

Vision West:

Investing in Civic Infrastructure



Building on a Tradition of Partnership



WASHINGTON COUNTY
OREGON

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Executive Summary



Washington County forms the western portion of the Portland metropolitan area. Its developed regions are home to traditional suburban and new mixed-use neighborhoods, electronics leaders such as Intel, IBM and Tektronix, and Nike's World Headquarters. Outside the nationally acclaimed urban growth boundary, the county transitions to nurseries, wineries, farmland and miles of evergreen forest that blanket the eastern flank of the Coast Range Mountains.

Two decades of explosive population and employment growth have prompted various sectors of the community to focus much of their energy and resources on meeting physical infrastructure needs. New and expanded roads, bridges, schools, churches, high-tech manufacturing facilities, hospitals and other "brick-and-mortar" projects have helped define this increasingly urban community.

Acknowledging these changes, Washington County, a council-manager organization, recently revisited its strategic "County 2000" business plan. Initially developed in the mid-1980s, County 2000 has guided many of the organization's policy and financial decisions. Past updates were limited to the organization's mission-driven focus and conservative fiscal policies.

With the region's economy and population still growing faster than the national average in 2000, the Washington County Board of Commissioners asked that a different approach be taken in updating the County's strategic blueprint. Before considering how it should change as an organization, the Board reasoned that the County needed to better understand how its community had transformed.

Initial focus groups involving more than 100 leaders from all segments of the community resulted in two findings: 1) despite unparalleled economic growth, many basic needs in Washington County were not being met, and 2) the county lacked any real sense of community. The second point was underscored by a "we don't know one another" sentiment repeated throughout each of the focus group sessions. This lack of awareness or "community" immediately presented itself as an opportunity to build or improve the connections between organizations and individuals.

Out of these early focus groups grew the VisionWest project, a countywide effort that sought to identify, better understand and develop strategies around community issues, while also building the capacity for collaborative community action.

Community members representing business, non-profits, faith groups, public organizations and citizen advocate groups participated in the VisionWest issue development process. Beginning with more than 200 small group presentations that involved 1400 individuals ranging from corporate CEOs to newly arrived farm workers, the identification phase highlighted eight issues of broad community concern (basic needs, environment, housing, children and families, education, aging and disabilities, behavioral health care and primary health care). Next, an additional 400 volunteers stepped forward and formed Issue Teams that completed four months of rigorous analysis and strategy development. Their recommendations all included strategies that call for greater collaboration among the community's many well-developed sectors. The Issue Teams asserted that the capacity of these "silos of excellence" could be enhanced dramatically through greater partnership, not just within sectors, but across them as well.



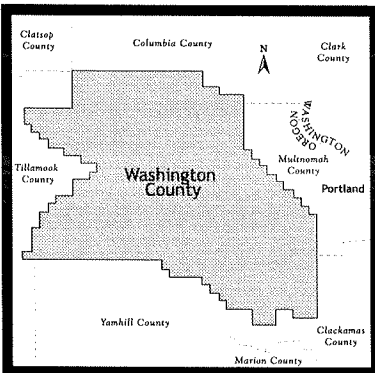
Encouraging and sustaining a heightened sense of community and the desire for tangible collaborative action was a fundamental VisionWest objective. As noted in the Issue Teams' reports, fundamental social concerns such as high school dropout rates and the lack of affordable housing defy solutions from a single institution. However, the demands felt by Washington County's many mission-driven organizations, as well as the realities of existing relationships and political dynamics, made it impractical for any one of them to assume the leadership role in the push for more productive partnerships. Enhanced collaboration was critical to Washington County's future, but it lacked a champion.

Today, the newly established Vision Action Network (VAN) fills that role. A non-profit organization initiated by Washington County, the VAN's purpose is to establish a permanent forum that involves leadership from all sectors in developing, prioritizing and implementing a true community agenda. The VAN's fifteen-member board includes representatives from business, education, non-profits, public agencies, health care and the faith community. Though less than a year old, the VAN already has a key early success under its belt: the establishment of the Inter-Religious Action Network.

This group is made up of faith leaders dedicated to working with one another and within the VAN structure to resolve quality-of-life issues for county residents.

The VisionWest project has been distinguished by three attributes. First, the breadth and depth of community involvement has provided a source of critical community insight that can help guide the strategic actions of Washington County and its many institutional partners for years to come. Second, the County's willingness to evolve from leader to facilitator to participant lent immense credibility to VisionWest as a true "community-based" endeavor. It also cemented the County's reputation as a progressive team player. Finally, through the creation of the Vision Action Network and the Inter-Religious Action Network, forums have been established that will attend to the health and productivity of Washington County's "civic infrastructure" with the same care and attention that is paid to its roads, bridges, hospitals, churches and schools.

Chapter One **Meet Washington County!**



Washington County and metropolitan Portland are nationally recognized as some of the most livable areas in the country. Located on the western edge of the city of Portland, Washington County is the second largest county in Oregon and is the fastest growing urban county in the state, with approximately 450,000 citizens.

Roughly 727 square miles in size, Washington County contains 13 cities, including a portion of the City of Portland as well as Hillsboro, Beaverton, Tigard and Tualatin. Focused residential and industrial growth has made it possible for the county to preserve more than 75% of its agricultural and forest lands. Only an hour's drive from the beach and mountains and a half-hour to downtown Portland, Washington County reaps the benefits of both healthy urban and rural environments.

Washington County's residents are the youngest, most affluent and most educated in Oregon. They enjoy excellent schools and a uniquely diverse array of cultural and recreational activities. Citizens live in areas ranging from established neighborhoods close to the center of Portland to traditional subdivisions to mixed-use communities that are located along the light rail system, which travels 18 miles from downtown Portland to the center of Hillsboro, the County seat. The region's rising housing costs have also prompted an upsurge in the construction of multifamily developments.

Often referred to as the "Silicon Forest," Washington County is home to technology leaders such as Intel, Tektronix and IBM and is world headquarters for Nike, Inc. The development of these industry leaders has seen the county transition from a largely agricultural community to a fully developed region within a fifty-year time-frame.

Growth has made Washington County the most diverse county in the state. While the overall population grew by 43% during the last census period, the Latino community skyrocketed by 245%. The Asian population has expanded to include people from throughout southeast Asia, extending beyond the large Vietnamese, Cambodian and Korean groups that already made Washington County home. The draw of technology jobs has attracted new immigrants from literally across the globe.

This varied population enriches the county with its wide range of customs and cultures, yet the overall rate of population growth has confronted government, agencies and the general public with an array of challenges. Institutions must face issues such as inadequate affordable housing and primary medical care, school funding deficits, a shortage of basic services and the preservation of community involvement in civic life.

While there has been a remarkable amount of investment in the county, especially by high-tech corporations and individuals associated with them, there has also been increased stratification. Significant growth in wealth in Washington County has been accompanied by an increase in its overall poverty rate, reflecting the national trend of a growing gap between those with financial resources and those without.

The quality of life in Washington County has attracted large numbers of talented people. But growth has come so quickly that the area's young institutions have had to devote the bulk of their energies to internal dealings just to try to keep pace. This has often led to a myopic focus on meeting needs as defined by each organization's mission. This mission-driven mentality has made it difficult for leaders to look outward into the greater community, leading to immature networks connecting Washington County's institutions.

With such a young area, of course, the question isn't whether systems and institutions will mature, it's how they will mature. Will Washington County's various social services agencies and organizations grow up individually or collectively? Will residents and leaders join forces to do what they can to sustain the region's quality of life? Will civic involvement take root, or will needs continue to go unmet?

Chapter Two Evolution

“In recent years social scientists have framed concerns about the changing character of American society in terms of the concept of ‘social capital.’ By analogy with notions of physical capital and human capital - tools and training that enhance individual productivity - the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value.”

—Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse And Revival Of American Community*

To fully appreciate the impact of Washington County’s civic infrastructure creation process, one must understand the way the County does business. In the mid-1980s, the County drafted its “County 2000” plan that transformed the organization’s largely scattered approach to service delivery into a much more tightly focused vision. County 2000 clearly defined the County’s financial and services strategies and changed the mindset of the organization. The plan called for the County to concentrate its primary efforts on providing only those services that fit within its distinct mission, rather than trying to be all things to all people. This changed the County from a reactive organization into a mission-driven organization.

“ We got good
at saying ‘No.’ ”

Walt Peck,
Washington County
Communications Officer

A mission-driven organization, as the County discovered, must clearly identify its focus and resist pressures to become involved in issues that do not fall under its umbrella. The change in attitude was positive, in that it allowed people and departments to stay focused on County goals within the context of a sustainable financial strategy. As a result of the County 2000 plan, Washington County has been recognized for its success in a variety of areas, including investments in its transportation infrastructure, a progressive criminal justice system for adults and youth and the overall stability of its financial management.

Yet the County’s inward attention also made it difficult to see or seize opportunities to work collaboratively. In fact, some issues not directly related to the County fell by the wayside or were never even heard. “We had blinders on that allowed us to concentrate on our particular objectives, and we achieved success in many areas because of our focus,” says Walt Peck, Washington County Communications Officer. “At the same time, we were less willing to engage with other organizations around their priorities if we didn’t share them. We got good at saying ‘No.’ ”

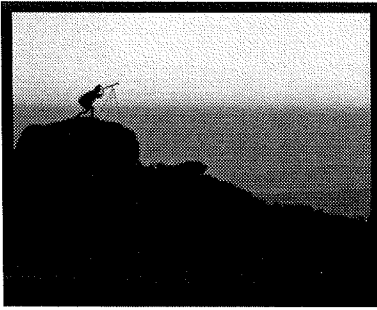
Interestingly, one of the many roles laid out for the County in 1986 by the County 2000 plan was that of “convener.” The idea was that the County could help deal with issues where it was not a direct service provider by bringing together the appropriate third-party groups. It was a logical role because implicit in the function of a county government is a countywide perspective. It was unrealistic to think that any other organization within Washington County could fill that position.

Washington County did not take on the convener role often, primarily because the focus was on its own priorities. The organization was moving so quickly to accomplish its own objectives that opportunities to serve as convener may have been overlooked, not consciously, but due to preoccupation with its own mission-driven efforts. People within the organization did not necessarily know who was involved with which issues outside the County and therefore missed opportunities to help with issue resolution. “We were absorbed with our own concerns, as were other key institutions in this fast-growing, increasingly diverse community,” remembers Peck.

