

## Imagine Projects in North and Central America (Jan 2009)



Listed below are North American Imagine projects with which Imagine Chicago has been involved or about which we've been sent information.



### Table of Contents

Imagine Aruba .....	3
<b>UNITED STATES</b>	
Imagine Humane (US).....	5
<b>California:</b> Imagine Los Angeles.....	7
<b>Colorado:</b> Focus on Longmont.....	8
<b>Florida:</b> Imagine Miami.....	10
<b>Illinois:</b> Imagine Chicago.....	14
Imagine Englewood if.....	23
<b>Indiana:</b> Imagine Cass County.....	26
Imagine Porter County.....	31
<b>Massachusetts:</b> Imagine Boston.....	35
<b>Michigan:</b> Imagine Detroit.....	40
<b>Montana :</b> Imagine Butte.....	42
<b>Ohio:</b> Imagine Akron.....	44
Imagine Garfield Heights.....	45
<b>South Carolina:</b> Imagine South Carolina.....	49
<b>Tennessee:</b> Imagine Johnson County.....	50
Imagine Memphis.....	51
<b>Texas:</b> Imagine Dallas.....	57
<b>Washington:</b> Imagine Orcas.....	59
Earthy Conversations (Pierce Co.).....	59
<b>CANADA</b>	
<b>Alberta:</b> Imagine Red Deer.....	61
Imagine Calgary.....	62
Imagine Oakridge.....	64
<b>British Columbia:</b> Imagine Abbotsford.....	66
Imagine BC.....	67
Imagine Prince George.....	68
Dream Vancouver.....	69
<b>Nova Scotia:</b> Envision Halifax .....	70
<b>Ontario:</b> Imagine School Success (Toronto).....	71



## *Aruba*

- Imagine Aruba



Nos Aruba 2025 Workshop - September 2008, University of Aruba

Nos Aruba 2025: Sustainable Development in Aruba [www.nosaruba2025.aw](http://www.nosaruba2025.aw)

“The Aruban community is becoming increasingly aware about the need for a balance between education, public health care, economic development, the environment and general well-being. *Nos Aruba 2025* presents the opportunity for each individual in Aruba to voice their ideas about how Aruba should continue to be developed in a sustainable manner, resulting in a common vision for Aruba in 2025. The vision encompasses the changes we want to see within our communities over a selected time frame: Aruba from the present to 2025. The vision is then transformed into a manageable and feasible plan that the community implements.

Aruba has experienced an enormous economic development since the Status Aparte. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Aruba’s population presently consists of approximately 106,000 inhabitants of which approximately 35% are not born in Aruba. Due to the rapid economic growth in the early 90’s, the local labor market could not provide sufficient workers which resulted in an influx of foreign labor. The economy of Aruba is 70% dependent on the tourism industry and therefore very dependent on the labor market. GDP per capita in 2007 reached US\$ 23,900. Still, like most small island economies in the Caribbean enjoying an accelerated economic growth we also have to deal with several challenges. The most important is to balance this economic growth with the environment and to maintain a high quality of life for all citizens. In this respect the Government of Aruba has been preparing national development plans and several vision plans since the Status Aparte.

The idea for a national integrated strategic plan for Aruba came from the same stakeholders that are participating today. The need for a vision became more and more relevant to both government institutions and private organizations. There are so many ideas to develop Aruba but still taking into account the importance of protecting our

nature, our culture and identity. The discussions on carrying capacity brought forward by the Chamber of Commerce in 2005 was also a trigger to this process.

While policy making is the responsibility of the government, it is imperative that the government consult with the stakeholders in order to be able to make important decisions. Therefore, in several countries, governments are using a participatory process through which the private sector, nongovernmental organizations and civil societies are consulted. And like many other islands in the Caribbean, Aruba started in January 2008 an eighteen month participatory process for a National Integrated Strategic Plan. This process is called *Nos Aruba 2025* which means “our Aruba 2025”. The purpose of this process is firstly to encourage the dialogue between the private and the public sector in defining policies to ensure sustainable development for the island and secondly to prepare a strategic plan that integrates all sectors to create a vision for the island for the year 2025 and to design the strategy to achieve the vision.

Although there are several methodologies to stimulate the participation and involvement of the broad community, in this case Aruba has chosen the Appreciative Inquiry approach. This methodology, which was developed in the 80’s by David Cooperrider, has been used in multinational companies and in some cities in different parts of the world.

Aruba is the first small island using this methodology which uses the positive core of Aruba as the basic principle for the Plan. Appreciative Inquiry is based on the premise that organizations change in the directions in which they inquire. So instead of studying the problems in an organization, the focus is on the positive and organizational strengths. This process uses a 4 phase approach called the 4 –D. Discovery: People talk about the times when the organization was at its best and they begin to define the positive core. This will encourage the people to appreciate themselves and their fellow colleagues. In this phase the strengths of the organizations and the people are identified. Dream: In this phase people are encouraged to visualize their future and the future of the organization. Design: Once the people have defined the vision, they have to design how they will achieve it. What are the elements that have to be in place in order to reach that point in the future and who will have the different roles. Destiny: The final phase is to deliver the dream and the new design. The important aspect of this methodology is that the people are the center of the process. From the first moment each individual is involved in the design of their future and therefore will feel committed for its implementation. This way people start transformations from the beginning of the process and feel connected to the vision. Instead of the Government defining the vision, the government inquires with the stakeholders what the vision should be and request the stakeholders to define how this will be achieved. The whole population can participate in this process independently of social status, gender, age, nationality, political preferences etc.

During the first 6 months of this process in Aruba the focus has been in the awareness of the need for strategic planning with the emphasis on the need for sustainable development. Hundreds of people have been involved in events such as workshop trainings in the Appreciative Inquiry facilitation, workshop trainings in appreciative strategy, a sustainable development symposium and the integration event for the discovery phase. The aim is to get as many people as possible participating and involved

in the process to define the vision but also to execute the actions that are needed to realize the vision. Different stakeholders representing all sectors are working together to integrate the different strengths identified to create a vision in which each one has a responsibility to make it happen. Finding the strengths of Aruba was the first step and in the coming months the participants will continue to build on those strengths to define the topics or areas that need to be discussed and developed. In addition, those participating in the process will be visualizing how Aruba will be in 2025 according to their wishes. At the end of the eighteen months the people of Aruba will have produced a strategy document in which they create their own future based on a sustainable development of the island to ensure the quality of life of all citizens and to be prepared to participate in the changing global world.” *Written by Maria Dijkhoff-Pita, Director - Department of Economic Affairs, Commerce and Industry, for "Business Forum Magazine" in Aruba July 2008.*

United States:

IMAGINE HUMANE

[www.imaginehumane.org](http://www.imaginehumane.org) *Connecting Around Compassion*



*A dream which emerged out of Imagine Humane's dialogue:  
"Unconditional love in 24 hours. \$29.95"*

When Bert Troughton and Sue Clement started designing an Imagine initiative for animal welfare they didn't even know each other. From their home offices at opposite ends of the country, Bert and Sue had long phone conversations and frequent emails about their values, their experiences and their dreams for the field. "From the first conversation we were learning from each other – it was exciting and energizing," says Bert, "and we knew early-on that we wanted to unleash this kind of learning connection for our whole field."

In the United States, 5,000 independent animal shelters struggle to deal with more than 10 million homeless animals annually. Imagine Humane believes that lasting solutions reside beyond the typical boundaries of animal protection and require an evolution from focusing on humane organizations to focusing on humane communities. 62% of Americans live with companion animals, and the majority are self-described animal lovers. There's a tremendous opportunity for animal organizations to work together to effectively engage the caring public in saving animals' lives.

Imagine Humane searched for a process that would energize and mobilize efforts of caring individuals and organizations and bypass typical silo thinking and resistance to change. Building on appreciative inquiry, dialogue education, and Imagine Chicago's work, Imagine Humane now designs and facilitates hands-on learning opportunities where animal welfare professionals ask appreciative questions, listen for and celebrate successes, learn from each other's experiences, and build effective partnerships.

In its first 18 months, working in partnership with PetsMart Charities, Imagine Humane initiated appreciative dialogues at two national humane conferences and in three major U.S. cities – Cleveland, Minnesota, and New York – with some exciting results. People

got to know and understand each other, and design plans for working together. The conversations spawned a detailed community assessment, a successful legislative campaign, and several joint spay/neuter initiatives. Some groups are taking the process back to their organizations and applying appreciative inquiry in staff and volunteer meetings, strategic planning, and their interactions with the public. On more than one occasion, foundations have volunteered on-the-spot to fund plans generated during Imagine Humane events.

Animal lovers are full of stories about trust, devotion, unbridled silliness, and unconditional love. They are richer for practicing compassion. Elevating and connecting their stories is not only good for animals; it adds an important dimension to building healthy communities. Sue and Bert hope Imagine Humane will provide a learning community for animal welfare and a point of entry for every caring individual to add their efforts to the cause.

*Core Practices of Imagine Humane include:*

***ACCELERATING LEARNING***

Adults learn best when information is relevant and immediately applicable, when the setting fosters interaction and relationships, and when the format provides for hands-on practice and application.

***ADVANCING DIALOGUE***

Structure, open questions, and nonjudgmental language create a healthy and safe environment to advance mutual understanding, and make it possible for people to build upon— rather than debate — a variety of ideas and methods.

***FOSTERING COLLABORATION***

Our recipe: begin with people who want to participate, create a shared vision for a better future, design a project plan that includes an appropriate and meaningful role for each participant, make time for relationship development and plan implementation, and communicate and celebrate often along the way.

***ACCELERATING COMMITMENT***

***California:***

- Imagine Los Angeles

In Los Angeles, two women decided to fund an effort to bring many disparate people together from around LA to see how they could improve the City of Angels. They read something about Imagine Chicago and decided to use the word Imagine in their own efforts. They gathered 40 people from youth organizations to entertainers over many months to understand what was and imagine what could be. One of the results was that Intel Corporation asked these two women to help them to place cyber cafes around LA to involve young people in learning about technology in a fun way. The young women also helped other non-profits write proposals for funding for their projects.

**Colorado:**

- Focus on Longmont : **Share your vision, create our legacy**



Imagine Longmont *fifteen years from today* – in the year 2020. It is a vibrant, freestanding community whose growth has slowed – but whose prosperity has continued . . . even blossomed. The community is everything you'd hoped and wished for, *and* there is enough money in the City to pay for the municipal services the community needs and desires. What do you see????

In 2005, community members in Longmont, Colorado engaged their collective imaginations to explore how to break the economic dependence on growth and outward expansion that is typical of the cities and towns along Colorado's Front Range. A community of about 80,000 people, Longmont is located the rapidly growing area north of the Denver metropolitan area.

The *Focus on Longmont* process, as they dubbed it, invited a broad cross-section of citizens to participate, make relationships, and share ideas and insights, and recommend policies related to the community's future as a vibrant, freestanding, mature community. Key steps were:

- Work with a 35-member coordinating team, representing a microcosm of the community, to design the initiative.
- Conduct 80 on-on-one interviews throughout the community.
- Create new community connections by bringing people from 149 different organizations together in 15 "community conversations" (group interviews)
- Convene a Community Summit with 175 community members to create a shared vision of the future.
- Conduct two deliberative forums with approximately 200 people to identify future priorities for action.

The *Focus on Longmont* process enabled community members to embrace their community with fresh eyes, even as they planned their future. It uncovered people's profound belief in their collective wisdom and intent.

**What did we do best?** City officials took a risk in trying a “new” approach to engaging citizens in co-creating the city's strategic plan. City leadership helped foster an exemplary collaboration between city staff, officials, citizens and consultants. Strong teamwork helped us mobilize quickly; moving from launching the initiative to organizing interviews, community conversations and a summit in less than 4 months. The process was much more accessible than usual to the City's large Latino population (some of whom are monolingual).

**What was most memorable?** The power of appreciative storytelling in transforming relationships between people and connections to the community. A special treat was seeing city staff react to hearing positive stories about how they had contributed to Longmont at its best.

**What will we do better next time?** Reach even further into the community to engage new voices. Examine the technical and fiscal realities of possible City policies and actions concurrently with deliberative forum phase of the strategic planning effort.

**What's next?** For City Council to adopt future policy directions and set priorities for phased implementation.

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## **Florida:**

- Imagine Miami: **The Community Prosperity Initiative** [www.imaginemiami.org](http://www.imaginemiami.org)

### **What is Imagine Miami?**

Imagine Miami (IM) is the most ambitious and comprehensive initiative to address the problem of poverty and diminished opportunity in Miami-Dade County in a very long time. It is a vision of possibility through the year 2015, of a community and economy that works for all the residents of the County.

### **Why is Miami-Dade Poor?**

Poverty is the most fundamental and debilitating challenge any community can face. But individual and family poverty - the lack of financial resources - is but the most glaring symptom of a pervasive, systemic problem that threatens the long-term development of the South Florida region.

The 2005 report of the Brookings Institution, *Growing the Middle Class: Connecting All Miami-Dade Residents to Economic Opportunity*, detailed a county with a dwindling middle class and a complex of factors that threaten a deeper crisis of opportunity. A strong middle class is essential for fiscal vitality and local spending, improved school performance, homeownership, safety, enriched cultural life, sustainable environment, and civic engagement. The following helps to clarify the challenge:

- + The City of Miami has the lowest median income and the third highest rate of poverty of the 100 largest cities in America; Miami-Dade County ranks 91<sup>st</sup> in income and 12<sup>th</sup> in poverty among the nation's 100 largest counties.
- + Miami-Dade has the highest rent burden of the 100 largest counties, and the fourth highest mortgage burden; 47 percent of renters in Miami-Dade spend over 30 percent of their income on rent. Recent developments suggest these trends are worsening.
- + Fifty-three percent of Miami-Dade's jobs are in the service and retail sectors, with the lowest average annual pay and little potential for advancement.
- + Educational attainment is among the lowest in the nation, with only 16 percent of City of Miami and 22 percent of County residents holding a bachelor's degree.
- + Miami's office space has moved to the edges of the County, more than any other large metropolis; transportation deficiencies hinder poor residents' access to jobs.
- + Miami-Dade County has the highest rate of uninsured residents in the state.
- + Between 1995 and 2000, 160,000 more people left Miami-Dade than moved in from another part of the country; on average, those who departed had higher incomes and educational attainment rates than those that stayed.

