratio Effective Rate: In City Out City
City
County
School
State
Other
Effective Rate \$1,000 Assessed Value:
Avg. Percent Increase Last 3 Years

Local Non-Property:

Type City County
Retail Sales (Yes) (Yes)

Sales Taxes:

Type	Rate	Type	Rate
Corporate Income		Retail Sales	
Intangibles		Indv. Income	
	\$1,000	Minimum Rate	
	\$100,000	Maximum Rate	
Gasoline			

Available Industrial Properties

Name	Size (acres)
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Major Employers

Name	Product or Service	Employees:		Year Established Here	Union
		Male	Female		
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For Additional Information, Contact:

Name

Organization

Address

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Phone

Notes:

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Rate Your Community

How do you rate the following aspects of your community?
Place a checkmark in the appropriate box.

Satis-
Good factory Poor No
Opinion

	Good	Satis- factory	Poor	No Opinion
1. General appearance of downtown				
2. Adequacy of shopper parking				
3. Availability of retail items				
a) clothing				
b) medicine				
c) hardware				
d) groceries				
e) lumber				
4. Availability of family restaurants				
5. Local retail prices compared to other communities in the area				
6. General attitude of retail clerks				
7. General attitude of local merchants toward				
a. encouraging farmers' trade				
b. advertising and sales information				
8. Availability of				
a. doctors				
b. dentists				
c. lawyers				
d. plumbers				
e. electricians				
f. builders				
g. mechanics				
9. Local organizations' efforts to better your community				
10. Availability of needed financial services				
11. Appearance of most homes in the community				
12. Condition of the streets				
13. Vacant lots in the community kept mowed and free of rubbish				
14. Adequacy of school facilities				
15. Local school curriculum				
16. Relationship between the community and the school staff				
17. Availability of suitable mobile home park				
18. Use of school facilities for community programs, recreation, meetings, etc.				
19. Recreational facilities and programs in the community for				
a. school-age children				
b. adults				

Good Satisfactory Poor No Opinion

20. Quality and quantity of camping and picnicking facilities				
21. Fairness of law enforcement officers				
22. Jail facilities				
23. Adequacy of fire protection				
a. in the community				
b. in the surrounding rural area				
24. Control of loose dogs				
25. Garbage collection system				
26. Hospital facilities				
27. Water supply				
28. Local library facilities				
29. Local job opportunities				
30. Programs for the elderly				
31. The friendliness of my neighbors				

Please answer the following questions.

Yes No Don't Know

32. Do you think there are enough suitable homes for sale in your community?			
33. Do you think there are enough suitable apartments or homes for rent in your community?			
34. Do you think there are enough suitable housing units for the elderly in your community?			
35. Do you think there are enough homes for low-income families in your community?			
36. Does your community have a comprehensive plan?			

What is your age? Under 19

 19-24

 25-34

 35-44

 45-64

 Over 65

What is your sex? Male

 Female

How long have you lived in the community?

Less than 1 year

1 - 5 years

6 - 10 years

11 - 20 years

21 or more years

What three projects do you think would be most beneficial to your community this year?

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. Information compiled from this survey will be used to determine priorities in your communities' economic development efforts.

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