Turning the Lens Around

In the Fall of 1999, the Washington County Board of Commissioners knew they had to address the task of updating the County 2000 plan. After all, it was nearly 2000 and they wanted a revised plan that looked further into the County’s future. At their annual retreat, Roy Rogers, one of five Washington County Commissioners (four of whom are part-time), relayed a relevant experience. He and many others in his accounting profession had recently held a meeting to redefine themselves, since both economic and technological changes were affecting the ways people dealt with their finances. The exercise forced him to look beyond the narrow scope of his field at what sorts of services others were providing, where there were overlaps and gaps and how he might fit into the greater picture. He suggested that a similar approach might benefit the County as it made decisions about its future direction.

Other commissioners supported the idea of taking an all-encompassing, honest look at community issues. In essence, their idea was to “turn the lens around.” Rather than looking at the County’s specific mission to see where it applied to the needs of the larger community, the Board suggested taking a broader view of all of the area’s current and anticipated issues and then evaluate the County’s position in relation to them.



“When the commissioners said, ‘Maybe we should look at the community as a whole,’ it blew the doors off the possibilities,” says Charlie Cameron, Washington County Administrator. “We weren’t prepared for that.” The idea of broadly expanding the planning process to include issues outside the County’s constrained focus fit in well with his and others’ growing interest in building social capital. “When the Board told us that our current approach was inadequate to the task, it really opened up new opportunities for us.”

These concepts were first taking shape at a time of economic prosperity for Washington County. As a result of the explosive growth in the technology sector, many other industries were enjoying the benefits of a burgeoning economy. In fact, the county’s population had the highest average income in the state.



Although business prosperity led to increased contributions to non-profit organizations and an overall excitement about the area’s future, many people were being left behind. There were a variety of unmet needs in the county - not just in terms of social equity, but also regarding other issues that affect the community broadly, such as teenage dropout rates, the provision of mental health services and the loss of open space. This was a time of both great potential and great need in Washington County. What could — or should — the community do differently? Don Bohn, Senior Deputy County Administrator for Washington County, explains, “When we took an inventory of the community’s assets, the resources necessary to fully meet its needs and the response to community issues at that time, we realized that Washington County had remarkable potential.”

Community Assets

Throughout Washington County, organizations already functioned quite well with each other within their separate realms. The county’s business community was already organized and supporting quality of life issues such as education and transportation. Washington County faith groups, although not formally organized, were reaching out to the community and trying to meet the needs of their congregations. The county’s educational institutions already enjoyed the coordinating benefits of the Northwest Regional Education Service District, and its non-profit organizations were renowned for their large numbers and the quality and diversity of their services. In addition, the various local government agencies within Washington County had earned a statewide reputation for working well together.

While each of these sectors represented a separate “silo” of excellence, few bridges of communication existed between them. Each silo limited its focus and, as in the case of the County, some had grown complacent about the amount of “good” that each group could accomplish. On an institutional level, too, the demands of these many mission-driven organizations resulted in insular operation. An organization might have known how it was relevant within its particular silo, but there was often little awareness of how it might relate to the other sectors in the county.

Washington County’s Board of Commissioners wanted to push the County organization beyond this comfort zone, broadening the number and type of groups with whom it was willing to engage, beyond the “usual suspects.” Getting beyond the pre-existing notion of the County’s role meant taking a more expansive view of the community’s needs and considering how government and others might respond to those needs.

“We faced quite a bit of skepticism about our motivations for doing this, both internally and externally, but as reflected in the Board’s directive, the needs of the community demanded something different.”

Charlie Cameron,
Washington County Administrator

Necessary Risks

However, undertaking a large-scale community involvement project posed considerable challenges. For one thing, opening up to this wider view made many in the County organization feel vulnerable. The natural anxiety about exposing themselves to criticism ran high, and some staff found the new demands that might be placed on them intimidating. “There was definitely a risk for our organization in taking this broader look,” admits Cameron. “We faced quite a bit of skepticism about our motivations for doing this, both internally and externally, but as reflected in the Board’s directive, the needs of the community demanded something different.”

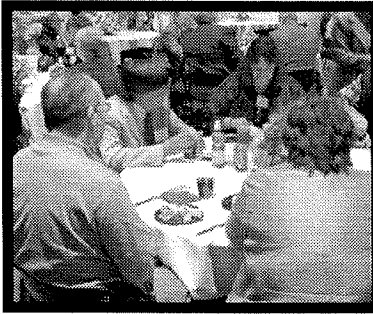
Many viewed this step as part of the maturation process for the County: it needed to open up in order to grow both as an institution and in terms of its place in the community. But the County had been so focused for so long that taking such a departure would be difficult...albeit necessary.

Making a Sea Change

County leaders decided to set aside reservations. As with other projects they had tackled in the past, they laid out an action plan focusing on bringing to the surface issues of concern to the community. They lined up consultant teams to provide analytical treatment of the information brought to light and to lead a countywide marketing and communications effort.

The big question was: Where to begin?

The first substantive task was to hear from community leaders. The County invited 110 key players — representing a more diverse group than any that the County had worked closely with in the past — to attend one of six “community visioning” meetings. County staff members were stunned to receive 100 positive RSVPs. The overwhelming response further supported the suspicion that there was a fundamental need to talk across sectors about issues of community concern.



The community leaders came to the table with strong feelings. At the meetings, their voices were united and clear on two points: 1) despite unparalleled economic growth in Washington County, basic needs were not being met, and 2) the county lacked any real sense of community.

In discussing the County’s proposed quest to identify countywide issues, the leaders shared several strong opinions:

“Consultants are nice, but top-level County leaders must be the ones committed to the process, invigorating it on a daily basis.”

Focus group participants

- “If the entire purpose of this visioning effort is solely to update the County’s strategic plan, we don’t receive much from our involvement and it isn’t worth our time.”
- “If you, the County, start thinking about this effort as one of encouraging broader collaboration, then we will enthusiastically participate.”
- “Consultants are nice, but top-level County leaders must be the ones committed to the process, invigorating it on a daily basis. The determination of County leaders, and no one else, can ensure the necessary follow-through because you know and care about this community.”
- “Mission-driven organizations will never provide the kind of over-arching leadership that our community requires. We need you to help us find ways to knit together our respective plans.”

One of the benefits of the meetings was that leaders from many of these institutions and organizations were given the opportunity to come together, often for the first time. The fact that they did not already know one another, despite holding key leadership positions throughout the county, is testament to the community’s silos of excellence.

The most significant outcome of the meetings was a consensus that key community needs were going unmet and that the sum of all of these organizations' mission-driven outputs lacked the promise of an effective response. What was needed, it was agreed, was the ability to take a look at the community from the 30,000-foot level, temporarily escaping each organization's day-to-day demands. As participants looked around the table, it was apparent that they shared a passion and concern for their community. This marked a turning point, as leaders recognized that collaboration represented the answer to true progress.

Folks run into each other in small towns. Leaders know one another and, in healthy communities, they naturally work together...In our large community, these relationships don't naturally occur.

Charlie Cameron,
Washington County Administrator

The Coffee Shop Model

While brainstorming about ways to bridge the gaps between individual "silos," the County considered the natural strengths of small towns. With a town's smaller scale, civic infrastructure can occur spontaneously, due to the sheer proximity of the leaders of disparate organizations. "Folks run into each other in small towns," says Cameron. "Leaders know one another and, in healthy communities, they naturally work together. It's sort of the 'coffee shop model,' where these people congregate and end up talking about community issues. Maybe there's a faith leader, a school superintendent and a City Councilor who each identify, prioritize and then come together to start working on a problem. In our large community, these relationships don't naturally occur. We had to find a way to encourage the growth of a civic infrastructure here."

The sheer numbers involved in anything in Washington County would make it difficult to be inclusive. Yet it was clear that Washington County was playing from a position of strength. The County hoped to parlay the community's health and wealth into significant progress. It was 1999, and County decision makers were taking advantage of a time of prosperity, having no idea that it was waning. The County seized the opportunity to build a model that was the right thing to do then; today, it is the essential thing to do.

Charting the Course

At each of the six meetings, lengthy discussions were held about the strengths of the community as well as its inadequacies. Leaders shared feelings about some alarming trends, such as the increase in poverty rates and number of high school dropouts. They also talked at length about how the community, with help from the County, could move forward more productively to address countywide issues.



This brainstorming subsequently took shape as values that would come to guide future community action. These values, listed below, were to become the cornerstone of the effort later known as VisionWest:

- ◊ Be *inclusive* - everyone benefits and brings value
- ◊ Make use of *coalitions* - they can accomplish more than individuals
- ◊ *Respect* multiple perspectives
- ◊ *Prevent* problems - prevention is cheaper than intervention
- ◊ Accept *accountability*
- ◊ Build on our *strengths*
- ◊ *Leverage* resources
- ◊ Remember that progress is *evolutionary* — not immediate
- ◊ Have *courage*
- ◊ Increase access to — and participate in — *opportunity*

The County emerged from these early community visioning sessions with two concrete understandings about the necessary work to be done:

- 1) Leadership in Washington County recognized the need to identify and address community issues. The County should not only follow up on the topics that emerged in the focus groups, but also proceed more broadly, identifying issues of concern throughout the community.
- 2) There was tremendous potential to be tapped by bridging the silos of excellence in Washington County. This potential would be critical to addressing issues of communitywide significance. Finding a way to tie together the good work of the many competent, well-developed institutions in Washington County must be made a priority.

“Mission driven organizations will never provide the kind of over-arching leadership that our community requires.”

Focus group participants

While it was clear that the County needed to expand its thinking and build bridges for collaboration, it had become equally clear that this effort could not be steered or controlled by the County. The endeavor needed to be a genuine grassroots movement made by the community. Washington County decision makers needed to strike the delicate balance on leadership that was both hands-on and hands-off and look to the community to further the effort.

But what effort, exactly, were they furthering? What were the most pressing concerns? What resources already existed that could help deal with important issues?

The County had to get its hands dirty, get into the community and find out.