### **What Does Imagine Miami Hope to Achieve?**

Imagine Miami's aim is to support the re-building and sustaining of a strong middle class in Miami-Dade County. To do so requires a broad-based approach that addresses new opportunity in education, housing, transportation, healthcare, sustainable environment, quality neighborhoods, and culture and the arts. If poverty and the loss of opportunity throughout society are systemic, then the approach to stimulating greater prosperity must be comprehensive and long-term.

### **What Is Imagine Miami's Plan to Expand Opportunity?**

The questions often asked are, "What is different about Imagine Miami? What will allow this initiative to succeed in the face of such an intractable problem?"

**Growing Public Awareness:** First and foremost, public awareness must grow regarding the multiple factors that deny opportunity, and the impact on the larger community. These barriers promote a growing underclass and severely diminish any narrow effort at economic development. It must be understood that Imagine Miami is not only about the visible poor; it is as much about the shrinking middle class and the inability of working class people to thrive in the present environment. Imagine Miami is committed to public education that clarifies the depth and reach of the problem.

**A Comprehensive Approach:** The effort to rebuild Miami's middle class *must* be across all sectors of community life. What will distinguish Imagine Miami will be a new collaboration among the sectors, with clarity regarding the pervasive nature of the problem. No one and no enterprise is immune; sooner or later, the conditions that diminish opportunity will do the same to the quality of life throughout the community.

While it is naïve to underestimate the problems that plague the community, Imagine Miami's focus remains on solutions. Research has uncovered a wealth of breakthrough initiatives, many successfully applied in cities in the U.S. and abroad.

**Imagine Miami Co-Chairs:** The co-chairs of Imagine Miami are **Eduardo J. Padrón**, President of Miami Dade College; **Peter W. Roulhac**, Vice President for Community Development, Wachovia Bank; and **Daniella S. Levine**, Executive Director, Human Services Coalition.

**Sector Leadership:** Since its inception in 2004, Imagine Miami has built a leadership team from eight sectors of community life. Those sectors are business, academia, arts and culture, community, government, media, philanthropy, and youth leadership. To date, over one hundred diverse thinkers from these sectors have contributed to the initial development of the project. Their research has uncovered innovative work from around the world in housing, healthcare, job development, education, the environment and more. Their commitment will lead to the successful adaptation and implementation of breakthrough efforts in Miami-Dade.

**Capacity Building:** Growing the capacity to address challenges over time is a central tenet, and encouraging new leadership is an essential need. As well, new levels of

cooperation will distinguish the progress of Imagine Miami. New partnerships and decision-making strategies that accommodate the scope of the project will be an integral aspect of its ongoing success.

**Civil Society:** Imagine Miami is very much about re-thinking and re-forming civil society, in the midst of 21st century economic markets. The cornerstone of civil society is broad opportunity, both as a necessary balance and complement to the markets that forge economic growth. This is the ultimate challenge of Imagine Miami – to realize the means to include a broader range of people and institutions in economic and social growth.

**Imagine Miami’s Strategic Plan** includes the following phased development:

Assessment and Research  
Vision and Goal Setting  
Cross-sector Action Plan  
Implementation and Review of Progress

The **Assessment and Research** phase is complete, utilizing an array of tools:

Community Surveys: close to 2,000 respondents, via the internet, helped to identify community strengths and the priorities to be addressed. A second *Values Survey* asked respondents about the fundamental themes upon which the growth of the community ought to be based. Surveys developed and evaluated by Miami Dade College Institutional Research.

Focus Groups: 16 focus groups, in each of Imagine Miami’s eight sectors and a range of interest groups throughout the community, hosted topical conversations that further clarified the aims of the project.

Local Research: Review of past projects and the County’s Official Future projections.

Global Research: in-depth review of community development strategies from across the U.S. and around the world.

SWOT Analysis by Major Themes: In themes of Economic Prosperity, Civic Health and Inclusion, Environmental Sustainability, and Opportunity, Imagine Miami researchers explored 24 components, including housing, transportation, civic participation, education, public spaces and more, for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Assets Inventory: *Get On the Map*, an internet tool for gathering community assets. Coordinated by the University of Miami School of Business.

**Vision and Goal Setting** has been provided a strong foundation by the assessment and research effort. Through a *scenario planning* process Imagine Miami will present four potential futures for Miami-Dade County that range from a “worst case” to a “most likely” and two visionary stories that challenge each person’s sense of possibility.

The four scenarios, due for completion in January 2006, will be presented to diverse audiences throughout the community, acting as catalyst to important conversations about the future of South Florida. These brief but poignant stories will be both cautionary and creative, incorporating breakthroughs in key aspects of community life. These scenarios

and ensuing conversations form the foundation for goal-setting and action plans that stretch over the coming two years.

The **Implementation** phase will signal a new level of collaboration throughout the Miami-Dade Community. Ultimately, Imagine Miami is about impact, making vision into reality. If we are to achieve real results, sector leadership will be instrumental in creating partnerships and decision-making strategies that ensure success.

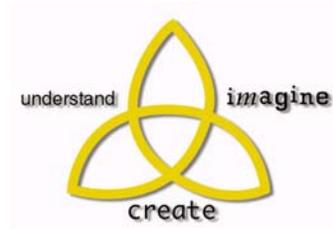
Have you weighed in on what values we need to build a stronger Miami?

[www.imaginemiami.org](http://www.imaginemiami.org)

### *Illinois:*

- Imagine Chicago [www.imaginechicago.org](http://www.imaginechicago.org)

Imagine Chicago is the original “Imagine” community project, launched by Bliss Browne (and a host of friends and colleagues) in Chicago in 1992. It can be described in many ways including



- a small non-profit organization that has been working since 1992 to cultivate hope and civic engagement in a variety of cross cultural and intergenerational initiatives, projects and programs.
- a catalyst for creative connections that result in the development of civic identity and commitment for individuals and institutions.
- a trainer, facilitator and mentor of community visioning practices and strength based communications and community organizing processes
- the inspiration for a self-organizing global Imagine movement on six continents.

Since 1992, Imagine Chicago has helped harness imagination for public good, encouraging and equipping people to become engaged in imagining and creating hopeful futures for their families and communities through both discourse and action. Working in collaboration with local organizations--schools, faith communities, cultural institutions, businesses, and community groups--Imagine Chicago has initiated and facilitated dozens of creative partnerships in which people have worked together to understand, imagine and create the future they value. A new set of strength- and arts-based practices for liberating imagination, improving communications and helping communities listen for and organize collective visions and actions has emerged out of Imagine Chicago's work.

Imagine Chicago has built intergenerational and intercultural partnerships across well-established divides of race, income, culture and class. People previously disengaged or disaffected have found meaningful ways to contribute their gifts to the communities in which they live. Imagine Chicago has bet on young people as its core staff and as a catalyst for expanding community imagination and hope. Constructive experiences of difference have nurtured in a new generation of leaders a passion for the common good.

Since 2002, Imagine Chicago has concentrated its time in coaching, mentoring, facilitation, design consulting and training others. The Imagine approach pioneered and practiced by Imagine Chicago has informed civic engagement efforts in government, business, education, culture, health, and youth and community development on six continents-- involving universities in Nepal, health workers in London, UNICEF in India, business leaders in Beijing, municipal planners in Central Singapore and Calgary, community activists in South Africa, aspiring political leaders in Chile and Argentina, policy makers in Scotland and Denmark, and rural parishes in Western Australia, to name but a few. Each global Imagine project has been locally designed and implemented. A new world of possibilities is taking shape as the imagination, hope and hidden assets within individuals, institutions and communities are activated and citizens of all ages

become engaged in defining and realizing a future worthy of their collective creative potential.



### How did Imagine Chicago begin?

In 1991, Bliss Browne was a corporate banker at First Chicago, an Episcopal priest in an African American parish, the mother of three young children and active on many civic boards. These worlds shared little common vocabulary and often functioned as parallel universes. She began to notice many ways our city of Chicago was divided—in discourse, in well institutionalized patterns of social and economic segregation.. Many young adults were anxious about their future, doubtful if they could find a way to make their lives count, with many young lives lost to violence and drugs. Ronald Marstin, a philosopher, once said, " Justice is fundamentally a matter of who is included and whom we can tolerate neglecting." She began to talk with friends about what it would take for many people to think about our city as a whole in a way which valued all of its citizens.

Wanting companions for her questions, she organized a conference on faith, imagination and public life. On the second night, people were asked to venture to describe "God's dreams" for our city, images of Chicago's future and economy worthy of the commitment of our lives. The image that came to Bliss that night was of the recycling symbol as an image of the Trinity. She envisaged those three simple arrows in a circle not just as an image of ecology but as a representation of an economy in which nothing and no one is wasted, in which everyone's participation counts. She began to imagine a city...

- where everyone is valued
- where every citizen, young and old, applies their talents to create a positive future for themselves and their community.
- where hope comes alive in the flourishing and connecting of human lives
- where young people and others whose visions have been discounted develop and contribute their ideas and energy.

Within three days of that conference, Bliss set aside a sixteen-year corporate career to begin the work of discovering ways to bring such a vision to life. That work became Imagine Chicago. In recent years, it's catalyzed a self-organizing global Imagine movement, the heart of which has been a profound belief, shared by many, in the possibility of working constructively across difference on inspired and inspiring actions.

It was not clear how best to begin. So in 1992, Bliss Browne dedicated nine months to learning Chicago history, and listening to people's concerns and hopes about what might constitute an effective visioning and community regeneration process in Chicago. She visited other cities with emerging citywide initiatives including Atlanta and Pittsburgh. She worked with the Council of Religious Leaders on their vision for Chicago's future. During that time, an informal network of Chicago leaders began to gather around the questions at the heart of Browne's inquiry. In September 1992, twenty of them -- educators, corporate and media executives, philanthropists, community organizers, youth developers, economists, religious leaders, social service providers -- were convened as a design team for the project. A private philanthropic foundation supported Browne to

pursue the work of designing the project's first phase, testing its viability, and getting the project organized.

From September 1992 to May 1993, the design team designed a process of civic inquiry. This was the starting point for engaging the city of Chicago in a broad-based conversation about its future. Two ideas shaped the ultimate process design. First, that the pilot should attempt to discover what gives life to the city, and second, that it should provide significant leadership opportunities for youth, who clearly represented the city's future. A design team member noted that the process was quite consistent with "Appreciative inquiry", an emerging change methodology developed by David Cooperrider and others at Case Western Reserve University, which fosters innovation in organizations through gathering positive stories and images and building on them to construct the desired future. Imagine Chicago's citywide interviews exemplified this mindset and approach.

The design team expected that positive intergenerational conversation would provide a bridge between the experience and wisdom of seasoned community builders and the energy and commitment of youth. They hoped that a common search for purpose would yield deeper insights into the collective future of the community.

Two types of pilots were implemented in 1993-1994: a citywide "appreciative inquiry" process to gather Chicago stories and commitments, and a series of community-based and led processes. Young adults and community builders in Chicago came together to share their hopes and commitments, within a setting of mutual respect. Intergenerational teams, led by a young person in the company of an adult mentor, interviewed business, civic, and cultural leaders, about the future of their communities and of Chicago. The interviewer asked positive questions about high points in the lives of citizens who had made a difference and their hopes for the future. The youth distilled the content for public view in ways that inspired public action and reinforced commitment. The premise was that young people could be effective agents of hope and inspiration, if released from the negative stereotypes held by themselves and others.

In late 1994, a formal evaluation gathered feedback on the effects of Imagine Chicago's intergenerational appreciative inquiry. Both the power and the limitations of the intergenerational interview process became clear. The process was successful in establishing a lively sense of shared civic identity, creating effective methods for constructive intergenerational dialogue, and expanding the sense among the young people that they could make a difference. However, sustaining structures were needed to move the participants from inspiration to action and leverage the connections. Imagine Chicago recognized that the appreciative intergenerational interview process would be more effective if it could be embedded within structures that could move more readily to action.

Therefore, Imagine Chicago spent 1995 designing structured intergenerational initiatives with identified public partners (like schools, community development organizations, cultural institutions and faith communities) who shared a common commitment to the

city's future. Each gave participants a chance to be city creators in more concrete and sustained ways. Each initiative moved toward visible outcomes through dialogue, curriculum development and network formation. This enabled individuals and organizations to develop skills which deepened their hope and helped forge meaningful civic connections.

A common framework to recognize and build capacity to make a civic contribution linked the initiatives. Imagine Chicago challenged individuals and organizations to consider three fundamental questions relevant to Chicago's future: **What is? What could be? What will be?** Through structured dialogues and opportunities for joint action, more and more citizens asked the questions and learned how their visions, choices, and commitments could help shape broader systems and communities in the city.

IMAGINE CHICAGO has worked since 1992 to create meaningful opportunities for people often left out to discover a place to belong and a way to contribute that links their considerable gifts to the communities in which they live. We've done so by encouraging and challenging people and institutions to understand, imagine and create the future they value, to move from understanding and dreaming community to building it. This is "mothering" work in the way Sara Ruddick describes it in her wonderful book *Maternal Thinking* where she suggests that motherhood is a sustained response to the promise embedded in the creation of new life. That for me is the challenge: How do we bring worthy collective dreams to birth and honor the new life they represent by creating the structures to sustain life's promise on a long-term basis?"

