Objectives

Participants will be able to
1. Identify the different types of communities in which they participate and for which they have responsibility;
2. Understand characteristics of effective communities;
3. Appreciate the importance of civic responsibility in a democracy;
4. Identify ways in which their leadership can address community issues.

Materials Needed

- Flipchart & markers
- Copies of “Leadership for Community Building” for each participant

Workshop Outline

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Note: Instructions to conduct this workshop are given in italics print. The “script” for a workshop facilitator is given in regular type.

Icebreaker – 15 Minutes – “What Spells Community?”

Before participants engage in this icebreaker, prepare enough “posters” for the group. Each poster will accommodate eight to nine participants. To prepare a poster, tape together four large sheets of flipchart paper with two sheets on top and two sheets on bottom. This should make a large square or rectangle. In the center of the paper, write the word “Community” vertically, then place the posters on a wall with enough space for participants to gather around them.

Break the group into smaller groups of eight or nine participants, and ask them to gather at one of the posters. Give each small group a number of different color markers. Ask participants to think of words that come to mind when they think of community and that use one of the letters in the word, “Community.” Ask each individual to contribute a word to the poster and how that word connects with community. The words can go to the right or left of the word “Community.” If they are confused, provide an example such as: “The letter ‘o’ in “Community” makes you think of a community being ‘open’ to newcomers, so you write ‘open,’ using the ‘o’ in the word ‘Community.’” Encourage participants to use each letter in the word. If time permits, encourage them to be creative and create even more words off of the newly added words.

Introduction – 5 Minutes

The word “community” is used frequently, often loosely, these days, and its meaning is fuzzy. When our grandparents talked about community, it probably referred to the geographic area where they lived and the kind of relationships they shared with neighbors. Those communities fulfilled social and functional needs for people. Today, we live in a much more mobile society, where we may live in one community, work in another, and shop or recreate in still another. What, then, is the meaning of community in today’s world?

In this session, we will explore the meaning of community and the different types of community, our civic responsibility in a democracy, and how leadership is fundamental to making a difference in our own lives and in society.

Activity – 15 Minutes – What Is Community?

Before participants arrive, post four flipchart sheets on easels or walls around the room. Space them apart so participants can move freely from one place to the next. Provide a number of markers at each flipchart station. Write at the top of the flipchart these four questions, one question per flipchart.

• What is community?
• What communities do you identify with?
• What are the characteristics that make it a community?
• What can leaders do to build community?

Ask participants to think about a time when they were active members of a community. You would like them to respond to the four questions that you have posted on flipchart paper around the room. Read the questions to them. When they are ready to respond, tell them to go to each of the flipchart places and write their responses. They can start with any of the questions. If they are not sure how to respond, it is okay to put a question mark. Ask them to respond to all four questions. When participants are finished, go to each flipchart place, and read their responses aloud. In order for everyone to see the responses, the group may need to gather around the flipchart. Ask for additional comments and discussion.
Topic Discussion – 25 Minutes

What Is Community?

Community is commonly defined as interactions among people for mutual support. We are part of many kinds of communities. One type of community is “Community of Place.” This is the more traditional view of community that refers to a neighborhood or town—a place where a person lives, works, goes to school, shops, worships, or recreates. Communities of place have a shared physical place and regular interaction among residents on matters concerning common interests. Many decades ago, when transportation was limited, people strongly identified with a single place because most of their activities were carried out in that place. Traditional communities provided social interaction for people and met their daily needs. Today, transportation and the Internet afford people the mobility to meet their needs in many different places.

The traditional community was homogeneous…experienced relatively little change from one decade to the next and resented the little that it did experience…demanded a high degree of conformity…[and] was often unwelcoming to strangers and all too ready to reduce its communication with the external world.”

– John Gardner (Shaffer, et al., 1993, p.7)

Ask participants whether or not they identify with a single community of place or with many different communities. Ask how they respond when people ask where they are from. Do they identify with a traditional community? Give a few minutes for responses and discussion.

Another type of community is the “Community of Interest.” Such communities are both formal and informal groups and organizations where people come together around a shared identity, common interests, and shared goals. These communities emphasize members’ needs for personal expression and growth, with the belief that what serves in the best interest of the community also serves in the best interest of the individuals. Both individuals’ and the group’s needs are met through a consciousness of their common purpose. Problem-solving and decision-making regarding community issues are intentional processes that are based on values of openness, honesty, and trust.

Refer back to the flipchart sheets, and ask the participants to identify some examples of communities of interest.

What Are the Characteristics That Make a Community?

Review the responses from the flipchart sheet and discuss.