Chapter Three **VisionWest: Imagine It, Shape It, Live It**

“I was gratified to be able to answer promptly, and I did. I said I didn’t know.”

—Mark Twain

“...we weren’t driving the bus and couldn’t specify where VisionWest was taking us.”

Charlie Cameron,
Washington County Administrator

With a mandate to “turn the lens around” from the Board of Commissioners and strong encouragement from community leaders to focus on collaborative action that produced tangible outcomes, Washington County staff laid the groundwork for a project that would come to be known as VisionWest. Preliminary process steps were identified, “but we were serious about this being a community planning process, which meant that we weren’t driving the bus and couldn’t specify where VisionWest was taking us,” recalls County Administrator Charlie Cameron. Instead, it was time to initiate a discussion in which the County’s primary job was to listen.

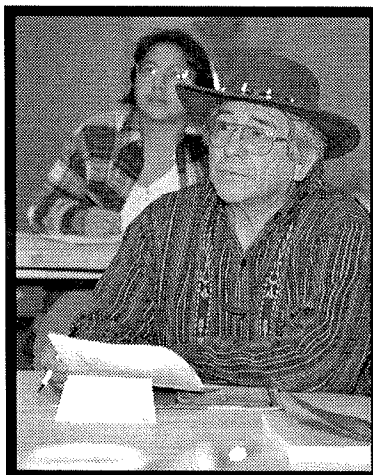
Imagine It

The previous focus group sessions with community leaders had highlighted a number of issues of concern, but there was a strong sense that these needed to be confirmed by the larger Washington County community.

Originally, the County considered launching a full-fledged public awareness and involvement campaign, complete with billboards, ads on buses and issue voting forms in every Starbucks. However, the feedback from community leaders during those initial visioning meetings indicated that a more direct approach was called for. Instead of a mass-media operation, it was decided that contacts needed to be personal and that the County should attach a human face to VisionWest and its search for issues of deep community concern.

Senior Deputy County Administrator Don Bohn was chosen to assume the project management role with a full-time commitment.

With Bohn taking the lead, the County went to unparalleled lengths to truly listen to the community, holding over 200 separate discussions over a four-month period. These meetings involved speaking with everyone from CEOs to groups of newly arrived migrant workers, from faith leaders to special interest groups. Some meetings included whole groups of people, while others were one-on-one conversations. Each began with the same basic set of questions: “What is it about Washington County that you value? What concerns do you have about your community today? In the future?”



“We walked through a lot of doors to find out what peoples’ concerns were and then we took the time to really talk about them,” describes Bohn. By spending hundreds of hours in discussion and talking to over 1400 county residents, the County was laying the foundation for the other VisionWest objective: a collaborative model for community problem-solving that could help address the issues that were being raised. (See Chapter 4.)

Finding people to talk to turned out to be fairly easy. County representatives started with groups that were familiar to them, since they were more readily approachable. Had staff members stopped there, they would have stuck with the formulaic public involvement process: talking with the folks you already know. Instead, at the end of every meeting, the representatives asked the crucial question: “Who else should we be talking to?” By diligently following up, always making arrangements to meet groups and individuals in their particular settings, the list of participants grew to a point where it was truly representative of the full diversity of the Washington County community.

As a result of these meetings, the value of the County’s stock in the community rose considerably. People began to gain a more complete understanding of the County and its responsibilities while the County, in turn, learned more about its community members and their greater concerns. “We became more relevant to each other,” states Bohn. “Each conversation produced a better understanding of how we fit into the larger community puzzle.”



“We became more relevant to each other. Each conversation produced a better understanding of how we fit into the larger community puzzle.”

Don Bohn,
Senior Deputy County
Administrator for
Washington County

An Inspiration: The Essential Health Clinic

During the early days of VisionWest, community members talked passionately about the need for greater collaboration in community problem-solving. Unknown to many, a tangible example of this concept was unfolding through the creation of the Essential Health Clinic, the first-ever free primary care facility for the county's uninsured working poor.

The Essential Health Clinic opened in October, 2001. It exists because a variety of non-profit, public, private and faith-based organizations attacked a critical health care problem by pooling their resources. Though it operates only on Thursday evenings, this free service sees more than 50 patients weekly with its staff of volunteer doctors, nurses and office assistants. Volunteers come from a wide variety of organizations, including Pacific University's Physician Assistants Training Program, area non-profits, local churches, area hospitals, the Washington County Department of Health and Human Services, a growing number of private health care professionals and many others. The clinic space, lab services and pharmaceuticals are all donated.

The clinic's main focus is to identify and treat medical problems such as asthma, respiratory infections, urinary tract infections and minor injuries before they become more serious ailments or chronic illnesses. Treating children is also a main priority.

“Many of the individuals we see would eventually end up in an emergency room with a much more serious and expensive problem,” says Roberta Hellman, a County health professional and one of the early founders of the Essential Health Clinic.

“By working together, we're able to make a difference in the health of Washington County residents.”

Throughout these four months of discussions, County representatives listened carefully and took meticulous notes, identifying commonalities among the issues people cared most about. From this information, County decision makers were able to group issues under eight headings that they thought reflected the chief concerns of the community at large.

These areas were:

- * Basic Needs
- * Children and Families
- * Environment
- * Education
- * Community Connections
- * Economy
- * Housing
- * Transportation

However, the County wanted to make sure that the community's voice had been heard correctly. "We had distilled ideas from 1400 very different people into eight main categories," recalls Walt Peck. "The only way to find out if we had done those folks and their ideas justice was to ask them." So every participant received an invitation to come review the County's analysis at a very special event.

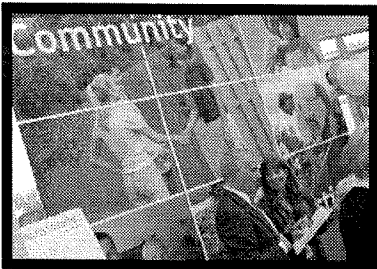
"An Evening of Celebration"

This was to be no ordinary government meeting. Because the VisionWest project was fundamentally about community — and because a lot of the community's positive aspects had been identified — organizers felt that it was important to make the meeting a celebration of community. It was also essential that participants understand how much the County valued their time and appreciated their efforts.

Until this point, it had been relatively easy for individuals to participate in VisionWest because the project had come to them. Now, with a critical need to assess the accuracy of what they had heard, County staff were aware that they had to create an event that would draw broad community participation.

"We had to ensure four things," remembers Peck. "A central and easily accessible location, great food, lively entertainment and, most importantly, a sense that by attending, folks would be furthering a project that could make a difference in their community."

When the crowd began arriving 45 minutes early at the high school that had been selected for the event, it became clear that these objectives had been met. Once inside the door, attendees were greeted by tables of delicious ethnic foods, huge banners portraying the eight issue areas, teams of people ready to listen to their views about the issues, door prizes and live music.



*I will never forget
that evening because
all of Washington County
showed up.*

Tom Brian, Chair
Washington County
Board of Commissioners and
VAN Board Member

Washington County Board of Commissioners Chair Tom Brian, one of the featured speakers at the celebration, was moved by the experience. “It’s easy to talk about diversity being one of the strengths of your community, but it’s another thing to experience it first-hand. I will never forget that evening because all of Washington County showed up. There was diversity of age, race, religion, gender, income, political views, and position in the community. The variety was testament to the strengths and challenges our community faces.”

Yet this was more than a party. As the evening progressed, many of the nearly 600 attendees worked their way through the eight issue stations where they engaged in thoughtful discussions and, if moved, cast one of their three “issue votes,” which were in the form of VisionWest stickers.

Refining the Issues

In the end, the Evening of Celebration helped to reshape the VisionWest issue list. For instance, there was a strong opinion that the significant and specialized needs of senior citizens and the disabled were being overlooked. In addition, the participants noted that the behavioral/mental health system in the county was in disrepair and that access to physical health care was a growing concern. As a result of these comments, Aging and Disabilities, Behavioral Health and Primary Health Care issue areas were added to the VisionWest list.

On the flip side, several issue areas were removed from the final list. Transportation and Economy had well-developed planning processes already underway in the community, and the decision was made to avoid duplication of effort. “There was a long-standing focus on these issues in Washington County and they had interested, savvy constituencies,” states Cameron. “Because many on our issue list suffered from a lack of attention, we decided it was best to let others handle the more established issues.” The Community Connections heading was also dropped from the final VisionWest list because of the realization that the concept of community-building had become an overriding theme of the whole effort and that it shouldn’t be restricted to a single issue area.

Because many on our issue list suffered from a lack of attention, we decided it was best to let others handle the more established issues.

Charlie Cameron,
Washington County Administrator

The final decision, based on community feedback and the awareness of other efforts, was to focus on the following eight issue areas:

Aging & Disabilities

Because of the special needs of these segments of the population, this issue area was established to look at such themes as long-term support, access to services and community awareness.

Basic Needs

There was a sense that a significant number of Washington County residents struggle to meet basic needs such as food and shelter.

Behavioral Health

Wellness of the community as a whole was an important theme in Washington County. The dearth of resources for individuals with mental illness and addictive behaviors was identified as a significant community concern.

Children & Families

People noted the importance of attending to the social, educational, health and recreational needs of children and families. This included quality and affordable day care, after-school programs, health care and other services that support positive growth and development.

Education

Members agreed that a good educational system is vital for preparing the future work force, parents and productive citizens. It also helps create equality among residents, while recognizing diverse educational needs and providing a range of extracurricular activities.

Environment

There was strong sentiment that Washington County's natural resources, in terms of aesthetic beauty, healthy living and recreational opportunities, are important to its residents. The value of natural areas and recreational resources is heightened as the county becomes increasingly urbanized. In addition, participants were concerned about ensuring clean air, water and physical environment.



Housing

Consistently raised as an important issue, housing was discussed in fairly broad terms. Concerns included maintaining housing options for those exceeding the median household income and providing safe, clean and affordable housing to those living below the median household income. Other factors included providing affordable housing close to employment and transportation centers and establishing an increased number of emergency shelters.

Primary Health Care

“Primary care” refers to preventative, routine and urgent outpatient care. Concerns included health insurance coverage, Oregon Health Plan access and community resources for providing health care to Washington County’s indigent population.

Up to this point, the discussion had been a mile wide and six inches deep.