The initial city dialogues led to many innovative partnership programs -- with institutional impact -- that created meaningful connections across generations, cultures, and neighborhoods and which developed responsible citizenship. The focus was on education, leadership formation, and community development programs that supported personal development for public service. Extensive program archives are available on Imagine Chicago's website [www.imaginechicago.org](http://www.imaginechicago.org)

In June 2001, Imagine Chicago reached the end of a program cycle which began in 1996 with the creation of a number of major citywide programs including the Urban Imagination Network, Citizen Leaders, and Making Civic Connections, and decided to restructure its work. Imagine Chicago's original intention had been to serve as a catalyst and connector rather than a program developer and manager. The nature of the partnerships shifted that and clearly established that there were promising and reliably constructive possibilities for working together across well-established divides. Imagine Chicago received an increasing number of requests to share its approaches and tools broadly, both nationally and internationally. Imagine Chicago's founder was growing weary of 10 years of 80-hour work weeks, however productive and rewarding.

The time was ripe for a restructuring of the organization to harvest and disseminate the lessons of ten years' experience so they would be more accessible to and replicable by other communities. Because Imagine Chicago's approach is so intentionally socially constructed, disseminating Imagine Chicago's work seemed most appropriate to do within learning exchanges with joint reflection on questions related to imagination and public

good. Imagine Chicago devoted 2002 to posting resources developed in its programs to its website and organizing a global Imagine conference. The conference attracted 150 people from six continents to a six day global Imagine celebration and learning exchange.

After the conference, Imagine Chicago closed its downtown office, chose not to apply for additional grant support for programs and announced our intention to shift from being a creator (mother) of new community projects to being a mentor/facilitator and trainer (grandmother) working alongside others. The financial structure was shifted to generating revenue from consulting and speaking fees, with interns continuing to provide additional staffing when individual contributions could be raised to support their involvement.

Since 2002, Imagine Chicago has worked primarily as a keynote presenter, trainer and facilitator at national and international conferences and a mentor of emerging initiatives. Being a speaker, facilitator and mentor to Imagine projects around the world, coaching and supporting them and bringing them into dialogue with community projects in Chicago has afforded great perspective on Imagine Chicago's core ideas, frameworks, and foundations for facilitation. They have also proven to have great utility in working with businesses and governments seeking to actively engage their citizens in thinking about sustainable futures in a richly participative democracy.

### How Imagine Chicago works

Imagine Chicago designs, sometimes manages and often facilitates intergenerational and intercultural networks and partnerships which cultivate hope and civic engagement and harness imagination for public good. It also trains other individuals and organizations in Imagine mindsets, tools and frameworks. Imagine Chicago's work is generally organized around one or more of four core processes:

1. Constructive questions– that draw out the best of the past and build on that foundation to design and create a more vital future; this includes mapping individual and collective assets, strengths and experiences that can be leveraged to community benefit
2. Dialogue – across cultural, racial, economic and generational boundaries.
3. Curriculum and event design – frameworks and organizers to understand, imagine and create projects that build community. These often involve arts-based opportunities to bring vision to expression in creative ways
4. Network formation – identifying and linking individuals and organizations eager to develop a positive future for their community, who share a common mission and commitment and are willing to work together as productive collaborators.

Imagine Chicago works in partnership with change agents in organizations, institutions and communities, building local capacity with strength-based communication and development tools and opportunities for collaboration that make a difference. We help design and facilitate community forums that inspire, inform and can build sustainable networks and mindsets for lasting institutional, community and systemic change. We train others in the approaches we have developed. We concentrate on developing

transformative public forums and initiatives that connect an individual's personal aspirations and learning to the development of the communities of which they are a part--their organization, their block, their church, their city.

### Moving from Idea to Action

Central to all of Imagine Chicago's initiatives is a common approach to learning which moves from idea to action:

- **Understand** what is (focusing on the best of what is)
- **Imagine** what could be (working in partnerships with others)
- **Create** what will be (translating what we value into what we do)

### **Understand**

All projects begin with and are grounded in asking and teaching others to ask open-ended, asset and value-oriented questions about what is life-giving, what is working, what is generative, what is important. The focus is on asking positive questions that encourage sharing of best practices, articulation of fundamental values, and which reveal the positive foundation on which greater possibilities can be built. For example, in working with parents, "What is something your child has accomplished that you are especially proud of? What about your family, this school, is effective in encouraging children to learn? What questions are you curious about right now?"

### **Imagine**

New possibilities are inspired by answering questions and hearing stories that cause us to wonder and stretch our understanding beyond what we already know. When we are invited to articulate or hear from others what's important and is working, we readily imagine how even greater transformation and innovation can happen. In a learning community, our collective imaginations continually envisage more. Grass roots leaders discussing what they have helped change on their block inspires others to try and make a difference. Young parents sharing stories of how they are caring for their children leads others to consider new, good parenting practices.

This stretching of the human imagination happens naturally. Envisioning is the realm of the future, of freedom, where new possibilities can break in. Each and every human being possesses the enormous gift of imagination; imagination is utterly democratic: The greater the diversity of the people involved, the stronger the collective imaginative capacity. Oliver Wendell Holmes suggested long ago that "a mind once stretched by a new idea never regains its original dimensions."

### **Create**

For imagination to help create community change, it needs to be embodied in something concrete and practical, a *visible outcome* that inspires more people to invest themselves in making a difference. E.g. when parents graduate from a parent training program and invite their family and friends to graduation, the word spreads that successful learning is possible and leads to great rewards. The parents become ambassadors for developing the next generation of parent educators. When students create exhibits that enable other students to learn about a topic, they are transformed into teachers of their peers. Their

personal self-esteem and understanding of the topic is enhanced but so is the educational interest and knowledge base of the whole school. When grass roots leaders articulate their visions for community change and create imaginative community development projects they design, their confidence and skill level grow. The visible outcomes and expanded volunteer effort attract the commitment of other individuals who see it's possible to make a difference.

To see the future as viable, people need an active sense that our lives and contribution count, that our choices make a difference to the outcome. When our ideas are listened to, when we are invited to share what we see and care about, something new happens. Latent ideas come into clear consciousness. The sharing of ideas and lives inspires deeper thinking and questions and innovation. Communities of interest become identified to one another. Democracy gets re-discovered as a creative activity. Government and citizens become more innovative and accountable partners.

Creating builds confidence in our power to transform. As Thomas Merton once noted, "Living is more than submission; it is creation. Once we begin to change this street and this city, we begin to discover our power to transform the world."



#### Imagine Chicago's Institutional structure

Imagine Chicago is a non-for-profit corporation with 501©3 status. That decision was made a year after Imagine Chicago began its work, once the design team determined there was something of value worth institutionalizing. Its legal structure has facilitated eligibility for philanthropic support. Imagine Chicago's

board consists of highly respected and well-networked interdisciplinary thinkers who provide strategic oversight and serve as brainstorming partners and connectors.

Imagine Chicago has functioned primarily as a catalyst and lead partner of collaborations involving multiple organizations, creating opportunities for sharing understanding and resources that lead to social innovation. The networks encourage learning by bringing together different discourses, practices and understandings around a common goal. Imagine Chicago is an organization with very open boundaries with respect to how it does its work and who does it; its operating structure is constantly reconstituted.

Each project has begun with a design team gathering around a powerful idea, question or topic, attracting unusual and interested partners, and devoting many months to brainstorming possibilities before making any project or institutional decisions or funding requests. Good information technology and administrative support have been critical to continuity and effective organization of key documents, financial systems and databases. We were very fortunate in having a foundation executive early on recognize this and provide critical funding for developing excellent, flexible administrative systems. This allowed Imagine Chicago to serve as an effective fiscal agent in the partnerships it brought together.

Imagine Chicago's staff has been intentionally tiny (two to five employees depending on the level of program commitments) and comprised primarily of the founder working with young interns on a rotating basis. This has modeled the intergenerational, intercultural partnership we value, renewed and expanded the organization with a constant source of fresh ideas and energy, and been cost efficient. Staying small has also precluded doing other people's work for them rather than empowering communities and partner organizations to do their own work. Key decisions have tended to be made jointly, often on the fly, in the absence of clarified roles.

As in many "postmodern" organizations, Imagine Chicago has leveraged extensive networks of friends across a wide range of sectors, and encouraged and relied on volunteers. This is evident not only in the board but also in the many highly experienced volunteers who contribute invaluable professional services and ideas. Permeable staff/volunteer boundaries allow responsiveness, creativity, flexible work roles and a high degree of production innovation and diversity. Authority resides not in position or compensation but in the ability to add value through knowledge creation and application in a changing mosaic of project teams.

Since boundaries are permeable and relationships continually shift, Imagine Chicago has devoted many meetings to redefining its programs and strategies. A simple mission, "to cultivate hope and civic engagement" has made it possible to have many partners and projects, and for them to inform each other. It has, at times, been quite challenging to maintaining a coherent sense of purpose given multiple diverse and loosely coupled projects. The multifaceted nature of the work has challenged and stretched understanding of organizational identity; the nature of the particular partnerships has affected the organization of the work and services. After many tries, the board finally abandoned the attempt to create a strategic plan, realizing that the organic and socially constructed nature of Imagine Chicago defies strategic ordering in advance except on a project basis. We listen for the future as it emerges and comes into view.

The role of the leader in the organization (which, in this case, has been Imagine Chicago's founder, Bliss Browne, since the beginning) has been to articulate and interpret the core ideas and values, build consensus around the mission that includes voices of diverse constituencies, listen for high value emergent initiatives, weave diverse voices and projects together, identify potential partners, and lead process and project design. The most important leadership skill has been effective communication—generating interesting and inspiring questions, active listening, an ability to speak and interpret multiple languages of the diverse communities that constitute the virtual organization (speaking "corporate" to funders and business partners and "mom speak" to parents struggling to raise their kids), organizing effective ways to gather and synthesize information from program partners and participants, embodying effective bridge building, and articulating the mission in constructive language. We have tried to develop an effective website and to discipline ourselves to post to it tools and resources as they were developed so they could be used by others.

Imagine Chicago thrives on understanding, imagining and creating. Imagine... an economy in which nothing and no one is wasted. Imagine... a city in which everyone, young and old, rich and poor, talk and work together, encouraged and equipped to contribute their unique energy and vision to shaping the way forward. Imagine... reconstituting democracy as a creative activity in which everyone participates. It has been thrilling to watch the global Imagine movement come to birth and grow. Imagine Chicago has resisted defining an Imagine "blueprint," preferring stories and questions to formulas and methodologies. 'Imagine' - the word itself - calls us to connect to potential, wonder, the power and the beauty of the unknown. It evokes feelings of hope and opens a limitless space of creativity and possibility. Imagination is the realm of the future, utterly democratic, not determined by current arrangements. Imagine what more is still possible...

[www.imaginechicago.org](http://www.imaginechicago.org)

- Imagine Englewood if... ( a community in Chicago, IL)

## The Imagine Englewood if.. Story



It was a typical summer day in Englewood: kids were playing on front lawns, older residents were sitting on their front porches sharing stories, and at a distance a group of teenagers was involved in a heated basketball game. It was on a day like this that Jean Carter-Hill, a long-time resident of Englewood, made her usual visit to the Boulevard Arts Center. As she looked at the art pieces on display, something caught her eye – a flyer

for Imagine’s Chicago Citizen Leaders Program. Jean decided it was something that she would like to try. From that moment on, neither she nor her community would ever be the same.

Jean discussed the program opportunity with her long-time friend, Helen Arnold-Massey. They agreed that the program could produce significant results. Their church, Mount Carmel CME Church, agreed to serve as the required fiscal agent for a neighborhood innovation they would design and create. “We all knew that something needed to be done,” recalled Jean. “We just hoped the Citizen Leaders Program would show us how.”

Within no time, the Englewood community had a team of neighborhood leaders, youth representatives, and interested citizens all seeking ways to transform Englewood. Every month, Jean picked up seven team members from Englewood and drove to Imagine Chicago’s downtown office. They decided on the slogan, “Imagine Englewood if...”, in hopes that it would inspire their neighbors to think creatively about their community. Jean and Helen decided that for their project, they would sponsor Family Health nights in which families could come together for a nutritious meal, discuss health issues and take a walking tour of the whole neighborhood. “We walked around to see what was going on, what was there and what needed to be done to make it a better place to live,” said Jean. They would then share the celebrations of the community like promotions, retirements, and graduations before each meeting began.

After gaining new leadership tools and resources, the group hosted meetings throughout Englewood. Once people started hearing about the program, more and more people wanted to participate. Helen and Jean, working with Imagine Chicago, led Citizen Leaders classes just for Englewood residents. Many community innovations were created. Citizen leaders from the first IEi class became mentors and board members for the next class.

But after a year, people gradually lost interest in the Citizen Leaders meetings. “The spirit was dying... I didn’t want that to happen,” said Jean. She decided to introduce “Make a Difference Day” to the Englewood community. Participants went on group tours to key locations in the community, such as parks, youth centers, and medical facilities. The organizing team collaborated with the Department of Human Resources and the Park District to provide each participant with information about community assets. The event concluded with panel discussions for children, teenagers, and adults about urgent issues, including education, health care, and safety. The day not only connected 750 Englewood residents to community resources, but it also ignited a desire to collaborate and create a community of which its citizens could be proud.



IEi continues to thrive. It has attracted many new partners including The Jewish Council, Rebirth of Englewood, Youth Possibility, Community Action Policing Services, and Nicholson School. IEi has also been visited by an international team of community activists from Birmingham, England and Vejle, Denmark. Developing and sustaining Imagine Englewood if... has taken Jean and her peers on a journey, in which they have redefined what it means to be part of a community. “Initially, I thought that people didn’t care.

But over the years, I have realized a lot of people do care, but they don’t know what to do,” said Jean. “People just need to communicate, connect and collaborate. It is only then that they will feel differently towards each other and be able to transform the communities they call home.”