“Community is a dynamic whole that emerges when a group of people participate in common practices; depend upon one another; make decisions together; identify themselves as part of something larger than the sum of their individual relationships; and commit themselves for the long term to their own, one another’s and the group’s well-being” (Shaffer et al., 1993, p. 10). Communities provide opportunities for people to interact with one another, to care about and take care of one another. People work together to reach common goals. This commitment and responsibility to one another to achieve important goals builds interdependency and sustains relationships. Research has shown that people’s lives are enriched as they strive to serve others and to reach goals that go beyond their own personal needs. As individuals shape the community through their involvement, so are individuals shaped by the community.
What Can Leaders Do to Build Community?

Review the responses from the flipchart and discuss.

Joseph Rost, a leadership scholar who wrote the book *Leadership in the Twenty-First Century*, defined leadership as “an influence relationship among leaders and followers (collaborators) who intend real changes and outcomes that reflect their shared purposes.” How does this definition relate to community? Allow a few minutes for responses and discussion.

Community provides the context in which leadership is often practiced. The geographic community is the broader environment within which our groups and organizations exist. Community also reflects our values and purposes of leadership. John Gardner, a scholar and practitioner of leadership, asserts that “skill in the building and rebuilding of community is not just another of the innumerable requirements of contemporary leadership. It is one of the highest and most essential skills a leader can command” (Gardner, 1990).

Joseph Rost goes a step further in suggesting that leaders and followers need to attend to more than their own mutually determined goals. They need to attend to the community’s goals and purposes, to the common good.

It takes leadership to build community. Gardner (1990) identifies eight elements of effective communities.

*Note to workshop facilitators: write the eight elements on a flipchart. If time permits, ask participants what each concept means.*

1. Wholeness incorporating diversity
2. A shared culture
3. Good internal communication
4. Caring, trust, and teamwork
5. Group maintenance and governance
6. Participation and shared leadership tasks
7. Development of young people or new members
8. Links with the outside world

Effective leaders realize that the dynamic influences of the broader environment mean that communities are constantly changing. Leaders also recognize that all forms of diversity (ideas, skills, knowledge, experiences, etc.) are needed in a community to address change in order to be flexible and resilient over time. Leaders bring people together, facilitate relationships between individuals and
organizations, open and sustain communication channels, and engage people in productive problem-solving and decision-making processes. This type of leadership requires well-honed skills in listening, enabling others, and working through disagreements when they arise.

Earlier, we established that we are part of many communities. We choose whether we actively engage with others to accomplish some meaningful common goal, or whether we remain on the sidelines. Research has shown that when people are strongly connected to others and have meaningful work to do, they are happier, and their life is more meaningful.

Ask participants if they agree with the last statement. Why or why not? Allow time for responses and discussion.

**Activity – Leadership for Community Building – 20 Minutes**

Distribute a copy of the “Leadership for Community Building” activity sheet to each participant. Read the four questions to the participants. Tell them to reflect on each of the questions and to write their responses in silence. When it appears that most people are finished, ask them to find a partner and share their responses.

After they have had time to share their responses with a partner, reconvene the group, and ask if anyone would like to share their thoughts.

**Reflection, & Application, & Summary – 10 Minutes**

Discuss the following questions as a total group:

- What did you learn about community as a result of this workshop?
- How can you use what you’ve learned to help any group, organization, or community you’re part of to be more of a “community”?
- How will you use what you’ve learned to take a greater role in your community and assume more civic responsibility?

A major objective for leadership development programs is that participants develop their abilities to be more effective leaders. Communities—whether defined geographically or by interests—are common settings in which leadership is exercised. This session was developed to help you think about what community means to you and how you can make a difference in your communities. A core attribute of being an effective leader is to know what you care about and how you can make a difference in achieving important goals that you share with others. We hope that this becomes a life-long endeavor.

**References**


Leadership for Community Building

Instructions: Reflect on the following questions, and write your responses in silence. When you are finished, share your responses with a partner.

Identify the communities of which you are a part, whether geographical communities or communities of interest.

What does it mean to be a member of a community? What are the responsibilities that come with being a member of a community?

What does it mean to be a citizen in a democracy? What are the responsibilities that come with being a citizen? Are these the same responsibilities that come with being a member of a community?

How can you use your leadership abilities to affect positive change in your communities, however you define them?
About Leadership in Action

Leadership in Action is a multi-state leadership development program for college-age students. It was funded in part by an USDA/CSREES HEP Challenge Grant, 2005-2009 to the University of Illinois, Purdue University, and the University of Wisconsin – Madison. Undergraduate students from those universities participated in a 21-month program during which the workshop modules were developed, used during the two cohort programs, reviewed, and revised.

We intend that students who have been trained in conducting effective workshops use these materials for leadership workshops with various student organizations. The materials can be used separately for individual workshop sessions, in any combination for a short-term program, or in their entirety for a long-term program.

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10/09