Walt Peck,
Washington County
Communications Officer

Shape It

Washington County’s citizens had identified their issues of concern. They now had to determine how to handle them. The County decided to develop Issue Teams made up of concerned citizens and leading figures from business, government and the community to grapple with the individual issue areas. “We were aware that, up to this point, the discussion had been a mile wide and six inches deep,” explains Peck. “Now we had to dig deeper to get practical and unearth achievable strategies.”

The key was to get the right people to the table. Bringing together individuals with common concerns and different perspectives was critical and had great potential for success. Some participants were self-identified — they came forward on their own, saying that they cared and had organizational resources to contribute toward addressing particular issue areas. After taking a look at those already onboard, Washington County asked certain other strategic people to participate. Finally, the Issue Teams were encouraged to recruit additional members whom they felt would round out each group. The size of the Issue Teams ultimately varied from 15 to 60 members.

These individuals participated in six to ten Issue Team meetings that were held throughout the Fall of 2001. Their charge was to develop an in-depth survey of the outstanding challenges and most promising opportunities in that area.

Washington County acted as the facilitator for many of the groups, but they relied on consultants for help in cases where the County was too close to specific issues.

*We reminded people
that this process needed
to be evolutionary,
not revolutionary.*

Don Bohn,
Senior Deputy County
Administrator for
Washington County

In some areas, the County was viewed as a fairly impartial party that could evenhandedly facilitate discussion. In others, such as Housing and the Environment, it was decided that the discussions would be more productive if the County simply came to the table as one of many participants.

Because the County welcomed everyone who wanted to be involved, the Issue Teams represented a huge breadth of people and points of view. As a result, there was the potential for great divergence of views and ideas. While it was important to hear these ideas, it was more important that the discussions remain practical. “We reminded people that this process needed to be evolutionary, not revolutionary,” notes Bohn.

Balancing Act

Because the Issue Teams consisted of people with different ideas about solving many of the issues, there were times when things were contentious. Some of the team members had previously been on opposing sides. “We tried to say, ‘Let’s not talk about where we’ve been; let’s talk about where we’re going,’ ” says Cameron. “There are enough issues to go around for everyone, and plenty of them can enjoy the consensus approach. So let’s accomplish those first and check our divisive issues at the door.”

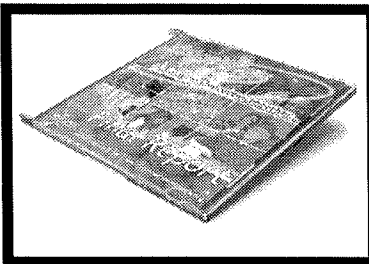
Some of the organizations involved in the Issue Teams were competing for the same resources, but facilitators emphasized the need to rise above competition and think beyond the views of an individual organization. Advocacy leanings within the Issue Teams were to be expected, but the groups were encouraged to assume that there would be no new capital to help solve the problems. Instead, the Issue Teams focused primarily on how to maximize existing resources, producing a greater understanding of participants’ varying viewpoints as to how those resources should be spent.

“It was crucial that we downplay any talk of significant additional funding for resolving any of these issues,” asserts Bohn. “We kept this strategy consistent throughout the VisionWest process. In hindsight, that was an especially important decision because Oregon’s extended economic downturn has resulted in funding reductions for many critical public services.”

To help define the teams, the County had to discuss what the Issue Teams were not. It was critical that members not view participation as a way to gain leverage with the County for additional services. “We are not the silver bullet,” says Peck.

In hindsight, that was an especially important decision because Oregon's extended economic downturn has resulted in funding reductions for many critical public services.

Don Bohn,
Senior Deputy County
Administrator for
Washington County



“People were told that they would be disappointed if they thought the point of VisionWest was to influence the County to step in and solve problems by itself. This process was about the county with a lowercase ‘c,’ not the County.”

Issue Papers

At the first meeting for each Issue Team, the group received a loose “table of contents” that would help focus discussion. The objective was to develop an Issue Paper, which included an overview of the trends and conditions pertaining to that issue, specific issues and strategies identified by each team and a short list of key recommendations that participants felt could be implemented in the following few years. These papers were to provide quality information and recommendations that any Washington County institution could refer to as it worked within a given issue area.

The County did not control or water down the content of the Issue Papers, nor did it edit them to suit any one organization. “We had to let things ride,” remembers Charlie Cameron. “We certainly have a large stake in the outcome of all this, but we needed to make sure participants understood that we had hands off.”

By the same token, the County wanted to make sure that VisionWest didn’t turn into a typical planning process. The Issue Papers were intended to inspire action, not sit on a shelf. “We weren’t interested in this work gathering dust,” says Bohn. We wanted to get at these issues with strategies that would make a difference soon in Washington County.” Issue Team members were asked to develop strategies that they themselves could embrace and work to support in the future. They were encouraged to keep their recommendations in mind as they prioritized initiatives, developed budgets and set strategic vision for their own organizations.

After four months of intensive effort, the combined Issue Team reports were released in CD format early in the Spring of 2002. Today, they are regularly used as part of agencies’ planning efforts and in grant applications; they have also stirred new strategic partnerships and provide targets to aim for in measuring the community’s progress. Equally important, the reports serve as a tremendous resource for groups working to understand global issues facing the county. And on a human level, they have solidified professional relationships between many people who previously knew little of one another.

We certainly have a large stake in the outcome of all this, but we needed to make sure participants understood that we had hands off.

Charlie Cameron,
Washington County Administrator

Common Themes

Despite the vast and varied territory covered by the eight Issue Papers, several themes or concerns emerged repeatedly from all eight Issue Teams.

Inclusiveness and diversity: All services and programs should be fully accessible to those of other cultures and those with limited English proficiency. Several Issue Teams emphasized the need to recognize diversity as an asset, not simply accommodate it as an obstacle or inconvenience. The different perspectives, abilities and experiences that neighbors bring to the community make Washington County a richer, more vibrant place to live.

Better access to information and services: Too often, it is difficult to find out how to get help with a problem. Several Issue Teams recommended a more coordinated and comprehensive system for information and referral; the national movement to establish a 211 phone number for social service resources was often mentioned as a model worth exploring.

Greater public awareness: Because the county is relatively affluent, there is a tendency to overlook some serious problems in its midst that will only become more challenging if left unattended. Washington County doesn't always associate itself with homelessness and hunger, mental illness and a lack of access to basic medical care, but as a rapidly urbanizing area, it must come to grips with its set of challenges. Even in the case of high-profile issues like affordable housing and the environment, more could be done to highlight the opportunities to make significant progress and to bring home the long-term costs of failing to respond effectively to the difficult challenges they pose.

Prevention, planning and early intervention: Several Issue Teams noted that strategies that prevent problems — whether they involve health care, the aging, the environment or at-risk kids — are not only more humane, but more cost-effective. In case after case, it was noted that getting to the root of problems is much less expensive and more sensible than trying to undo the damage of neglect later down the line.

Better coordination among providers: In several issue areas, participants noted that service providers themselves could be more helpful if they had a greater understanding of other programs, if resources and initiatives were better coordinated and if organizations thought critically about their core competencies and put cooperation ahead of turf wars.

We didn't want this to be the one shot that people had to make a difference. There needed to be a continuing effort by the community, for the community.

Walt Peck,
Washington County
Communications Officer

There is tremendous potential to improve service delivery by finding methods for sharing information and best practices, coordinating efforts where appropriate and engaging in strategic and frank discussions about the best ways to bring in more resources and make use of the ones already in existence.

Public, private and nonprofit partnerships: Every Issue Team cited the need for productive, cooperative relationships between government, non-profit agencies and the private sector. Assigning responsibility for solving problems to any one sector or organization is short-sighted, ineffective and ignores the tremendous opportunity to create a model for successful cross-sector collaboration.

Greater resources — stable and adequate funding: In several areas, notably housing, basic needs, primary health care and behavioral health, the community simply requires more resources to meet demands. Most Issue Teams highlighted the need for creative ways to bring more resources to bear on the challenges the county faces, as well as for a greater investment from both the public and private sectors in meeting some social needs that have not always been recognized as priorities.

Live It

With the VisionWest Issue Papers in place, the community — and the County — had a body of strategic knowledge from which to draw. Washington County could now return to its original task of updating its strategic business plan, overlaying the VisionWest strategies on the County's various missions. Although the County could take responsibility for some of the strategies outlined in the VisionWest process, it represented just one of the many players at work for the greater good of the community.

This is the point at which most strategic planning efforts cease. But for Washington County, it was only the beginning. "It came down to wanting to be genuine about asking people to invest in their community," says Walt Peck. "We didn't want this to be the one shot that people had to make a difference. There needed to be a continuing effort by the community, for the community."

Passing the Torch

The question: "How are we going to sustain this effort? Who is going to hold us all accountable, including Washington County's government?"

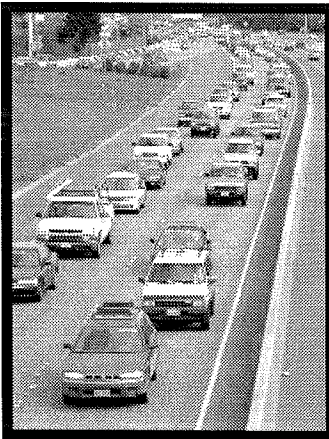
The answer: Establish an objective, credible party to make sure that collaborative efforts remain true to the community. This party should not be affiliated with County government, and it should represent a wide spectrum of views. It should stand above the fray, and its primary task should not include the provision of direct services but rather the encouragement and facilitation of collaboration.

Enter...the Vision Action Network.

Chapter Four **Vision Action Network: Creating a Lasting Legacy**

“Sometimes you can row on your own and have an impact, but other situations require everyone pulling in a common direction.”

—Steve Clark, VAN Board member and Community Newspapers President.



No single institution has the ability to take on tough issues like school drop-out rates or affordable housing.

Charlie Cameron,
Washington County Administrator

Two decades of explosive population and employment growth prompted the various sectors of Washington County to focus much of their energy and resources on physical infrastructure needs. New and expanded roads, bridges, schools, churches, high-tech manufacturing facilities, hospitals and other “brick-and-mortar” projects defined the 1980s and 1990s in this increasingly urban community. What was missing, according to the nearly 2,000 people who participated in the VisionWest project, were personal links between organizations and individuals in Washington County. Some call this “civic infrastructure,” others simply refer to it as “community.” VisionWest made it clear that, regardless of what it is called, Washington County was lacking.