In 2006, a community garden in Englewood was named for Jean. A local newspaper chronicled the progress of Imagine Englewood if... in June 2006 with the following story:

***Englewood Garden Honors Community Leader***

*At the Jean Carter-Hill Community Garden in Englewood, banks of flower beds curve around an open green space and stone paths lead to a tree-shaded corner with two small circles of wood benches*

*The community-school garden at Nicholson School, 6006 S. Peoria, is a site for learning and community service for 8th grade students of math and science teacher Belinda Childrey. Students learn about growing and gain a sense of accomplishment and ownership, Childrey said. "They work hard on the garden," she said, and they come back to visit it years after graduation. "It's part of them."*



*Students named the garden for Hill in 2004 when she retired as school-community representative at Nicholson after 25 years in Englewood Schools. Hill and Imagine Englewood If..., the group she co-founded with another Nicholson teacher in 1997, pulled together partners for the garden ranging from the school and the neighboring New Canaan Land MB Church to the Chicago Botanical Garden and the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs.*

*Hill turned to the schoolyard as a community garden site after lead levels were too high at a nearby vacant lot and a churchyard. Lead levels are still too high at the school to grow vegetables, but not to work in the soil.*

*With Englewood leading the city in lead contamination levels, it's one of the issues that Imagine Englewood If... has taken up. "People are growing gardens and planting vegetables and don't realize there's lead in the soil," Hill said. The lead problem is compounded because community and home gardens are a possible response to another concern of the group -- the lack of availability of healthy food in Englewood.*

*"We took the kids to the neighborhood stores looking for vegetables," Hill said. "We told them to write down what they saw. "All chips and candy. Way in back there might be a bruised banana or a potato."*

*Then they took the children to a South Loop supermarket. "Their eyes got so big," Hill said. "They told us, 'I've never seen anything like this.'"*

*Imagine Englewood If... holds town meetings on issues of concern as well as an annual volunteer recognition ceremony.*

*At Nicholson's graduation on June 12 (10 a.m. at New Canaan Church, 5957 S. Peoria), Childrey will be giving out the Jean Carter-Hill Award for community service. "It's for children who go above and beyond," said Childrey. "That's what Jean does all the time. She's always working for the community and for the children."*

*Afterwards students take graduation pictures in the garden, Childrey said."*

*The Jean Carter-Hill Community Garden will hold community volunteer days starting at 1 p.m. on June 13 and 27, July 11 and 25, and August 8 and 22. "*

An interview with Jean at [www.youtube.com/view\\_play\\_list?p=E77FB7F91A53E458-47k](http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=E77FB7F91A53E458-47k). Lots more about *Imagine Englewood if* can be found at [www.imagineenglewoodif.org](http://www.imagineenglewoodif.org)

***Indiana:***

- IMAGINE CASS COUNTY (C.A.R.E. Campaign)

From March-December 2003, the United Ways of Cass County and of Porter County developed AI protocols and engaged large segments of the local population in reflecting on community strengths and ways to build community capacity. Thousands of interviews were conducted, evaluated and summarized, with each process culminating in a community summit. The pilots developed new partnerships, provided important new models for civic conversation about community priorities, and enhanced the reputation of United Way as a community building organization.

The Cass County C.A.R.E. Campaign design team worked to develop an assessment tool that incorporated the use of Appreciative Inquiry, which reframes community assessment as a values-based community building process rather than a deficit-oriented data gathering campaign. This state-of-the-art process incorporates a more future-oriented, solutions-oriented focus with richer dialogue and ownership into the design. The C.A.R.E. Campaign was designed to draw attention to strengths upon which our community can build, the opportunities and community visions there are to realize, and energize and engage community ownership.

The design team was fortunate to be able to work hand in hand with Bliss Browne, creator of Imagine Chicago, throughout this process. Bliss assisted our team in goal refinement, evaluation strategies, and interview and focus protocols all in an effort to make this campaign as effective and successful as possible. Bliss returned to Cass County for our community summit which magnified and shared ideas gathered through our interviews with a larger audience, and brought the community together to deepen our community's commitment to living out the process of appreciative inquiry and bringing our community together for the common good. The process sequence was as follows:

1. Planning Committee sets structure of process (Feb-March)
2. Board Meeting—introduce concept of AI and Community Assessment (March)
3. Select and Recruit Design Team (March-April)
4. Design Team meetings: (April-June)
  - a) Decides topics
  - b) Designs questions
  - c) Determines format
  - d) Decides target sites for broadest community engagement
  - e) Assigns roles and responsibilities for implementation
5. Design team leads focus groups throughout the community (August-October)
6. Community Summit to create vision for future & develop action plans (November)
7. Report to the Community (in multiple formats) – January 2004
8. United Way follow through with and/or facilitate implementation of action plans – ongoing

## 9. Presentation of findings to State leaders conference March 2004

### ***Design Team Meetings***

A broad based design team was engaged to lead the process, with people selected on the basis of their likely interest and their willingness to engage constituencies with which they had connections and see that they could be a part of making something happen in the community. The design team was critical to the project's success. It was important to get the right people on it. Interested United Way board members were crucial. Other community leaders were also critical so it became a community owned process. Regular meetings (monthly then weekly toward the end) were held. Team members took responsibility for identifying interview sites, leading interview processes, data collection, and publicity. The CARE Campaign was designed to reach a broad audience, with Design Team members key to reaching as many people as possible through the recruiting and training of other interviewers. The focus throughout was on giving many people a chance to talk and be heard.

Regular, unequivocally enthusiastic communication with the design team set a tone of active participation. Attention at each meeting was also put on publicity targeted at the broader community with the intent of reaching a wide audience. The intent of the promotions was to inform the community of the CARE Campaign (launch the campaign), to invite them to be interviewed or do interviewing, and to encourage and invite participation in the summit. Information about the C.A.R.E. Campaign and/or Appreciative Inquiry was also made available on the United Way of Cass County's website at [www.unitedway.cqc.com](http://www.unitedway.cqc.com)

### **Interview Findings**

During September and October of 2003, United Way of Cass County's C.A.R.E. Campaign volunteers conducted nearly 2,000 individual interviews of various residents and workers in Cass County. Although the interviews were dialogues on life in Cass County and as such represented very personal subjective thoughts, the steering committee attempted to draw a number of generalizations from the interviews as a whole. A representative 500 interviews were spread across age groups from teen to 65+ and included both Caucasian and Latino individuals.

General themes emerged from the interviews as important to the quality of life in Cass County and as reasons for moving here and living here. In rank order they are:

1. The importance and closeness of family ties;
2. The abundance and variety of activities for youth;
3. The general small town atmosphere and friends for support;
4. The quality of the school systems; the comfort level of having been born and raised here;
5. The desire to find a job here or work in this environment;
6. The feeling of safety and security perceived in this environment;
7. The overall friendliness of the people; and finally
8. The importance of church and church related activities on family life.

Also mentioned, but not as frequently, were the variety of community events, the importance of 4-H and YMCA programs for youth, and the quality of the parks for family recreation.

The six most frequently mentioned community advantages were consistent across all age levels, with the importance and closeness of family ties ranking number 1 overall and with each of the Caucasian subgroups. Number 1 for Latinos was the desire for more and better jobs. With that exception, overall responses for the top six were consistent, although priorities varied slightly.

The quantity and variety of youth activities provided by the schools, 4-H, the “Y”, scouting, and church youth groups were cited over and over again as a strength throughout the county.

Personal and individual friendships also ranked high in determining the comfort level of respondents, and this combined with the small town atmosphere and the accompanying feelings of safety were ongoing themes throughout the interviews.

Finally, the quality of the schools was mentioned repeatedly as an important factor by all age levels and was ranked second in importance by Hispanics.

The most frequently mentioned images by Caucasians were the fire at the Galveston Methodist Church and how it brought people together, farmers helping farmers in times of family crisis, the Cole Hardwood fire and how it brought people together, and finally, the Carousel as a positive family oriented community image. There were no consistent images named by Latino respondents, who have typically arrived in Cass County quite recently.

When asked what areas of the community might be strengthened, the responses were fairly consistent and ranked in this order;

1. The need for additional activities for teenagers
2. Additional and varied attractions for all ages
3. More and better jobs, (top ranked by Latinos.)
4. Increased retail shopping opportunities and dine-in restaurants and
5. A greater emphasis on improving the aesthetics of the community .

Four other areas cited to strengthen the community are worth mentioning.

1. Some type of welcoming events or organization to help newcomers become acclimated into the community.
2. A variety of avenues to help youth become involved in the community – volunteerism, community service projects, caring enough to give something back instead of always being a consumer.
3. Despite a general feeling of safety in the community, a need for better and/or more efficient law enforcement, and finally,
4. A desire to see efforts made to strengthen cultural connections and understanding (expressed by both Caucasian and Latino respondents. ) Latinos also expressed a

need for more and better daycare and the need for additional activities for young adults (those past their teen years).

Seven issues stood out in the area of community collaboration. The dominant one was the theme of people coming together to help others. This was illustrated by various stories of people helping others in times of crises (this summer's flooding, the Cole Hardwood and Galveston Methodist Church fires, deaths or serious illnesses in families, severe snow storms, etc) or people in general working to help the needy with food and clothing drives. The community outpouring of support and patriotism following the 9/11 attacks also formed a consistent story. There were also times of joy and happiness that brought people together such as athletic championships, various volunteer projects, and the county fair.

Only one separate theme repeated itself solely in the area of youth participation, and that was the skate park. Most of the youth participation was included in other areas with a strong emphasis on the importance of school sports and activities; church youth group activities, 4-H, YMCA, and scouting activities. These were all considered great strengths, but even so, a number of respondents seemed unaware of the many opportunities that are available, expressing the need for greater communication of the possibilities that are here. From the Hispanic respondents there was an emphasis on the need for youth clubs, perhaps reflective of something present in their cultural experiences nor currently available in Cass County.

When asked who should attend the Community Summit, individuals uniformly answered it would be more meaningful for them if their family and friends attended with them. This was consistent across all age levels and cultural groups.

In answer to the question of what would make the Community Summit worthwhile, the desire to make a difference and benefit the community dominated the responses. The expectation of seeing definite results was also important and was ranked number 1 by the two younger age categories and by Latinos. Many also expressed the need to connect with others of similar interests and to explore the idea of community involvement. A few saw participation as a way to benefit themselves or their family, and still others simply thought it might be fun.

### *Community summit*



A community summit was held on November 15, having been rescheduled from September to accommodate the large numbers of people who had asked to participate in the interview process. The summit was designed to bring

alive the stories and themes which had surfaced in the inquiry process, and to represent in multiple media what people had shared. The executive summary was discussed and visually represented in charts and graphs; positive images of Cass County were represented in student videos and art montages. The summit meeting room was surrounded by powerful quotations taken from the interview transcripts and maps of the county. The space deeply honored the scope of work that had been done, and the range of perspectives that had been brought to consciousness as a result. The range of participants was also noteworthy – young and old, Caucasian and Latino, curious mall walkers and dedicated service providers, in short, not just the usual suspects. The room was a hope map of what was possible and what had already been created.

### *Lessons learned*

- *A project like this changes the perception of many* in the community that the role of the United Way is to be just a fundraiser. This helped the community recognize United Way as a vital piece to the larger community puzzle that is engaged in building community capacities.
- *The process develops new relationships.* New relationships with Faith-Based organizations were initiated through the involvement of the Catholic priest that served on the design team. The UW earned his respect as a community building organization and will be a point of contact in the faith-based community to help bring human service organizations and faith-based organizations together to improve the quality of life and overall wellness of the people of the community. This will be an especially strong relationship because the conclusions cited above of what makes our community strong all come down to the values that people have within them, their families, and their friends. Many times a potential donor will not give to the United Way because they give to their church. We have a lot of work to do to help the churches understand how we can help the community together.
- *Many factors contributed to the pilot's success.* These included strong existing relationships; and the credibility and trust the community has for the United Way. The UWCC has developed initiatives over the past 5 years that have brought various community leaders and organizations together to assess and address issues. This project benefited from and extended that trust and reputation.
- *It is too early in the process to determine how the pilot will change the application of resources* To date, this has not been discussed in regard to our traditional funding of member agencies. However, there has been discussion in regard to the possibility of offering stipends for start up funds to address identified issues. In addition, there will be discussion in regard to leveraging funds through grants and foundations with the use of the assessment.
- *Action needs to follow soon* since community expectations are currently high. We have inquired with the community and come to some conclusions through those inquiries of what the community wants; some ideas have been shared both through the interviews and the summit. The hope should be to strengthen the partner organizations, using the information to write grants, to solicit volunteers, to collaborate with other organizations.

***Why would we tell another United Way who wants to undertake this project?*** That this process is effective

- To inquire what the community wants and is
- To realize what the community wants and is
- To build new or strengthen current relationships
- To do community visioning
- To form collaborations
- To gather current information for use in writing grants, making grants, recruiting business, recruiting professionals
- To focus on the best things about your community, build on them, and emphasize and amplify them.
- To expand the identity of the United Way
- To identify new things to do and new ways to do them

You can do this! And if you want to do this, we can help! This is time consuming and develops a mind of its own. You have to be aware of that and be flexible.

- Don't have expectations. If there are then you will guide the process and influence the findings.
- Picking the right people from the beginning for the design team is important!
- You can catch more with honey than vinegar. Positive mindset and determination are important! Expect people to have a difficult time understanding the non-traditional ways of thinking!
- When people concentrate on the positive, it creates energy and a feeling you don't get from needs analysis. And it gets new people involved.

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- Imagine Porter County

### **PROJECT GOALS**

- A. Generate wider community involvement, ownership and partnership with United Way of Porter County.
- B. Build civic identity about and commitment to Porter County as a whole.
- C. Enhance the communications practices of United Way of Porter County.
- D. Strengthen the infrastructure for volunteerism in Porter County.
- E. Identify common values and opportunities for community investment.

### **IMPLEMENTATION TIMETABLE**

January 2003 – UW board buy-in and application for funding to IAUIW  
February 2003 – Determine project scope and timetable with consultant  
March, 2003—Select and recruit DESIGN TEAM; name project

Our Design Team was comprised of twenty individuals, who represented all segments of the community: business, industry, media, government, judicial, education, retirees, nonprofits, workforce development, labor, community volunteers, our community foundation, and United Way Board and staff. We also had a social work intern from Valparaiso University as part of the team. We entitled the project Imagine Porter County.

#### April, May, June, 2003—PLANNING AND DESIGN

The Design Team met every 2-3 weeks during the months of April to June. They developed interview protocols, selected topics, designed and tested questions, determined the interviewing format, and identified target groups. They decided that we would use a group format with a trained facilitator. We would approach existing groups and ask for time on their agenda to administer the IMAGINE PORTER COUNTY (IPC) questionnaire. While that would be the primary method of collecting data, we would also conduct individual interviews, mail surveys, and on-line website surveys.

Our goal was to interview groups of all ages (from adolescents to seniors) and from all sectors (geographic, cultural, social, and economic). We added a demographic section to the survey to track this information. A Spanish language version was developed as well as a questionnaire for youth.

#### July through November, 2003—INTERVIEWING

We sent out news releases about IPC, had a news feature about the project, and highlighted IPC on our website. We interviewed during the month of July through November, with the majority of the groups being facilitated in September and October.

IPC was conducted with 28 groups, with approximately 500 participants.

#### September 26, 2003—**IMAGINE PORTER COUNTY COMMUNITY SUMMIT**

We held a community leadership summit on September 26, 2003, with about 65 people in attendance. At the summit we reviewed the information we had collected to date from IPC participants. We also had a presentation from youth leaders, who talked about their experience, and what they had learned from their involvement with IPC. Over 70% of the summit attendees gave the highest marks to the youth presentation on the evaluations.

We highlighted individual stories and developed a collective vision for the future. Finally, we asked the summit participants not only to envision their future hopes but also to explore what elements would be necessary to bring their ideas to life.

#### October, 2003—**REVIEW**

The Design Team met to review the evaluations and summary information from the summit. All the participants felt that IPC was a valuable process. The Team discussed their reactions to the entire IPC process.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

- ◆ We learned that people truly care about their community and the families who live here. They value what Porter County has to offer. They want to preserve this heritage but also want to make Porter County an even better place for their children and grandchildren.
- ◆ Hopes for the Future:
  1. Economic Development and Jobs—This is not surprising in an area of high unemployment due to steel bankruptcies and downsizing.
  2. Activities which Strengthen Families—These include intergenerational volunteer opportunities and recreational activities.
  3. Acceptance of Diversity—In a county that is 96% white, more diversity and acceptance of diversity was the # 3 hope for the future.
  4. Public Transportation and Affordable Housing—These were areas to be developed.
- ◆ IPC allowed for a variety of approaches to interviewing: groups, individual, mail, or on-line.  
The ideal situation is one that allows for conversation between two or more people, but all information learned was valuable.
- ◆ The process generates enthusiasm, and one group often leads to another, as people become excited about the process.
- ◆ People appreciate being asked to share their experiences.
- ◆ The process worked with every group, but no two groups were the same. The facilitators need to be flexible and creative. We also needed to adapt the questionnaire for youth and Spanish-speaking individuals.
- ◆ We did not have enough facilitators. We had trained several individuals who were free during the summer months, but the groups did not start gaining momentum until September.  
United Way staff and our intern did most of the facilitation.
- ◆ Timing is crucial. Interviewing should be done in the spring and early summer, not campaign time. There was not enough staff time to devote to contacting groups, and some people became confused and thought we wanted to do campaign presentations.

- ◆ IMAGINE PORTER COUNTY gave UW credibility as a “listening and open” organization.
- ◆ Look for “sparklers” for your team, those who are positive and enthusiastic and are strongly supportive of the project. They should also have the ability and inclination to spread the word about your project throughout the community. Some individuals had a hard time accepting appreciative inquiry as a valid assessment tool for United Way because it was not concrete enough. We lost some people along the way. A suggestion would be to have a smaller team in the planning stages and expand it during the implementation stage.
- ◆ Access to leadership was sometimes problematic. It was difficult to convince employers to free-up enough employee time to conduct the interviews.
- ◆ At this point it is too soon to tell how or if IPC will affect the allocations process. The Planning Committee of the Board will be reviewing the results of IPC, as well as our previous needs assessment documents. I believe that the next step will be the formation of Vision Councils, who will study the issues and topics raised by IPC and then make recommendations to the United Way of Porter County Board of Directors.

**Concluding thoughts:** IMAGINE PORTER COUNTY is a civic conversation model, and the information learned forms a foundation for future planning processes. The next stage is to move beyond dialogue into action. United Way of Porter County will take a leadership role in this community-building process, but it will take multiple partners to make the shared visions a reality. We believe that we have accomplished the following:

- ◆ We created a shared vision for the future of Porter County with inspiring content.
- ◆ We created a process for working together that expands our partnerships and deepens engagement.
- ◆ We modeled an appreciative and inclusive way of thinking that is open to possibilities and creates hope for the future.

***Massachusetts:***

- Imagine Boston

**History and Inspiration**

Imagine Boston was a new civic engagement initiative to forge connections across boundaries and to include youth as civic partners in the process based on the intergenerational experience of Imagine Chicago. That interview process showed that the very best interviews, the most inspiring stories and examples, the boldest images of the future, were conducted by youth.

**Why Imagine Boston now?**

As Boston knits itself together physically with the completion of the “Big Dig”, this is a fortuitous time to strengthen the social fabric of our city. The work done in Chicago has inspired “Imagine” projects around the world. We propose a model that draws on the best practices and learnings from these projects and is suited to our city at this time. In our model, we include intergenerational interviewing as one of our core processes and we work from an appreciative stance, seeking stories of moments when we were at our best, of overcoming challenges, of making a positive difference and we ask, “How do we get more of it?”; “How do we make this a city where the exceptional moments are the norm?”

According to the 2004 Indicators Report of the Boston Foundation:

Greater Boston's civic culture has been identified as fractious, exclusionary and "lacking the collaborative gene." Following a major scan of the region, the report [\*Boston Unbound\*](#) found that Greater Boston - unlike many of its competitor regions in the US - is hobbled by a competitive, fragmented and parochial civic culture that does not promote collaborative problem-solving, the mentoring and inclusion of new leadership, or the integration of best practices from elsewhere. The authors of the report cite the need for more inclusive civic structures with new and more diverse leadership on issues of critical importance to the city . . .

We question whether the collaborative gene is truly lacking in Boston’s DNA; we expect that it is just dormant. We believe that an intergenerational civic engagement project could help awaken and nurture our collaborative capacity. We envision a process that would involve teams of children and young adults (possibly City Year members or Americorps volunteers) as their mentors in partnership with existing community organizations engaging members of the community in conversations about the many aspects of city life. It could be an opportunity to gather stories about school, neighborhood or the city at its best and how it could be even better in the future. These stories that highlight our many strengths and successes, and express our hopes and dreams for the future, would be shared in neighborhoods, libraries, and other civic venues where people, old and young, can find ways to work together to make a positive difference.

Our model rests on the assumptions that:

- Each of us has a role to play in creating and shaping the city’s future as a positive place for ourselves and each other.
- A positive, appreciative approach to community change draws on the best of our past and present and ignites the imagination of what the future could be.
- A positive image of the future is a powerful stimulus for collaborative action.
- It is essential to provide significant leadership opportunities for youth as they have a role to play *right now* and most clearly represent our future.
- Looking in the eyes of a youth who is asking positive questions about your best experiences, your hopes and dreams for the future makes it very difficult to be cynical or disingenuous in your response.

#### An Imagine Boston Pilot Project

So we start with youth. The following description of an Imagine Boston pilot project demonstrates our model and our commitment for developing young leaders who acquire the skills for shaping their own future and for becoming engaged in shaping their communities.

#### *Three Saturdays and a WOW!*

Imagine yourself as a freshman in High School. You think that someday you might like to be a writer, an artist, a policewoman, a lawyer, a teacher, or maybe a doctor. As this young girl, you have an opportunity to spend a few hours with someone who is living your dream. You interview the Mayor of your city and discover that she grew up in a housing project, or talk with the Latina physician or artist and learn that both struggled with learning a new language and not being included as school children because they were “different”. You learn that the lawyer in a major Boston law firm was not an A student, that the Superintendent of Schools had to overcome her shyness. You hear the excitement in their voices as the policewoman tells you about the time she found a missing toddler and reunited him with his mom and the landscape architect tells you how a seemingly simple idea she had of placing benches in an open space had a huge impact on creating community and made her realize how her particular vision could make a contribution to the life of the city.

It was the third Saturday of an Imagine Boston pilot project, “Three Saturdays and a WOW!”, and the atmosphere was electric. This program originated with a call from the housemaster at a high school in a working class community in Greater Boston. She was concerned that too many girls were underachieving, making poor choices in their lives, or possibly dropping out of school. We met with her, proposed a pilot leadership program that could accommodate the constraints of time as the end of the school year approached. We suggested she invite girls whom she or her faculty was concerned about and who showed some spark of leadership. The invitation went out and we met with a diverse group of girls on three Saturdays from 9-3:30. (They were diverse along many parameters: ethnically, academically, behaviorally, and in terms of their confidence and social skills.)

They were told that they were invited to participate in this program because someone had seen a spark of leadership in them. They greeted this news with great skepticism and so the focus of our first day together was to discover that “spark” that someone in their school had seen in each of them. We did this through a variety of activities including paired interviews and story-telling. During the week, each girl interviewed at least one female adult she knew—a parent, friend, or

teacher, to discover what she could learn from their life experiences. They asked questions about how that person's family came to America and what helped them thrive in a new country, about their high point experiences, challenges they had overcome, and hopes for the future. On our second Saturday, we shared the stories from their interviews and began to craft our own story of leadership. For our third round, we asked the girls to let us know whom they might like to interview and to help create an interview protocol. Except for a woman firefighter, we found people in all the careers that interested the girls and eleven amazing women took time on a Saturday to come to the school to be interviewed. They were each interviewed by one or two girls and everyone participated in a lively conversation afterwards as they shared stories and lessons learned. The conversation continued over lunch and as our guests left, email addresses were exchanged and invitations to keep in touch were offered. The girl who hopes to be a writer was invited by the author she interviewed to send her one of her stories and she would read it and give her feedback. Guests, parents, friends, and relatives of the girls were invited to the WOW!--a celebration that included a presentation by the girls of what they had learned.

Three Saturdays is not a lot of time to build leadership skills. Yet our experience suggests it is a powerful beginning. As the girls moved through each round of interviews we saw them develop more poise and confidence. They came to appreciate their own gifts. They forged connections with people whom they came to know as not so different from themselves—some had humble beginnings, some came from other cultures, struggled with language, all overcame obstacles and achieved a great deal through hard work, persistence, and the courage to pursue their dreams.

Since this first pilot we have developed our model further. We discovered how hard it can be for some youth to imagine a positive future for themselves. We have begun to believe that imagination is an endangered species in great need of nurturing and have made it a central part of our core mission to create an experience that inspires youth to craft their own personal narratives of hope and possibility and help them create a roadmap for achieving their dreams. We believe that meaningful connections across generations, even in this brief event, began the creation of just such a narrative for our participants. As the aspiring artist in our group completed her interview with an accomplished artist, we asked, "How was that?" She smiled, put her hand on her heart, took a deep breath and said, "Inspiring." And indeed it was.

We have followed up on the results of this intervention and found it to be more powerful than we ever expected. In a three-month follow-up "reunion" with this first group of participants, we began to understand the impact of even this brief experience when one of the girls said, "This program should be for everyone because everybody has a spark of leadership." In a one-year follow-up meeting with the Housemaster, she indicated that participants in this pilot and the one that followed have made significant gains. She would like to see this program for every High School freshman. Several very shy girls have found a place at the High School. They are no longer sitting alone in the cafeteria and have friends and connections. One, in particular, has really blossomed. She joined a drama club and went with them on a field trip to New York—a huge step for her! Several of the girls have taken on a leadership role in school and community activities. Our most skeptical participant expressed a strong interest in Japanese cartooning known as Anime but in our group she could only see roadblocks and dead-ends as she talked about her future. This winter, she approached her Housemaster saying she wanted to start an after-school Anime club. She presented an agenda for the first meeting she wanted to hold, asked for a room and a faculty advisor. Her request was

granted, fifty students showed up and the club has been going strong. At her initiative, members attended a local Anime conference. We suggest that our model is one way to help youth believe in the power of their dreams and take steps to achieve them.

While speaking with the Housemaster, she heard the voice of one of our participants in the next room and invited her to come in. It was a delightful surprise to see her as she walked into the room. She used to come to our group (in May) hiding herself in a quilted down parka. This day she was dressed with great flair and pizzazz in a spring green shirt with a matching flower jauntily tucked behind her ear. When she saw us she asked, “Are you here to start a new group?” We asked if she thought we should, and she replied, “Yes, it was AWESOME!” “How had her experience in our group helped her?” we asked. She said that it opened her eyes and made her want to better herself and to try new things. When teachers at school used to tell her something good about herself she didn’t believe them and thought they were just saying that to “fix” her. In our group she came to realize that she really did have a “spark” of leadership. As we were talking, she eyed some of the posters on the bulletin board promoting opportunities for youth. She said that she used to look at those and think they were “cheesy”. Now she looks at them and thinks about what she might like to try next.

Imagine Boston is not about “fixing” kids; it is about recognizing youth as a resource, respecting their developmental needs, their potential for contributing to society, and their wisdom. We would like to see all youth imagine a positive future for themselves and to believe in their power to create that future. Among the questions that we posed to our group were: “Why should grown-ups listen to kids? What is it that kids know that the world needs to hear?” It turns out that they know a lot about the very things that keep adults up at night worrying. They know about drugs, teen pregnancy, teen suicide, and behaviors they see by peers and adults that are exclusionary or make them feel inferior. They need to have a voice in contributing to finding solutions to societal problems. Therefore, we have a particular commitment to developing youth leadership skills and creating opportunities for them to participate as full civic partners in shaping our communities and our city.

#### The larger Imagine Boston vision

We see this youth leadership project as one building block of Imagine Boston’s mission to cultivate civic engagement and social capital by forging connections across boundaries (of generations, of neighborhood, race, class, and any others that tend to keep us apart) through conversations that matter and that lead to collaborative action. Using our strength-based approach including paired inter-generational interviews that inquire into stories of success and best practices, we envision a story-gathering project. We see youth in a leadership role as the gatherers of stories that reconnect us with our own and each others gifts and assets.