Yet this kind of enhanced community capacity was viewed as essential to the success of many of the recommendations made by the VisionWest Issue Teams. “No single institution has the ability to take on tough issues like school drop-out rates or affordable housing,” says Charlie Cameron. “We need to work together, but we’ve not had a common table that we could gather around.”

This is why, as the Issue Teams worked away, the County took the early steps to create the Vision Action Network (VAN), a non-profit organization whose purpose is to establish a permanent forum that involves leadership from all sectors of Washington County in developing, prioritizing and implementing a true community agenda. The VAN serves as a catalyst for bringing people together, identifying challenges and promoting community action that delivers real benefits for people and institutions throughout the county.

A resonating theme from most of the VisionWest participants was that collaborative planning and mobilization should not be a one-time event. Instead, it should be part of a new, ongoing way of doing business in Washington County. The VAN serves as a direct response to this sentiment.

When a project reaches out to migrant workers with the same commitment that it expends on corporate boardrooms, I pay attention.

Jerralyn Ness
Community Action Organization
Executive Director and
VAN Board Member

Leadership is Key

As anyone who has ever established a non-profit organization knows, there are hundreds of details involved in getting started. “But that was the easy part,” admits Don Bohn. The real challenge lay in identifying and recruiting the VAN’s first Board of Directors. This group would play a crucial part in filling a void in community leadership that many VisionWest participants associated with the county.

It was time for the hundreds of hours of community outreach and relationship building by Bohn and other County officials to pay dividends.

“I was honored to be asked to join the Board,” says Mary Monnat, President of Tualatin Valley Centers, the largest mental health care provider in the county. “Being on the VAN Board is a great complement to the work I already do because it gives me a broader view of the community’s issues, whether or not they relate directly to mental health.”

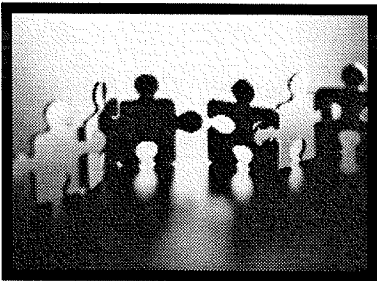
Board member Conrad Pearson, owner of Pearson Financial Group, recounts, “Over twenty years ago, my wife and I tried to help meet the needs of the greater Tigard [a city in Washington County] community by working with churches to provide services as a unit. There was plenty of initial interest, but it was hard to sustain the effort. The beauty of the VAN,” Pearson continues, “is that it gives an even more comprehensive platform where community members can rise to the occasion to help however, wherever, whenever they can within an overall plan.”

“When a project reaches out to migrant workers with the same commitment that it expends on corporate boardrooms, I pay attention,” says Jerralyn Ness, Community Action Organization Executive Director and VAN Board member. Ness, Pearson and Monnat were three of the original nine members recruited to the Board. Joining them were representatives from small and large businesses, K-12 and higher education, local governments, social services non-profit organizations, religious institutions and health care agencies.

Flexing Their Muscles

While County leadership actively participated in establishing the original VAN Board of Directors, they purposely selected a group of strong individuals with deep and varied ties to the community. “We wanted to take the idea of civic infrastructure to a new level and create an ongoing legacy here, but without it being a County-run effort,” explains Charlie Cameron.

One of the Board’s first significant actions was to recruit six additional members from the community. Any notion that the County might try to dominate this Board disappeared when it voted to recruit these additional members from outside of government. Rather than feeling threatened, Cameron viewed this action as a sign of progress: “Government is just one of many players in this community — we were already at the table, and others needed to be invited.” Cameron and Tom Brian, Chair of the Washington County Board of Commissioners, both serve on the VAN Board.



“We’re in a position to bring about change quickly because we can tap into the power of our colleagues.”

Conrad Pearson
Owner of Pearson Financial Group
and VAN Board Member

Vision Action Network Objectives

- *Provide a forum for ongoing relationship building, information sharing, community dialogue and problem solving.*
- *Serve as a clearinghouse for accurate and timely information.*
- *Establish linkages between individuals, organizations and sectors and provide information for planning and implementation efforts.*
- *Develop collaborative action plans that seek to coordinate efforts and mobilize action toward community-based strategies and interventions.*
- *Increase awareness of the Vision Action Network in order to accomplish its mission and goals.*

Keeping Connected

One of the Board’s most important functions is to legitimize the VAN organization and its initiatives. The Board’s current panel of 16 members represents diverse areas of the community. This means that members can bring their full cadre of experiences to the table, making connections within and between their individual networks to help address issues. Pearson asserts, “We’re in a position to bring about change quickly because we can tap into the power of our colleagues. This potent potential is one of our group’s keys to success.”

Many VAN Board members applaud Washington County for recognizing that it cannot be the answer to all of the area's problems. "They acknowledged that collaboration was necessary and went about finding the best way to solicit reliable cooperation," states Pearson. "I was surprised that this effort was coming out of government. Their openness about needing help was both honest and refreshing."

Adds Monnat, "What is so compelling about this effort is that there's been a recognition that any one of us alone can't solve these issues. We have to get together with a central map if we want to go anywhere. The work of the VisionWest Issue Teams is a great start on that map, and the VAN can be instrumental in pulling people together."

The Board sees its primary task as one of facilitation. "Most of the work we've done is involved with helping groups evolve to meet needs," says Cameron. "We are taking advantage of the roles that are already established, trying to expand them to fill some of the voids identified in the VisionWest process." Since the purpose of the VAN is to infuse a culture of collaboration in the community, the Board's job is to keep making connections between groups and to follow up with Issue Teams to make sure that recommendations are staying current with the ever-changing face of Washington County.

What is so compelling about this effort is that there's been a recognition that any one of us alone can't solve these issues.

Says Bill Christopher, Executive Dean of the Portland Community College Rock Creek Campus and VAN Board Chairman, "There are so many groups in the county with common interests, whose missions and visions are parallel to each other. But there just hadn't been an opportunity to come together around issues and leverage our resources. Our job as the Board is to facilitate exactly this."

Mary Monnat
President of Tualatin Valley Centers
and VAN Board Member

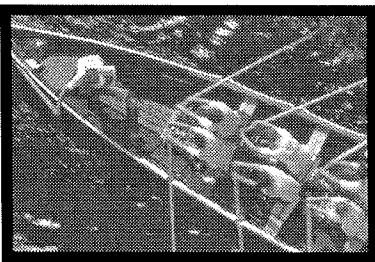
The VAN Executive Director

The VAN's first employee is Executive Director Craig MacColl, who came aboard at a formative time as Washington County was trying to revert to the position of participant, rather than that of leader. He reports to the Board, which identified several critical priorities for him, including:

- ✦ Reviewing the organizational development plan.
- ✦ Evaluating financial and operational needs.
- ✦ Developing and implementing a process to prioritize and move forward on select VisionWest strategies.

“We don’t want to discourage any group from addressing specific problems or needs, but we also don’t want to pretend that individual efforts are going to resolve fundamental community problems.”

Steve Clark
Community Newspapers President
and VAN Board Member



- ◊ Growing the Board through extension to other group representatives.
- ◊ Devising fundraising and marketing strategies for the organization, which will be implemented with direct assistance from the Board.

As Executive Director, MacColl serves as the chief spokesperson for the VAN, interacting with media, community, local and state government, faith leaders, business and non-profit leaders and other interested parties. The Executive Director also oversees the development of the annual resource and budget plans.

One of MacColl’s biggest jobs at this stage is recommending priority issues that are most appropriate for the Board to tackle — ones that require collaborative, full-scale VAN participation. Issue Teams can present issues to the Board to get feedback about possible resources they may have overlooked or ideas for resolution.

MacColl credits the County for setting up the VAN as a non-profit organization. “Their willingness to turn over responsibility and control is unprecedented in my experience,” comments MacColl. “They have stepped back and become part of a community of interests that is moving forward together.”

Degrees of Participation

With a formidable Board and Executive Director in place, the VAN turned its attention to furthering the recommendations developed by the VisionWest Issue Teams. As it had for other organizations involved in the process throughout the county, a fundamental question arose: What is our role?

The VAN developed based on a model for participation that respects the value and independence of Washington County’s many public, private and non-profit institutions, while also acknowledging the complexity of certain community issues. “We don’t want to discourage any group from addressing specific problems or needs, but we also don’t want to pretend that individual efforts are going to resolve fundamental community problems,” says Steve Clark, VAN Board member and Community Newspapers President. “Sometimes you can row on your own and have an impact, but other situations require everyone pulling in a common direction.”

The VAN identified three levels of participation for organizations to use to help take on community issues: 1) actions that could be taken by individual organizations, 2) actions through enhanced partnerships between specific organizations and 3) full community

Level 1

Individual organizations address issues that fall within their scope of mission and services. With Level 1 areas, organizations themselves recognize community needs and respond using appropriate resources without the assistance of other groups or agencies.

The role of the VAN in this area is to:

- Keep VisionWest issues and strategies in front of people/organizations.
- Provide information to stakeholders that will help with budget priorities and business plans.
- Track the issue areas and activities of the stakeholder organizations.
- Identify additional opportunities for collaboration/partnership.

The following are examples of Level 1 actions:

Disabled access to services

After receiving input from the VisionWest Aging & Disabilities Issue Team, Washington County pursued a merger between the County's Department of Aging and Veterans' Services and the State Office of Disabilities in order to improve access to services for the disabled population without regard to age.

Chaplains

After learning about a shortage of chaplains in the County justice system, local faith leaders stepped in to fill the void. Word was spread throughout Washington County's various faith communities by members of the Inter-Religious Action Network. (See Chapter 5.)

Clinic staffing

Washington County is associated with a number of low-cost or free health clinics, but there were problems finding enough doctors to staff them. After being alerted to this need by VAN member organizations, physicians began volunteering their time.

Strategic planning

Washington County is currently updating its strategic plan using input from the VisionWest Issue Papers.