We believe that a city is shaped by its stories, those that are told and those that are waiting to be told. Boston is a city of people representing over 100 different ethnic groups and nationalities. There is no one history of a great city; it is his story, her story, all our stories that shape our understanding of what was, what is, and what could be.

Imagine a corps of young people representing the many neighborhoods, ethnicities, and cultural richness of Boston discovering their own personal, family, and community history and meeting with adults from around the city to gather their stories—stories of people who have come to Boston from all over the world, stories of why they came, of what helped them survive and thrive, of what they bring with them that enriches our city. Imagine collecting stories of people’s contributions to the life of the city – ideas they had, policies they promoted, and actions they took. Imagine asking people to express their hopes and wishes for the city and then asking, “What part are you willing to play to make that happen?” It could be a new kind of history that taps into the DNA of city life at its most robust, anticipates its fondest hopes, and invites participation in bringing those hopes to life.

Many stories will be told in words; others, in drawings, photographs, music, or dance. We begin to look at the city with new eyes. It is no longer just our textbook history but rather a tapestry, a mosaic, a quilt of experiences, memories, and perceptions. We become tourists in our own city, exploring our past, discovering our uniqueness, appreciating our cultural richness, and imagining new possibilities for our future. Through these stories we begin to rediscover our city and look at it with an appreciative eye.

Imagine Boston will convene the story gatherers and the story tellers to meet in groups around the city to share the highlights of the stories and to make meaning of them together. What are we learning about who we are at our best and what are the compelling visions of what we might become? What are the stories telling us that help us envision the communities and city we want? And what is it that we are willing to do together to realize that vision? Story by story, we connect with one another and become a more engaged citizenry who see ourselves as stewards of our city and shapers of its most desired future. Imagine that! Imagine Boston!

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### **Michigan:**

- Imagine Detroit (Michigan)

Imagine Detroit was a two year project founded in 2001 modeled on the Imagine Chicago intergenerational interviews. Its goal was to help foster healthy relationships between the community and its youth as a catalyst for sparking positive change and a fun interactive way for youth to enhance their social skills. Imagine Detroit designed a city-wide interview process in which young people from all over Detroit were trained in Appreciative Inquiry and set up interviews with some of the city's most interesting leaders, activists and politicians.

Imagine Detroit was launched by Mark Craig, a successful business entrepreneur, and led by Tim Wilborn, the youngest interviewer in the original Imagine Chicago process. Tim created training materials for Imagine Detroit including an Interview protocol, youth training agendas and adult/youth partners packets. The materials integrated Appreciative Inquiry with the Search Institute's developmental assets model.

In 2002, Mark and Tim cited as the project's greatest challenge getting the momentum of the project going and getting buy-in from the youth and keeping them actively involved. They cited as the project's greatest successes and accomplishments:



- + Effectively using a network chain, which led all the way up to the Mayor's office.
- + Exit surveys from the teens which showed that "there is a lot more that they like about the program than what they would change about it. They like the interactions with the city leaders and they like the organization of the project. In fact, the teens are interested in getting more teens and adults involved."
- + Several of the interviews led to strong personal relationships between the teen and interviewee. One teen interviewed a man in charge of building a new YMCA in Detroit. The teen was very interested in architecture and able to meet with the architects working on the YMCA as well as be the first new member when the building opened.
- + Many interviewees came to view the city and its many resources and assets differently. A young Latino woman who interviewed an older Caucasian man found out that they had more in common than they had originally thought including a common spiritual belief. The man was so moved by the young woman's intelligence and poise that he offered to help her get into Stanford University.

The most important lesson the organizers learned was that "If the teens don't take ownership of the project, it will fail. There is one organization whose adult leaders are very interested in the project, but the teens don't show up to meetings, so it isn't working.

Out of a total of 150 teens recruited and trained, about 70 keep showing up and out of that, only 20 are actively involved in the project.”

How did Imagine Detroit impact the future of Detroit? According to Mark, “People are starting to see Detroit as a gem; they are seeing more assets than they have seen in the past. This project is bringing out the best memories in people, positive images which they don’t often see in the media. Imagination removes the boundaries in us. We tend to set limits to what we can do (budget, feasibility...), but with imagination, people can see what’s possible and strive to make it a reality. “

For the following three summers after Imagine Detroit completed its project work, Tim was invited to Serbia to help launch and train a team of young people who gathered to Imagine Serbia.

**Montana:**

- Imagine Butte [www.imaginebutte.org](http://www.imaginebutte.org)

Imagine Butte is an open community project that seeks collaborative solutions to upgrade the Richest Hill on Earth for the new millenium. Its goal is to inspire Butte's youth to take a leading role in shaping the future for Housing, Public Resources, Environment and Restoration Planning, Historic Preservation, Neighborhood Revitalization Plans and Recreation Plan Activities.

Youth Leadership is combined with the wisdom of elder residents to create a history, a tapestry for action, and a game plan for success. All current residents, former residents, public officials and global friends are encouraged to comment and take part in Imagine Butte activity. Imagine Butte is “A Living Plan To Restore and Replace Resources Affected by Our Mining Heritage, and Celebrate the Natural, Cultural and Technical Resources of Butte, Including a Youth-Based Planning Action.”

Imagine Butte was funded by the Urban Revitalization Agency of the Butte Silver Bow county government. A grant in the amount of \$65,000 was made available to develop and conduct a collaboratively developed community housing needs assessment led by Imagine Butte. The assessment focused on housing and potential housing investment within the URA district which is bounded on the south by Platinum Street, on the east by Arizona, and on the west by Washington Street.

For the purposes of developing neighborhood revitalization plans, Butte has been organized with three neighborhoods with boundaries defined by tax and census districts. The project will result in an economic restructuring analysis for the Uptown Neighborhood. More than 14 organizations and agencies in Butte joined forces with Imagine Butte's master planning advisor to develop and implement a building-by-building survey to be filed in cooperation with the Butte-Silver Bow planning board's future actions. The survey focused on owner plans and preferences in upcoming urban revitalization actions and plans for future growth.

The High Schools project is ready for immediate implementation with available volunteer power and student leadership.

First, the survey will be sent out to URA occupants and building owners followed by on-site evaluation of the housing stock and housing potential. At the same time, Imagine Butte will conduct retail and service interviews of commercial tenants of Butte businesses. Questions in these interviews will include:

What are your plans for the future? Do you envision expansion along the lines of entertainment and historic district activities?

Based on the results from these interviews, Imagine Butte will draft an Uptown action plan for economic revitalization of retail trade for Butte.

Other on-going efforts will be to encourage groups and individuals to adopt a home, lot, or other property on drive zones and the business loop to help improve the appearance and value of these properties for occupants, owners and the overall community.

The first success from this effort has been that the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth will adopt a home with the Habitat Neighborhood Partners Program.

**Ohio:**

- Imagine Akron

***Imagine.Akron: 2025*** was a citizen-led planning effort designed to assist the municipal government in setting long-term goals for the growth and operation of Akron.

*Imagine.Akron* suggested goals that the City of Akron should achieve to retain the confidence of its citizens; reveal strategies that will enable the private and public sectors to achieve such Goals; and identify the resources necessary to succeed. The project was intended to complement the ongoing work of professional planners in the City of Akron and in the numerous public and private agencies that serve Akron. The project began in January, 1999 and was set to conclude in September, 2000 with a presentation to the Akron Roundtable, and publication of a report to the Mayor, Council and people of the City of Akron. For more info, visit <http://www.ci.akron.oh.us/2025/Reports/ia-design.html>

- Imagine Garfield Heights (Ohio)

The residents of an inner ring suburb of Cleveland have been informed and inspired by a community visioning process led by high school students. While young people are too often the subject of criticism about problematic behavior, these students have been a source of community pride. By offering AI consultation to community leaders and students to create “Imagine Garfield Heights”, the Diocese of Cleveland became the catalyst for this remarkable journey. The results express the power of positive imaging. According to Garfield Heights School Superintendent Ronald L. Victor, this process demonstrates “the incredible capacity kids have to do things to build up the whole community.”

The transformation began in 1998 with the first Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast which focused on “The Church in the City,” a major initiative of Bishop Anthony Pilla and the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland. This effort is designed to reinvigorate central cities through new forms of partnership and redevelopment within the overall region. Since the breakfast, a team of community leaders from local institutions and different faith communities has met regularly to consider and implement ways to bring a new spirit to Garfield Heights. Superintendent Victor loved the stories Rick Krivanka of the Diocesan Pastoral Planning Office told about Imagine Chicago, a community growth initiative led by young people. Victor offered public high school students the opportunity to participate as consultants to the town. In a talk he told them, “This is what consultants do. They go out and interview people, analyze the data, and report back on what they found.” The students were eager to volunteer, and along with students from Trinity, a Catholic high school, they began Imagine Garfield Heights.

In the first phase in 1999, a team of students from the two high schools interviewed a cross-section of formal community leaders about what gives life to the city and what could be done to enhance the future of the city. Each time the students reported their findings back to a larger and more appreciative audience – first at a joint city council and school board meeting of 250 people, and later at an ecumenical prayer service of 400 people. In 2000, a larger team from Garfield Heights High School expanded their interviews citywide to include informal leaders and residents. Presentations were again made before the wider community.

The questions the young people asked of adult leaders were adapted from questions used by Imagine Chicago in 1993-94:

- + How long have you lived in Garfield Heights? In this community? What first brought your family here? What’s it like for you to live in this community?
- + When you think about the whole city of Garfield Heights, are there particular places or people or images that represent the city to you?
- + Thinking back over your Garfield Heights memories, what have been real high points for you as a citizen of this city—times when you felt most alive, proud, excited about being a part of this community?

- + Why did these experiences mean so much to you?
- + How would you describe the quality of life in Garfield Heights today?
- + What changes in the city would you most like to see? What do you imagine your own role might be in helping to make this happen? Who could work with you?
- + Close your eyes and imagine Garfield Heights as you most want it to be a generation from now. What is it like? What do you see and hear? What are you proudest of having accomplished?
- + As you think back over this conversation, what images stand out for you as capturing your hopes for this city's future?
- + What do you think would be an effective process for getting people across the city talking and working together on behalf of Garfield Heights' future? Whom would you want to draw into a Garfield Heights conversation?

A community leadership conference involving over 75 community leaders was held in August of 2001. From this leadership conference and Imagine Garfield Heights emerged six objectives for the city: visionary leadership, excellent schools, all-inclusive recreation, attractive retail, outstanding cooperation and quality housing. The Garfield Heights City Schools mission statement reflects these objectives and the creative perspective of the Appreciative Inquiry philosophy: *“The Garfield Heights Learning Community demonstrates basic values that meet the needs of the heart with clear academic goals applying to all children in appropriate facilities and where all community members work together.”*

With the momentum from the interviews, the school system began producing a community wide newsletter that people wanted. With the help of alternative programs, few students have been suspended or expelled. In November of 2000, the community supported a \$41,500,000 million dollar bond issue for a new high school complex and other additions and renovations for district facilities and it passed on the first try. The new high school was set to open in the fall of 2003 and reflect the vision of the people that public schools should serve the whole community. It was designed with a performing arts center and a community health and physical education center. Proficiency scores of school students showed continuous improvement. The state responded to the obvious enthusiasm of the residents and qualified the district's Master Plan to provide the district with up to \$19 million dollars to complete the 10-year \$84 million building project.

In the third phase of the project in 2002, every student in the high school participated in an interview with another student about the quality of life in the high school itself. Topics were created by a student team from preliminary interviews with a cross-section of students and faculty. They included:

### ***1. Creating A Caring Community***

*Our care for one another is central to the life of Garfield Heights High School. These words are at the heart of our school mission “I care...” and matter to every student and teacher. Care is shown in the ways we treat each other - by being respectful, by giving ‘each’ student positive attention, by not talking back. These expressions of*

*care go both ways between students and teachers.. Teachers show their care in their desire to help and through their involvement in extra-curricular activities.*

- a. Describe an experience at Garfield Heights High School in which you personally felt a real sense of care from others. What did other people say or do that really expressed their care and concern?*
- b. What could we do to be more caring here at Garfield Heights High School - 1 or 2 things that could really make a difference in people's lives?*

## **2. Doing your best to succeed**

*Being successful, reaching a goal, achieving a win, getting a good grade, doing work that is recognized - these are the things that reflect success and 'make me feel included.' Success depends on involvement. Winning is important in building pride and positive energy. We need to do more things that showcase work by all kinds of different students. Fostering a positive attitude is essential for every student. We need to help students who struggle - hear their issues in a constructive way - not 'single them out' in a negative way.*

- a. When have you done something at Garfield Heights High School that felt like an important success to you? What help contributed to this feeling of success?*
- b. What could we do here that would encourage students like you to 'do your best' and that would recognize the good things that you accomplish?*

## **3. Getting a good education**

*Getting a good education is helped by fostering higher expectations, reaching personal goals, doing your best with studies, getting good grades and being prepared to go to college or do meaningful work. Students need to have goals and to stay focused on their goals. Doing better is helped by smaller classes in which students receive more attention and one-on-one contact. It also helps when we build a spirit of friendship in each classroom that makes it comfortable and easier for everyone to participate and to talk.*

- a. Recall a time when you felt you were really getting a good education in a particular course. What conditions in the classroom brought out the best in your desire to do good work and to learn?*
- b. What is the one thing you would most like to see happen at Garfield Heights High School that would help you to get the best possible education and learn things that are important to you?*

## **4. Being Involved and Building Unity**

*Involvement in activities - in sports, music, theater, organizations - helps to build pride in our school. When you make the effort to participate, perform, win, help out, contribute, serve others, and take trips together, you build friendships and feel a spirit of unity with others. Being able to say "I'll always be a Bulldog" comes from involvement. People each need to make an effort to build this unity. No one can do it for you. The spirit of unity is also reflected in student - teacher relationships, in becoming friends. It helps when a teacher can separate the roles of being a teacher and being a helpful friend, and let things go that get in the way. 'Teams' foster unity in sports, music and other activities. We also need to build unity within and between different teams and create inter-team events in other areas. We need to deepen unity with 'different people'.*

*(missing the questions for this section...)*

Major first presentations on findings from this work were made by students at two consecutive annual assemblies of all school district staff that numbered over 400 people. The students arrived at very positive and workable suggestions, and the adults listened.

The web site for the Superintendent, Ron Victor, offered some of the presentations by students from their AI interviews in different phases. This work was also integrated with Leadership Garfield Heights. High school students presented interview results at a community leaders meeting, following a leadership workshop in the morning by Warren Blank. The student presentation catalyzed an 'open space' session and the launching of initiatives/committees focused on Community Involvement, Excellent Schools, Positive Diversity, Team Recreation and Housing, City Beautification, School/ Community Recreation, Resident Forum, Indoor Recreation, Community Newsletter, and Focus on Improving/Expanding our Library. High school students & 8th graders became partners and leaders with adults at the tables in planning action steps.

submitted by Rick Krivanka rkrivanka@dioceseofcleveland.

### ***South Carolina***

- Imagine South Carolina

Imagine South Carolina was a project initiated in 1995 by two AI consultants working in partnership with a statewide non-profit organization to generate a year of constructive public dialogue. The focus was how South Carolina's communities could transcend long standing racial divisions to create grassroots projects.

Information about the project can be found in ***Lessons from the field: Applying appreciative inquiry***, Chapter 6: Imagine South Carolina, written by A. Stewart and C. Royal and published by Practical Press, Inc. in 1998.

## *Tennessee*

- Johnson County (Tennessee)

Johnson County, TN is the most economically depressed county in Tennessee. This program was funded by a health care grant to support leadership among the women in the county so that they might help develop the community. The goals for this program were to develop leadership skills in the women who attend and to identify several key projects that will improve the quality of life in the county. In a 5-day Community Leadership program in 2003, Imagine Johnson County worked to develop leadership skills as well as commitment to community projects. From the visions generated, three design teams were formed and work begun on three different projects for the county. A case study on the project can be found at

<http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/practice/toolsCasesDetail.cfm?coi=3515>

## **Tennessee:**

- Imagine Memphis

[www.imaginememphis.org](http://www.imaginememphis.org)

**Mission:** Through Imagine Memphis, youth and adults come together in appreciation of each other and the strengths of Memphis which fosters a broad, intergenerational network to create a more vital future for Memphis.



**Vision :** *Imagine Memphis* is intended to look deeply into the soul of Memphis and search out the core values from which all our strengths originate; to find the good that is the foundational bedrock of who we are as a community. By involving large numbers of youth and adults, we are together rediscovering who we are and what we care about. The result is Memphis being a better place for all to live demonstrated by a more positive atmosphere, a more determined citizenry, and innovative solutions for effective action. Youth tap into the wisdom and experience of adults and adults appreciate the creative energy of the youth resulting in stimulating a vital Memphis.

## **Strategies**

- Using intergenerational Discovery interviews to identify what is working in Memphis and what is unique and special about Memphis, youth and adult community influencers together tap into the imagination of those involved and activate a renewed commitment about their participation in the Memphis community.
- Through a meaning-making approach called Leading the Way, youth and adults process the results from the interviews and share the results with leaders of other initiatives in Memphis to continue broadening the voices being heard from Memphians.
- Community Gatherings for intergenerational change agents in organizations, institutions and communities provide a learning forum for the participants to broaden and deepen their capacity to further make a difference through strength-based approaches.

## **Core Processes**

- Dialogue – across cultural, racial, economic and generational boundaries.
- Capacity development – tools and techniques to understand, imagine and create projects that build community based on current assets.
- Network enhancements – to link individuals and organizations committed to developing a positive future for Memphis’ children.

## **Desired Outcomes**

1. Each semester, involve a minimum of 100 high school youth and adults in envisioning the future of Memphis and enticing them to take an active role in shaping the future of Memphis (including youth returning to Memphis after out-of-city college).
2. Increase the use of asset-based, strength-based approaches by youth and adults within and among organizations in Memphis, in large part through convening a “master class” at least yearly.
3. Increase learning between high school youth and community influencers through conducting Discovery Interviews, making meaning from the interviews, and sharing the with other narrative-oriented community organizations (e.g. Common Ground, Beloved Community, Fast Forward, etc.).

### **Phase I Results**

- + Completed approximately 100 discovery interviews
- + Documented two meaning-making sessions with youth as they processed the results from the discovery interviews and the results were presented to community leaders.
- + Offered an intergenerational Community Gathering facilitated by Bliss Browne (Founder of Imagine Chicago and international facilitator of Imagine efforts) that provided tools and techniques encouraging use of strength-based approaches.
- + Inspired other community influencers through various gatherings and classes in which members of the Design Team (youth and adults) introduced Imagine Memphis and appreciative inquiry.
  - Center for Ethical Leadership classes and class projects
  - Showcase Event at the Hilton Hotel (April 2008)
  - Memphis Theological Seminary class
  - University of Memphis, College of Education class for Memphis City School teachers
- + Created marketing collateral for Imagine Memphis
  - Imagine Memphis website designed by Chip Clay, Methodist Health Care.
  - Video (professionally produced through a Venture Fund grant from United Way with the youth developing the content)
  - Imagine Memphis news report under the direction of a University of Memphis journalism professor
- + Graduating seniors on the Design Team have volunteered their desire to continue being connected with Imagine Memphis and returning to Memphis after graduation from college.
- + Worked with BRIDGES to infuse appreciative inquiry into its Bridge Builders curriculum. In fall 2008, all senior class school-based projects have been launched through the use of discovery interviews with a strength-based focus.

### **Phase I Sampling of “For the Sake of What” Stories**

- + During the Discovery interviews, youth experience a shift in power. They are viewed by the community influencers as curious and open; youth view the community influencers as sources of wisdom and experience.
- + One high school youth said in November 2007 after his Imagine Memphis Discovery interview training that the reason he is involved is that since the mayoral elections, the city is divided. In order to have economic development, the city must be united. If we are not united, we will be just a little town.
- + An Executive Director of a non-profit was inspired through the Discovery Interviews to develop a high school internship for his non-profit.
- + Through the Community Gathering and learning along with youth, one of the adult participants said that he realized that he had put his cynicism on the shelf for a whole day.

**Phase II (in process) (August 2008 – July 2009)**

- Conduct 200 Discovery Interviews (100 per semester)
  - Gandhi King Conference—Oct. 17, 2008 (12 completed)
  - BRIDGES location—Nov. 8, 2008 (30 completed)
  - BRIDGES location—March 28, 2009
  - High School location—April 2009
- Conduct periodic meaning making sessions with youth and adults, and attract research specialists who will do additional analysis and develop reports for policy makers, funders, etc.
- Sponsor a Community Gathering master class for community initiative leaders and youth. (potentially fall 2009)
- Develop mechanisms to increase the sustainability of Imagine Memphis
  - Formalize an infrastructure involving youth and adults to distribute the work among more volunteers supporting Imagine Memphis.
  - Strengthen the process for maintaining contact information for Imagine Memphis participants for periodic updates.
  - Attract funding that provides staffing support, as well as funding for resources needed for various activities.
  - Work with Leadership Memphis as the fiduciary agent to formalize accounting procedures.
  - Update the Imagine Memphis website with results from Phase I and offer on-line registration for various activities.
  - Create a Facebook entry for Imagine Memphis.
  - Increase strategic partnerships with organizations/institutions to provide resources and support.
- Utilize opportunities to attract youth to participate in Imagine Memphis.
  - Design Team youth defining ways for their peers to participate based on their skills and interests (e.g. Design Team, selected tasks, etc.) and provide easy access, electronic mechanisms for communication (i.e. Face Book) and registration
  - Youth participating in BRIDGES – through Bridge Builders
  - Youth participating in Memphis Challenge as well as through the Memphis Youth Leadership Program

- Gandhi/King Conference – Imagine Memphis Design team to provide a community development workshop for youth.

### **Big Hairy Audacious Goals--(what success looks like)**

In 3 – 5 years ... what would be different in Memphis because of Imagine Memphis?

- Safer communities and stronger schools are being realized through mutual respect and learning relationships among youth and adults who activate new possibilities for our community's transformation.
- More youth and adults are inspired to experience a vibrant quality of life in Memphis.
- Memphis is a national model for intergenerational collaboration that results in a vital community.
- Increased recognition of youth leadership programs and additional available resources serve a broader youth population across Memphis.
- Community influencers and youth leaders are readily linked and value equity of voice approaches to building viable relationships.
- Citizenry reach out beyond their own neighborhoods and raise their pride and expand their identity with a larger, ethnically diverse Memphis.
- News commentary and people's attitudes about Memphis focus on the strengths and uniqueness of Memphis.
- Elected officials are role models for focusing on hope and possibility to inspire citizen engagement and community development.

Community Process Improvement Areas:

- Youth, through increasing their leadership involvement in community initiatives and the newly formed Youth Commission, will give voice to shaping the future of Memphis.
- Community influencers will offer direct experience to inspire youth to engage more actively in community initiatives.
- Dialogue among community leaders and youth will increase intergenerational learning and stimulate innovation.
- Discovery interviews will clarify the essence of Memphis which will shape the decisions for future growth.

What efforts will move us toward these goals?

- + Gaining commitment from specialists in community development and public policy research to ensure the results from the discovery interviews are communicated to community leaders in effective ways for the voices of Memphis to be heard.
- + Finding a "home" for Imagine Memphis so its efforts will be sustainable long term.
- + Continuing to strengthen the Imagine Memphis infrastructure for coordinating and providing Imagine Memphis services.

- + Raising the visibility of Imagine Memphis through demonstrated results and ensure that Imagine Memphis is viewed as a viable resource for other organizations, institutions, etc.

The following strategic format was used to focus our great intentions for Memphis. This planning approach creates a self-sustaining culture because all parties know the direction at a detailed enough level to move into effective action. The framework is from Good to Great by Jim Collin. Design and Resource Teams are to help ensure that we are best serving our constituents – all citizens in Memphis area.

**Passion:** Increase the mood of hope and possibilities for creating a vital future for OUR community (shifting the narrative)

Highlighting the strengths and assets of Memphis to promote effective action and secure a vital future for our community.

Elevating the conversations/stories of Memphis.

**Best At:** Creating intergenerational connections (youth and adults learning from each other)

**Resource Engine:** People – attracting key people ... legion of volunteers who are:

Representing our diverse constituency  
 Sharing our passion -- shift mood for vital community thru intergenerational connections  
 Purposeful action-oriented  
 Using Dialogue through Appreciative Inquiry  
 Building off everyone's strengths

Brand (deliver, grow, and preserve):

*Youth and adults embodying hope and possibilities through each other*

Resources

- Consistent, sustainable infrastructure
- Funding (short term and build for the future)

**Intersection/Hedgehog**

*Youth and adults embodying hope and possibilities through each other*

Core Processes:

*Network enhancements—*

providing a service to enhance the capability of participating groups/organizations/individuals by bringing various groups together AND creating a network experience that fosters expanded networking/collaboration.

*Dialogue—(a) IM Design Team and (b) network enhancement initiatives.* We come together to plan and create with an openness to learn from each other.

*Capacity Development—(a) for Imagine Memphis (deliver, grow and preserve our Imagine Memphis Brand) and (b) for others through such activities as the Community Gathering where we attract master teachers for the participants to experience expanding networking experiences and using more positive narratives.*

The above strategic plan was submitted by Mary Jo Greil. For more, please visit [www.imaginememphis.org](http://www.imaginememphis.org)

**Texas:**

- Imagine Dallas



Imagine Dallas has been working since 1994 to connect visionary adults working to shape an inclusive future for their city with visionary high school youth who want to co-create a powerful path for their community and for the nation. Imagine Dallas emerged in 1994 after Bliss Browne of Imagine Chicago spoke to a group of executives and community leaders at

EDS in Dallas. The group had been meeting for a year to about making a difference to Dallas' future and focusing on young people seemed the most promising intervention strategy.

A group of five women met throughout the summer of '94 and were attracted to using the Imagine Chicago model with adolescent girls as the interviewers. EDS helped support a kickoff luncheon for community leaders in February 1995 at which Bliss Browne and Leslie Welch (one of the original young interviewers for Imagine Chicago and the youngest member of Imagine Chicago's board) spoke. Imagine Dallas raised funds to incorporate as a non profit, create a board of directors and hire one staff member. Its mission was defined as a "constructive voluntary process that seeks to enrich the future of Dallas through the collective imagination of its citizens. The forging of appreciative intergenerational connections is at the heart of the enterprise. Imagine Dallas ignites the civic imagination of a broad spectrum of community builders by inviting them to share publicly their Dallas stories and visions in interviews led by young women. Through this catalytic process, both the young women and community builders in the city will be inspired to shape deeply held hopes into opportunities for action.

Results of the North Dallas interview process can be read about on pp.90-99 in *Lessons from the Field: Applying Appreciative Inquiry* edited by Sue Annis Hammond and Cathy Royal and published by Practical Press in 1998.

In 2007, Imagine Dallas sponsored an Imagine-Nation conference in Dallas, again focused on connecting committed visionary adults with motivated high school youth. They explained the Imagine Dallas process on their conference website in the following dance recipe:

## The Imagine Dallas Two-Step

1. Talk to leaders about what is possible. Visit with community leaders – elected officials, Sunday School teachers, grandparents, teachers and principals, sports stars and personalities, leaders of non-profits and corporations, anyone with a stake in your neighborhood. Use Appreciative Inquiry to uncover the heart and soul of your community. Find out what people are passionate about.
2. Go to work on the needs and desires that you uncover. Find or create projects that enhance your community. Invite others to participate.

Repeat as needed.

For more information, visit <http://imaginationconference.com/>

***Washington:***

- Imagine Orcas

Orcas Island is in the Pacific North West of the U.S, south of the Canadian border. Leslie Rae, a specialist in strategic development ran a board retreat for the Orcas Island School district board and showed the Imagine Chicago video. The board members were so inspired that they committed themselves to doing individual interviews using the Imagine Chicago model. Through the interviews they created awareness in the community of Orcas Island about the school district’s mission to create lifelong learners and a good learning environment.