Mental health management

In the past, the Oregon Health Plan's mental health contract for Washington County was handled by a private provider that added a profit margin to its fees. The County Department of Health and Human Services assumed responsibility for management, returning this margin to clients in the form of direct services, minus the mark-up. This has resulted in an estimated annual addition of \$500,000 to the program and is a direct result of input from the Behavioral Health Issue Team. The savings is particularly significant given recent major reductions in State-funded mental health services.

Level 2

An existing coalition of organizations assumes responsibility for developing action plans and implementation strategies.

The role of the VAN in this area is to:

- ◊ Facilitate, coordinate and/or otherwise participate in planning and implementation efforts, as appropriate.
- ◊ Track the issue areas and activities of the stakeholder organizations.
- ◊ Identify additional opportunities for collaboration/partnership.

Examples of Level 2 actions include:

Health forum

Primary Health Care leaders now meet to follow up on VisionWest recommendations. The VAN provides a forum for the established network of issue leaders to discuss strategies for protecting and expanding the health care safety-net system. Once again, Oregon's precarious economy has created significant new funding challenges for this group.

Volunteer recruitment

The Essential Health Clinic is Washington County's only free health clinic that provides direct medical services to the uninsured. Although the clinic grew out of collaboration between public, private, education, non-profit and faith partners, its creation predates the work of VisionWest. However, the faith community and others who were drawn to the ideal of VisionWest and the VAN are now donating their time to the operation of this all-volunteer effort.



Access to clinics

The Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Clinic (VGHC), a provider of primary health care for underinsured residents, wanted to relocate to be more accessible, but could not find a space it could afford in a location that would serve more people. Thanks to the relationships forged through the VisionWest/VAN process, the County offered assistance, since the clinic's move would also support some of the County's goals of providing better access to health care. Help took the form of successful lobbying for funds in Washington, D.C. and the lease of a surplus County facility (for a token amount) that VGHC was able to remodel as a clinic facility. This was all accomplished within a 90-day federal deadline.

Level 3

The VAN assumes a principal position in areas that require broad collaboration and where no other organization (or coalition of organizations) is positioned to lead, develop and execute an action plan.

The role of the VAN in this area is to:

- ◊ Provide leadership and coordination among a diverse group of stakeholders to plan and mobilize around an urgent community issue.
- ◊ Participate in and monitor implementation efforts.
- ◊ Identify additional opportunities for collaboration/partnership.

Below are some examples of Level 3 actions:

Inter-Religious Action Network

The creation of the Inter-Religious Action Network benefits the community by providing a forum where a wide range of faith leaders can bring issues to the table, as well as join forces with other groups for resolution of issues brought up by the VAN. (See Chapter 5.)

Affordable Housing Trust Fund

The VAN is working with other groups to create the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which will combine public and private resources to create a new source of capital to support the production of affordable housing. Those involved envision the Fund as providing development financing for the new construction and/or rehabilitation of rental and homeownership units targeted at those individuals not currently served by



The area of affordable housing is especially appropriate for VAN Board involvement because the lack of affordable housing affects many other issues across the county. No single group is positioned to take a comprehensive look at this issue and work for resolution. Many organizations are working to make affordable housing a reality, but not as a cohesive unit.

Long-term care support

The VAN is investigating a long-term care program to foster supportive relationships between volunteers of all faiths and community members who have long-term health needs. This is based on the model of collaboration set forth in the Faith in Action program, which is part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Tools for the Cooperative Spirit

Before the VAN's establishment, the county lacked a "community agenda." The VAN Board is now developing a workplan to increase public visibility of significant issues, making sure the community goals are clear and organizing a framework for achieving them. This is particularly useful to large organizations who want to help the community but have too many requests for resources to be able to answer them all. Now, Washington County's large companies can check with the VAN regarding issues of recognized priority. "This is the kind of community-based effort that we all need in order to understand how to make a difference," said former Intel Public Affairs Manager Mike Salsgiver.

The private sector won't be the only group taking advantage of the VAN's information. Bill Monahan, Manager of the City of Tigard, hopes to make use of the VAN's "clearinghouse" function to help screen the grant applications he receives from social services agencies. "The VAN looks at agencies' accountability and gives performance criteria, so I'll be able to make better decisions about which agencies are filling the most crucial needs. I'll also be able to see which groups are involved in efficient collaboration, making City resources go further."

Furthermore, the VAN lends credibility to its causes. For those who want to get involved with community improvement, there is now a clear, legitimized list of issues needing work. People have places toward which they can direct their resources, finding prescreened, VAN-researched groups and agencies working toward specific outcomes.

I'll also be able to see which groups are involved in efficient collaboration, making City resources go further.

Bill Monahan
Manager of the City of Tigard

It's amazing to me that people in our county could be in similar fields, working toward the same goals, and not know each other.

Mary Monnat
President of Tualatin Valley Centers
and VAN Board Member



Ultimately, the VAN brings people together. Charlie Cameron began working for Washington County in 1983, the same year that Mary Monnat became the leader of Tualatin Valley Centers. Underscoring the silo mentality that had developed in the county was the fact that the two had never met, even though their professional concerns for the county overlapped in many areas. Since the creation of the VAN, both Washington County and Tualatin Valley Centers have benefited from the new relationship forged by their leaders. “It’s amazing to me that people in our county could be in similar fields, working toward the same goals, and not know each other,” marvels Monnat.

Serving as Inspiration

There are also non-affiliated individuals who have been inspired to take action as a result of the VAN. Toni Lee Curry, a Washington County resident, was no stranger to community organizations, but she saw the VAN as a truly unique opportunity for involvement. “The power of people working together with common goals really struck me,” remarks Curry. “Here’s this group trying to get a handle on a big, wobbly concept, on what ‘community’ really means. I see this collaboration as so necessary — public and private agencies are putting aside their differences, realizing that it’s time to stop squabbling and work together.”

Curry found herself helping organize an inventory of faith-based services in conjunction with the Inter-Religious Action Network. “I want to help people avoid duplication of efforts and be able to join forces. So much of our society is based on staying on separate sides of our fences. We needed a down-to-earth, practical vehicle that provides a network of available resources.”

In fact, the establishment of the Inter-Religious Action Network represents one of the VAN’s most significant early successes.

Chapter Five

A Success Story: The Inter-Religious Action Network

“It has been a surprise that what has happened with the Inter-Religious Action Network is that it turned into more than just a service group, more than serving the needy, but something even deeper.”

—Father Jose Ortega, St. Matthew Catholic Church

A guiding premise of the Vision Action Network from the beginning was that its Board should represent the full diversity of Washington County. Finding leaders who were “plugged in” proved to be easy for the business, non-profit and public sectors.

“Many of us were more than a little embarrassed and ashamed that it took government to establish something we should have done ourselves.”

Rick Stoller
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

By contrast, networked faith leaders were elusive. County staff quickly discovered that there was no single group that spanned the spiritual breadth of Washington County. There were, of course, coordinating groups of one faith or another, but there was no organization made up of different faiths with a countywide vision.

“The faith community here was largely absent from any sustained coordination with the public or non-profit sectors,” explains Charlie Cameron. “Although the different groups were doing important work on tough issues, there was no network for them to use to communicate with each other and with the other sectors in the county.”

Separation of Church and State

Washington County decided to make an effort to see if the broader faith community could be identified and then offered a place at the VAN table. One of the concerns, and a potentially divisive issue going in, was separation of church and state. Spending County time and money working to organize a group of religious leaders might have been viewed negatively by some of the public. Yet, the lack of an overarching organization would have been a concern for any major sector, not just the faith community, and it would have prompted the same response from the County. “The VAN would have been incomplete without the faith community and that wasn’t acceptable,” states Don Bohn.

Says Rick Stoller of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, “Usually it’s the church holding government accountable, and here are these government representatives living out our calling. Many of us were more than a little embarrassed and ashamed that it took government to establish something we should have done ourselves.” Others agree, however, that it took someone from outside the faith community to bring together leaders with such differing religious views. “We were this non-religious entity that had traditionally and constitutionally kept our distance from this area,” relates Cameron. “Our interest still wasn’t religion, it was getting things done to improve the quality of life for people in our community. We were confident that this was a value shared by Washington County’s faith leaders and we thought we could help them get organized.”

Making the First Move

Once again, the first step was to contact all of the potential players and measure their interest. The method? The Yellow Pages. After cold-calling approximately 35 heads of diverse faith groups and following up through one-on-one meetings with many of them, County staff organized an introductory breakfast to allow these leaders to get acquainted and to educate them about the VAN.

The County's wisdom in this is that there was no crisis or special agenda, just a general concern about the welfare of the greater community.

Lowell Greathouse
United Way of the
Columbia-Willamette

Attendance was remarkably high, with over 30 representatives of different faiths sitting down together. Most knew several people around the table, but despite some long tenures in the community, no one knew even a majority of those assembled. “It was like the original VisionWest focus groups all over again — even more so,” recalls Don Bohn. “There was a kind of electricity in that room; most of those folks were truly excited about meeting one another.”

There were some skeptics, but many shared Unitarian minister Mark Hoelter’s experience. “I was curious about whether this was really going to be real, and I planned to go and take a back seat at the breakfast, just to listen. But I found myself raising my hand right away.” After discovering much common ground with one another and, surprisingly, with the County, seven faith leaders joined Hoelter to form a committee to explore Bohn’s offer to help establish structure. Most of the other attendees asked to be kept closely apprised of the committee’s progress.

Creating Purpose and Trust

Several of the interested faith leaders had experience with government looking to them as an alternative safety net for the community’s most needy. While recognizing their calling to assist in such situations, this continued request alone would not have been enough to spur their interest in participating in a new group. Instead, the County invited them to play a vital role in determining the future of their greater community. “Only asking them to take a back-up position marginalizes the contribution that the faith community can make,” says Don Bohn. “They can also play a critical part in helping shape community priorities and strategies for responding, which is exactly why they needed to be part of the VAN.”

“Communities come together for one of two reasons,” explains member Lowell Greathouse, of the United Way of the Columbia-Willamette. “A crisis will bring people together for the greater good of a community — floods, tornadoes, earthquakes. Also, if there’s a specific project that people are asked to rally around, they are comfortable stepping up because the focus will be limited to that project alone. The County’s wisdom in this is that there was no crisis or special agenda, just a general concern about the welfare of the greater community. The question was ‘Is that compelling enough?’ ”

The answer proved to be “yes.” One year after its first meeting with County staff, the Inter-Religious Action Network is a recognized part of the civic landscape of Washington County. “Working together in a forum like this is creating trust among all of us,” says Wes Taylor, pastor of the Tualatin United Methodist Church and Inter-Religious Action Network Chair. “Since the Inter-Religious Action Network convened, the bottom line for me has been that I’ve experienced the Kingdom of God on Earth because every other week [at regular meetings] I get to sit down to breakfast with all religions and, for the first time in my life, experience the true brotherhood and sisterhood of religion. Sure, I’m a Methodist, but I’m also part Jewish, part Muslim and so on because of the people I’ve grown to know here.”

It would be hubris to think that we may not fall into serious disagreement.

But let’s start with emphasizing that which we can agree upon.

Mark Hoelter
Unitarian Minister

Adds another Inter-Religious Action Network member, “We live in a time and a community where people are looking for signs of hope. There is a lot of negativity in the community, some of which stems directly from lack about understanding of different religions, so one of this group’s tasks is to create energy to reflect something positive. People of good will can produce something positive for the good of the community, promoting the best of what we are.”

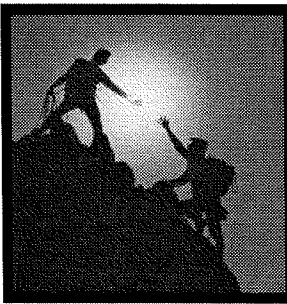
Maintaining Diversity While Working Together

Because the Inter-Religious Action Network is made up of leaders from so many different faiths, they certainly don’t agree on everything. The group tries to stay away from the specifics of their individual religions, instead focusing on their common goal of bettering their whole community. “It would be hubris to think that we may not fall into serious disagreement,” admits Mark Hoelter. “But let’s start with emphasizing that which we can agree upon. We’ll build on our strengths, then tackle harder issues as we need to.”

As the network moves toward undertaking large, communitywide issues, members know that the work will not all be done as a group. They plan to take on different projects as their interests and capabilities dictate. However, a “covenant” holds this group together, a commitment to respect the partnership and trust the other parties involved. “Our diversity is one of our greatest strengths,” asserts Bob Nuhn of Bethel Congregational United Church of Christ. “It gives us an understanding of who we are as a community and gives us hope for the future.”

*When people get involved,
they see that our friendship
is contagious and that it
has very little to do
with religion.*

Wes Taylor
Pastor of the Tualatin United
Methodist Church and
Inter-Religious Action
Network Chair



“The beauty of this group is its goal of improving our community and doing so as part of the greater whole,” says Emily Gottfried of the American Jewish Committee. “It felt good to be invited by the County to join the Inter-Religious Action Network because it meant that I could make a difference, and it’s my responsibility to the community to do so.”

The Inter-Religious Action Network has no model on which to base itself. Members of the group see this as a positive attribute, since they aren’t hampered by any past efforts but are instead free to think about all the possibilities for developing action in this unique environment. “Part of my optimism comes out of being challenged by the work of others in this group. It’s wonderful to hear what other faith communities are doing,” continues Mark Hoelter. “Knowing what’s happening helps inspire all of us, challenges us. The Inter-Religious Action Network calls us forward to be active participants in this process.”

Challenges

Of course, there are always obstacles to face. One of the group’s challenges is to overcome the population’s potential fear of evangelizing from the group’s members. “We certainly had our eyes open to the possibility that people might think we have some sort of hidden agenda, or that we’re going to proselytize,” says Wes Taylor. “We’ve dealt with it by keeping our focus on the common goal and the trust that has developed. When people get involved, they see that our friendship is contagious and that it has very little to do with religion.”

As the Inter-Religious Action Network gets more and more active across boundaries, working with other business, education or non-profit groups, members will keep in mind people’s potential fears. “It’s up to the group to demonstrate that the most important part of its name is ‘Inter’ — representing many religions working together, and each member has to demonstrate that to remove hesitation,” says Don Bohn. “We need people to mobilize around broad, general community issues, regardless of their religions or the religions of those spearheading the effort.”

“This inter-religious movement represents a huge asset to our greater community in that, through the County’s involvement, it has the luxury of both strong conviction and a stable structure, something which many religious or non-profit groups struggle to establish and maintain,” remarks Diane Dulin, pastor of the Hillsboro United Church of Christ. “Not having to start from scratch organizationally and having consistency in the values of all members, the County included, has allowed us to make considerable progress this year.”

This inter-religious movement represents a huge asset to our greater community in that, through the County's involvement, it has the luxury of both strong conviction and a stable structure, something which many religious or non-profit groups struggle to establish and maintain.

Diane Dulin
Pastor of the Hillsboro
United Church of Christ

Inventory of Services and Programs

One of the first efforts of the group was to establish an inventory of services provided by faith organizations to the general public in Washington County. This information provides a map of local faith assets, a resource to faith, government and social services organizations and a starting point for further collaboration and partnerships. The inventory is web-based and can be found at <http://www.vision-west.org/interfaithsite/home.cfm>.

Community Faith Forum

On October 9, 2002, the Network hosted a Faith Community Forum. The day-long forum brought together people from all religious traditions to examine both the Washington County faith community and the greater community. This was a historic gathering of over 150 leaders and lay leaders from faith-based agencies and service organizations. The forum was a springboard for quarterly meetings of the broad faith community to discuss emerging community concerns and collaboration and partnership opportunities.

"One of the most significant outcomes of the Community Faith Forum was that we realized that we're not all represented here yet," said one forum participant. "At my table, we looked around and wondered about some of the minority groups that weren't represented. It inspired a feeling of longing for all groups to be here and be a part of our future."

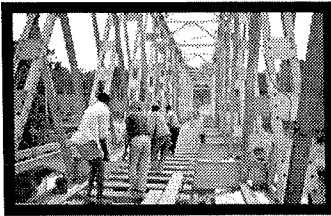
Diane Dulin adds, "A danger that we're trying to be aware of with the Inter-Religious Action Network and the VAN is that they could, unintentionally, become yet another road block or layer of bureaucracy that people would have to fight their way through if we're not careful to keep growing, always welcoming participation from new groups and so on."

Members of the Inter-Religious Action Network hope that the Community Faith Forum will become an annual event. They want to prioritize the urgent needs within the county and identify those they would be able to rally the faith community around, so they can have an effect on individual issues. Having an annual event like the Community Faith Forum would give faith leaders a regular opportunity to reevaluate their goals and take an honest look at work accomplished.

Early Results

The Inter-Religious Action Network holds regular, biweekly breakfast meetings, where members are exposed to issues of concern by other members or by County representatives. Attendees are encouraged to seek out and invite new participants, especially leaders from groups not yet represented in the network. “So far, our circle keeps on growing,” remarks Dulin. “I’ve been involved with this group since it was formed and every other week there are new arrivals, representing an impressive variety of religions.”

The Inter-Religious Action Network members have asked Washington County staff to inform them of issues that apply to both the community in general and to the faith community specifically. “What’s fascinating about the County people is that they have the capacity to see the whole terrain. They can identify countywide needs and recognize what the faith communities bring to meet those needs,” says one member of the Inter-Religious Action Network. For instance, staff used the Inter-Religious Action Network as the forum to let multiple faith leaders know that Washington County’s jail system needed chaplains; the group’s members took the request for help back to their respective communities and filled the vacancies.



“We all have something to offer, playing on our strengths.”

Emily Gottfried
American Jewish Committee

When Emily Gottfried learned about the Essential Health Clinic at one of the network breakfast meetings, she was interested in finding ways to help contribute. Because hers is a bridge-building organization rather than a congregation on its own, Emily didn’t have the human resources to commit to volunteering hours for the clinic. So, she got creative.

Emily’s organization, the American Jewish Committee, opted to forego traditional centerpieces at one of its corporate fundraising dinners. Instead, those funds were spent on supplies for the Essential Health Clinic, which were displayed on each table along with clinic information. This was especially appropriate because the honoree at this dinner was Oregon Health & Science University. By substituting supplies for centerpieces, the group helped the clinic both directly by donating valuable medical materials and indirectly by educating business leaders about the Essential Health Clinic.

Says Emily, “Other organizations have the people power to get many hands involved in these projects, but they may not have the corporate connections. We all have something to offer, playing on our strengths.”

Diane Dulin agrees. Recently, a group of leaders from her church got together to discuss the possibility of offering some after-school, mentoring-type programs there at the church. Right away, one of the leaders suggested partnering with other existing groups in the county, illustrating the heightened awareness over the last year of a new approach to social services.

Future Steps

At this point in the VAN/Inter-Religious Action Network process, faith leaders are starting to come together on common issues with leaders in other sectors, such as business or education. They are working together to tackle some issues of concern to the greater community, such as caring for the elderly and affordable housing.



In fact, the Inter-Religious Action Network's immediate focus will be participation in both the Faith in Action program and the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. The Faith in Action program is a Robert Wood Johnson grant program focusing on faith-based groups providing long-term support to seniors so they can stay independent for as long as possible. This fits into one of the major issue areas of the VisionWest project: Aging and People with Disabilities. Although there is no guarantee that the group will receive one of the grants, members want to develop the program anyway. Many groups already care for their own elderly, but they need to mobilize together to help those who have fallen through the cracks.

The Inter-Religious Action Network also hopes to contribute to the VAN's Affordable Housing Trust Fund effort for Washington County. (See Chapter 4.) With many details yet to be discussed, the VAN will facilitate a diverse working committee of faith, non-profit, government, business and civic leaders to develop a comprehensive business plan.

Mission

The Inter-Religious Action Network brings together diverse faith communities from different races and cultures to:

- Promote and support relationships, dialogue, understanding and community spirit among the broadly defined faith family.*
- Promote and support relationships, dialogue, understanding and community spirit with government, business, nonprofit and civic leaders — working together toward mutual goals and aspirations.*

Just the fact that we're all sitting here in a room talking about these community issues is amazing to me.

Bob Nuhn
Bethel Congregational
United Church of Christ

- *Provide visible leadership and support for collaborative efforts. Build a friendly environment for faith-based projects that seek to improve the quality of life in our community.*
- *Promote and support an environment of respect for spiritual goals, congregational missions and an ethic of reconciliation among faith traditions.*
- *Through diverse representation, recognize 'invisible' portions of our community and work to bring more thorough participation in the life of our county.*

Taking Action

Members of the Inter-Religious Action Network are familiar with organizations that meet, identify issues, agree that those issues are important, but never act. This group is determined to move forward with its concerns and gather momentum in order to continue making positive contributions to the community in a cohesive way. Many recognize that the coming together of this group is itself a huge accomplishment. "Just the fact that we're all sitting here in a room talking about these community issues is amazing to me," says Bob Nuhn. However, even though the group is just a year old, many have already taken what they've learned and applied it to the way they do business within their individual faith communities.

Concludes Wes Taylor, "We credit Washington County and its commissioners with the vision for all of this. They were willing to take risks and deal with a lot of criticism because they realized the benefits of working with religious groups and gave us their enthusiastic attention. We are continuing to expand the effort that they have made in reaching out to our segment of the community."

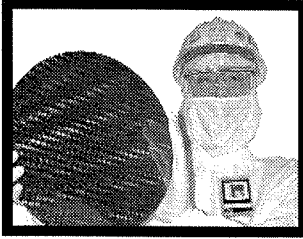
Chapter Six

It's Only the Beginning...

"A well-connected individual in a poorly connected society is not as productive as a well-connected individual in a well-connected society. And even a poorly connected individual may derive some of the spillover benefits from living in a well-connected community."

—Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*

When the VisionWest project began to take shape in the final months of 1999, the Washington County economy, which has been described as the locomotive for the rest of



Oregon, was in overdrive. “We are to technology research and development what Detroit is to the auto industry,” says Charlie Cameron. “The world’s demand for things high-tech had prompted some in our community to assume that our economy was bullet-proof.”

It wasn’t. More than three years later, with the technology bubble burst and high-tech employment down 13.5 percent from its high in 2001, that attitude has changed, according to Cameron. “I think folks are a lot less apt to take success — in a variety of forms — for granted. Things are tough throughout the country and they’re really difficult in Oregon.”

And where does that leave the work of the VisionWest project and the organizations that grew out of it — the Vision Action Network and Inter-Religious Action Network? Simply put, more important than ever.

The insistence that Issue Teams assume status quo for available resources was fortuitous. “Strategies that assumed new money would have been easy to develop — too easy,” Don Bohn says. “Fortunately, we didn’t go that route because the State’s fiscal crisis means we have fewer resources today than we had two years ago.”

*“Strategies that assumed
new money would have
been easy to develop —
too easy.”*

Don Bohn,
Senior Deputy County
Administrator for
Washington County

The continued success of the Essential Health Clinic, recent creation of the Community Housing Fund, and dynamic growth of the Inter-Religious Action Network are all indications that a new collaborative ethic is building in Washington County. “The real test of whether this effort has transcended from a ‘project’ to a ‘movement’ can only be measured in its tangible results five, ten and twenty years from now,” according to County Commissioner Chair Tom Brian. “That’s a lot to expect, but our community has set the bar high.”

While the jury is still out on the long-term impact of VisionWest, those inside and outside the County have judged the initial phase to be a huge success. It has also stirred significant interest from communities across the country.

An Award Winner:

Several organizations have singled out the VisionWest project for special honors.

City and County Communications and Marketing Association (3CMA):

Best Community Visioning Process in the United States for 2002-03.

*International City/County Management Association (ICMA): Selected for
"Best Practices" symposium, March 2003.*

*Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO): The "Two Pauls" Award in recognition
of community leadership and creation of the Inter-Religious Action Network,
February 2003.*

Lessons Learned

So, what are the critical insights those intimately involved with this project have gained? What truisms have emerged that make as much sense in Washington County, Oregon as they would in communities throughout the United States?

Reflective Leadership

Had Washington County simply pursued another update to its strategic plan, little would have changed. The County Commissioners' decision to instead look beyond the limited confines of the organization's existing strategic priorities and to then acknowledge that basic needs of the community were not being met, even in the best economic times, has unleashed tremendous new community capacity.

Organizational Commitment That's Personal

Given a full plate, the County's default position was to turn to consultants to lead the VisionWest charge. The project's success can be partially traced to the earliest focus groups' insistence that key County leaders assume the leadership role. Consultants have a place, but it is not in conveying and interpreting the sense of passion and concern that people have for their community. Senior Deputy County Administrator Don Bohn's immersion in the project forged "connections of relevancy" with and between community partners that will benefit Washington County for years to come. He challenged people to look beyond their preconceived notions about government (and other institutions) because they were dealing with a genuinely motivated human being, rather than an amorphous bureaucracy.



Doors Wide Open

A project of this magnitude is overwhelming, but this challenge is part of what makes the effort so appealing. How many people can get their arms around an initiative like this and run with it? Waiting for everyone to get on board before launching VisionWest was not a realistic option; only by digging in could Washington County begin to make progress. However, once they found a way to spearhead the initial effort, County staff were amazed at how quickly and easily they were able to get people of all stripes to join the effort.

But that was no time to stop spreading the word. Those already active in their community recognized the importance of widening the circle, always leaving room for more participation. This attitude of inclusion is reflected in the VisionWest Issue Teams, the Inter-Religious Action Network and the VAN Board, which constantly challenges itself to reach further into the community to find other individuals, groups and agencies who will join the effort to collaborate. Even though these groups sometimes hold conflicting viewpoints, they are all dedicated to improving the community. Therefore, welcoming those with differing views and staying open to new, creative ways for people to get involved strengthened the VisionWest process.

The real test of whether this effort has transcended from a 'project' to a 'movement' can only be measured in its tangible results five, ten and twenty years from now. »»

Tom Brian, Chair
Washington County
Board of Commissioners and
VAN Board Member

Grassroots, Not Glitz

One "catastrophe" that Washington County avoided was an initial strategy that called for a substantial marketing campaign with mass-media appeal. Although this tactic may have been exciting, it would certainly have been expensive and would not have resulted in the kinds of conversations that the County sought. The switch to a more time-intensive grassroots approach gave the project the personal touch it needed. With this method, people felt that their concerns and opinions were actually being heard, whereas a glitzier style might have sent the message that the County was following its own agenda.

Momentum

Once VisionWest's legacy was in place in the form of the VAN, the County made the transition from leader to fellow player. Handing over the baton proved to be more difficult than expected, since participants had looked to the County for guidance throughout the process. There was no way to know just how to transfer the knowledge and energy of the effort without losing some momentum. If given the chance to start afresh, Washington

It's Got to Be Fun

While hundreds of volunteers spent thousands of hours discussing and developing strategies to make Washington County a better place to call "home," there was also wide agreement that there is much in this community to celebrate. With this in mind, music, food, and participation by youth and children were regular components of an outreach process that was at times joyful and liberating.

The Process Must Honor the Community

Washington County's progression from initial concept to targeted focus groups to the examination of large-scale issues to the finely honed work of Issue Teams to, finally, the ongoing work of the Vision Action Network all makes good sense. The focus groups helped the County come to the realization that the regular government planning process just didn't apply. Discovering that important issues to the community weren't necessarily the obvious ones to the County was crucial to VisionWest's efficacy.

Developing the Issue Teams' community-based research and development gives the VAN (and any other interested parties) concrete information and suggested methods for resolving community issues. And now the VAN provides a forum to promote and support continued community efforts.

Take Your Hands Off the Wheel, Mind Your Pocketbook

Sharing power can be difficult, but who doesn't want to share responsibility, especially when dealing with today's difficult community issues? Some may conclude that Washington County took a tremendous political risk when it initiated the VisionWest process. Had it asserted control throughout and ultimately claimed credit for the strategies that emerged, that would certainly be true. The danger would have been greater if one of the fundamental ground rules for the Issue Teams had not existed: no new revenue. Instead, the County shared power and responsibility from the outset, and strategies were limited to existing resources. It convened the process, listened and adjusted course based on the comments of its partners, and ultimately evolved to one of the many organizations drawing upon the insights of the Issue Teams and participating in the collaborative work of the Vision Action Network.

Appendix A

Washington County	Statistic	%
Land area, 2000 (square miles)	724	
Persons per square mile, 2000	615.3	
Metropolitan area	Portland, OR	
Population, 2000	445,342	
Population, net change, 1990 to 2000	133,788	42.9%
Population under 5 years old, 2000	35,111	7.9%
Population 65 years old and over, 2000	39,351	8.8%
Persons under 18 years old, 2000	119,618	26.9%
Female persons, percent, 2000		50.2%
White persons, 2000	366,007	82.2%
Black or African American persons, 2000	5,119	1.1%
American Indian and Alaska Native persons, 2000	2,913	0.7%
Asian persons, 2000	29,752	6.7%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander persons, 2000	1,325	0.3%
Persons reporting some other race, 2000	26,100	5.9%
Persons reporting two or more races, 2000	14,126	3.2%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, 2000	49,735	11.2%
Foreign-born persons, 2000	63,438	14.2%
Language other than English spoken at home, age 5+, 2000	76,346	18.6%

High school graduates, persons age 25+, 2000	253,848	88.9%
Bachelor's degree or higher, persons age 25+, 2000	98,549	34.5%
Persons with a disability, age 5+, 2000	60,418	13.6%
Mean travel time to work, workers age 16+ (minutes), 2000	23.7	
Housing units, 2000	178,913	
Homeownership rate, 2000	60.6%	
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2000	\$184,800	
Households, 2000	169,162	
Persons per household, 2000	2.61	
Median household money income, 1999	\$52,122	
Per capita money income, 1999	\$24,969	
Persons below poverty, 1999	32,575	7.4%

Figures are in absolute numbers unless otherwise indicated.

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Agricultural Statistics Service, National Center for Health Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau

Contact us!

The VisionWest project was an amazing journey. Much of the time our route finding allowed us to navigate the hairpin turns. We also found ourselves in the ditch on a few occasions. Perhaps the biggest challenge was adjusting to having multiple hands on the wheel.

It remains to be seen what the future impact of this work will be. That said, there is no question that, in terms of process and short-term achievements, VisionWest has produced many positive results. This early success is attributable to the dedication of hundreds of dedicated people. We welcome opportunities to share what we have learned from one another.

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