- Earthy Conversations (Pierce County, WA)



Earthy Conversations is a youth-led, county-wide intergenerational dialogue that is exploring the most powerful experiences in nature and learning of residents of Pierce County, Washington in order to inspire and shape the future utilization and development of Chambers Creek Properties as a life-changing environmental learning experience and catalyst for social change. Imagine Chicago has been the lead consultant to this pioneering public/private community collaboration to expand civic engagement in designing a new environmental education center at the Chambers Creek properties, a reclaimed quarry on Puget Sound. This project, called Earthy Conversations (see [www.piercecountywa.org](http://www.piercecountywa.org) for more information) has been done in partnership with the Chambers Creek foundation and Pierce County and has involved nearly twenty Pierce County schools, University of Washington-Tacoma, local environmental organizations, and other youth and adult civic organizations.

Young people have hosted hundreds of intergenerational conversations to stimulate personal and community discussion about people’s best experiences with nature and

extraordinary learning and establish the direction for future environmental education throughout Pierce County

At 932 acres, Chambers Creek Properties offers an extraordinary site on which to pioneer environmental reclamation, education and stewardship in one of the largest urban environmental living classrooms in the Puget Sound bioregion.

Earthy Conversations is designed to engage and ignite the individual and collective imagination of our community, expand thinking about what is possible, build powerful relationships between generations and catalyze inspired action. Earthy Conversations provides noteworthy leadership opportunities and skills development for youth, who have the opportunity to significantly impact the future they will inherit.

Read more at <http://www.chamberscreekfoundation.org/news.php?id=14> and at [http://www.co.pierce.wa.us/xml/abtus/ourorg/ccp/Project\\_Updates/UPDATE\\_2008-02.pdf](http://www.co.pierce.wa.us/xml/abtus/ourorg/ccp/Project_Updates/UPDATE_2008-02.pdf)

For more information, please contact [earthyconversations@co.pierce.wa.us](mailto:earthyconversations@co.pierce.wa.us)

**Canada:**

***Alberta:***

- Imagine Red Deer

Imagine Red Deer, led by Jim Taylor, engaged in several rounds of "community conversations" patterned on an early stage of Imagine Chicago. Working with IC's proven set of questions, they adapted them to reflect the local situation. The results of "Phase 1" were written up on Imagine Red Deer's web site, [www.imaginereddeer.org](http://www.imaginereddeer.org).

Imagine Red Deer applied for funding to the National Crime Prevention Strategy for Phase 2 of the project to begin in February 2006 with two new components: to develop a drop-in centre for "street affected" youth that will help them connect to the people, information and services that will assist them to become positively engaged with the community and escape from their high risk lifestyles and to create two "images" exhibits, using still photography, and video, based on research into positive psychology and the power of image. Youth and adults will seek, capture and share images of people "at their best" and/or "full of joy". In 2006, several collections of images will be published on the web sites of the Red Deer Public Library and Imagine Red Deer, mount a framed "hard copy" exhibit of images. For more, please see <http://www.rdpl.org/imagine-red-deer>.

- Imagine Calgary



The City of Calgary is engaged in a process to develop a 100-year vision for a sustainable Calgary called imagineCALGARY.

imagineCALGARY is the blueprint helping

Calgarians create a sustainable future and exceptional quality of life for generations to come. A key component of has been broad consultation with citizens to gather input on their vision and values for Calgary. Approximately 18,000 citizens have participated in a dialogue about the future of their community by answering five questions:

- What do you value about Calgary?
- What is it like for you to live here?
- What changes would you like to most see?
- What are your hopes and dreams for Calgary in 100 years?
- How could you help make this happen?

A Round Table of committed citizens was set up to synthesize the input from the community to produce a vision statement. The Round Table is comprised of nearly 40 citizen volunteers who are studying the answers, sorting through mountains of other information and working with a variety of experts to write the 100-year vision and identify targets and strategies toward reaching the vision. The imagineCALGARY Round Table consists of citizen volunteers who are committing their time and energy to synthesizing the answers and other information about the city into a vision statement.

In addition to the Round Table, a number of other volunteer citizen groups have been set up. These include:

- 5 Working Groups - which will develop 30 year targets and strategies towards the vision
- Advisors - who are a variety of experts and interested people who will support the Round Table and Working Groups throughout the process
- The Mayor’s Panel on Urban Sustainability – a group of community leaders to help ensure the legacy of imagineCALGARY is embraced and acted upon by institutions and groups throughout the city.

The imagineCALGARY team has used a number of creative ways to engage citizens. They have organized “Imagining Sessions” ranging from 30 minutes to 3 hours to talk with various groups about the questions. They have also engaged schools to develop programs for students to talk to their parents and community leaders about the questions. A group of youth volunteers interviewed community leaders, including players from the Calgary Stampers, well known media personalities and even Alberta’s Lieutenant Governor!

Calgarians developed a blueprint for a sustainable future when they created the imagineCALGARY Plan for Long Range Urban Sustainability. Developed with input from more than 18,000 community members, the Plan was the end result of the

imagineCALGARY initiative, the largest community visioning and consultation process of its kind anywhere in the world. The Plan includes a long-range vision and goals that reflect the diversity of aspirations and interests of the community now and into the future. It also includes a series of 114 Targets that provide useful reference points for organizations and individuals to determine what action can be taken to build a sustainable community.

Members of the imagineCALGARY Partnership and citizens, corporations, community agencies and the civic government of Calgary are now using the Plan and working together to shape the city's future. You can download the imagineCALGARY Long Range Plan at [http://www.imaginecalgary.ca/imagineCALGARY\\_plan.php](http://www.imaginecalgary.ca/imagineCALGARY_plan.php)

For more information and great resources on urban sustainability, visit the comprehensive website: <http://www.imaginecalgary.ca> or e-mail [info@imagineCALGARY.ca](mailto:info@imagineCALGARY.ca).

- Imagine Oakridge (AB)

While working with ImagineCALGARY, a long-term project asking Calgarians to envision their city 100 years hence, Sarah Arthurs decided to do the same within her own community of Oakridge. With funding from the Calgary Foundation, ImagineOAKRIDGE was soon underway.

Sarah describes Oakridge as “suburban heaven.” She felt the community already had a lot going for it, including green belts, bike paths, natural landmarks, and an engaged populace. Yet she felt it could build upon these strengths.

Last fall, the community held its first workshop, facilitated by Bliss Browne of Imagine Chicago. It was immediately obvious how much everyone valued living in one of Calgary’s greenest communities. They proposed celebrating it as “The Jewel of Calgary.” Other ideas included...

- Making Oakridge a self-sustaining, 24/7 urban village.
- Improving relations with the neighbouring Tuu Tsina Nation.
- Providing more services for seniors and enlisting their involvement in community development.
- Creating “third spaces” where people can meet and discuss issues related to the common good.

When asked if she would recommend the process to other communities, “Go for it!” was Arthurs’ enthusiastic response. “The imagine process opens people as a community to more than just their own tight little worlds,” she added. “It unleashes huge potential for making our communities greener, more connected and creative. But it takes a fair amount of involvement and engagement, and it needs to be embedded in a long process.”

*British Columbia:*

- Imagine Abbotsford , BC

Imagine Abbotsford is a consortium of the Abbotsford Community Foundation, BC Healthy Communities, the Fraser Valley Centre for Social Enterprise, and United Way of the Fraser Valley.

On September 21 and 22, 2007, Imagine Abbotsford convened a dialogue to consider Abbotsford's future 30 years from now. As a continuation of the first round of dialogues that took place between 2006 to 2007 on the subject of ecology and economy, this second round of dialogues considers the theme of culture and learning. Twenty-five community animators from a broad range of interest groups and areas of specialization met over the course of two days at the Clayburn Village Schoolhouse, an Abbotsford landmark and newly-refurbished heritage building. The purpose of the dialogue was to engage, explore, and share ideas about Abbotsford's educational and cultural future.

Facilitator Joanna Ashworth opened the event by inviting participants to come together as individuals, rather than representatives of interest groups and organizations. She encouraged the group to exercise their collective imagination and see what emerged from the conversation. She presented the concept of dialogue as a means of exploring and identifying our shared values while acknowledging and appreciating our differences. Dialogue, in comparison to debate, is an opportunity to listen with the intent of understanding, as opposed to listening with the intent to challenge and oppose. To discover solutions to the complex social realities of our community, we must understand the varied viewpoints and perspectives that underlie the reality of our past, present, and future.

For more information, see

<http://www.sfu.ca/dialogue/imaginebc/pdf/ImagineAbbotsfordTL.pdf>

- Imagine BC

Imagine B.C. based at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, B.C., has sponsored public dialogues so that experts in a range of fields can "get out of their silos [of specialty] and find common solutions," says Joanna Ashworth, the group's director. Artists have joined forces with economists, for example, to illustrate a range of individual and collective economic behaviors and their impacts on the environment years ahead.

British Columbia is considered to be one of the best places in the world to live. Yet amid this prosperity exist troubling socio-economic disparities, environmental degradation, a resource-based economy in transition, a health care system facing increasing pressures, and a physical and cultural landscape quickly vanishing due to economic migration and global economic forces beyond the region. Such challenges, tensions and diverse experiences call out for dialogue. Imagine BC is a five-year series of dialogues that seeks to create a forum for diverse perspectives about the future of the province.

Each year the series of dialogues may include:

- small dialogues where thirteen delegates produce a thematic consensus statement and set of future scenarios
- medium sized dialogues where delegates report on themes and interact with policy-makers and elected officials
- large sized dialogues which include 150 participants and a province-wide radio audience on themes and questions concerning BC's future
- local dialogues engaging participants in communities across the province

By asking citizens, influencers and experts to engage in meaningful dialogue and to collectively imagine the kind of future we want in the province, Dialogue Programs' Imagine BC series generates provocative and constructive visions to bring about real social change, one conversation at a time. For more info, visit <http://www.sfu.ca/dialogue/imaginebc/index.htm>

Imagine BC won the CAUCE award for Excellence in Regional Programming.

- Imagine Prince George (BC)

On July 15, 2008, youth from the Prince George area were invited to envision their ideal future. They did. And more. Using art, movement, and dialogue, youth from diverse walks of life discovered that, despite their apparent differences, they shared a number of significant hopes and desires. In particular, they care about the community and its future. They work hard volunteering in many ways to make change in their communities and they all proclaim that the status quo is not good enough. With targeted outreach by the Fraser Basin Council and key community members, young people from Prince George and surrounding communities were invited to join in a day to explore what their community means to them and what hopes and fears they hold for the future. With the creative leadership of social artist and youth engagement specialist Nadia Chaney, the group of 11 youth gathered at the Prince George Native Friendship Centre to explore the meaning of community, sustainability and to mine the depths of their own leadership potential. To read the report of their ideas and aspirations, go to <http://www.sfu.ca/dialogue/imaginebc/pdf/imagine%20bc%20prince%20george%20SEP%202008-1.pdf>

- Dream Vancouver (BC)

Since 2002, the Think City Society has helped citizens understand the issues facing their communities while developing collective solutions to protect the environment, strengthen local economies, advance democratic rights and ensure access to quality public services. Think City believes that all of us can help shape Vancouver's future by participating in the development of new ideas, practical solutions and support to tackle challenging issues facing our city.

To launch the Dream Vancouver process, Think City held a day-long conference in 2007, which brought together nearly 300 interested citizens from across the city. Here, participants were encouraged to discuss and collaborate on their dreams for the future of Vancouver. On October 21, 2007 Think City held the sold-out Dream Vancouver



conference. The all-day conference took participants from their dreams about Vancouver to a possible agenda for change. The conference was facilitated by Bliss Browne, President of Imagine Chicago, who used an assets-based approach, based on Appreciative Inquiry, which helped participants evaluate as a group what they do well and what strengths they have as a community.

The afternoon began with a keynote speech by former City of Vancouver

Co-Director of Current Planning Larry Beasley. Ms. Browne then facilitated an open-space session which took participants through a series of questions designed to bring them to a collective vision of what the city could be. A full conference report is available at

<http://publicsolutions.ca/images/DV%20Report%20FINAL%20July%2016.08%20LowRes.pdf>

Now, Think City is moving forward with the topics that had the most public support at the Dream Vancouver conference – affordable housing, transportation and citizen engagement. From late-July to mid-October, Think City surveyed over 2,500 citizens to generate discussion and enable tracking of public concern around these three issues.

For the 2008 municipal election, Think City compared the three major civic parties' survey answers against those submitted by citizens. The results? No matter which party holds a majority on Vancouver city council after the Nov. 15 election, the public has been promised substantive actions on affordable housing, transportation and citizen engagement by all three sitting civic parties.

To read more about Dream Vancouver, please visit <http://www.dreamvancouver.ca/>

*Nova Scotia:*

- Envision Halifax

**Envision Halifax** was founded by the United Way of Halifax Region and the Shambhala Institute for Authentic Leadership and is now inviting broad-based community involvement. Its core values are:

**Releasing Inherent Capacity.** We already have a wealth of resources, individually and as a community. Our primary focus is on igniting and cultivating that capacity.

**Engaging in Personal Journey.** Leadership and civic engagement involve a lifelong journey of discovery and learning.

**Embracing Creative Ambiguity.** Powerful questions and the ability to host diverse views can transform our understanding and our actions.

**Practicing Stewardship.** We are stewards of our community and the natural environment. We practice integrity and accountability in everything we do.

**Creating Extraordinary Society.** Together we can create the kind of community we know is possible, for ourselves and for future generations.

Envision Halifax is igniting a culture of civic engagement across the Halifax Region by fostering networks of community-oriented leaders, cultivating new emerging leaders, and providing input into key community issues.

Envision Halifax is actively involved in community building through participation in various community initiatives. We have developed several ideas about hosting community conversations and events that generate fresh thinking and collaborative networks of people.

For more information, please visit <http://www.envisionhalifax.ca/index.shtml>

***Ontario:***

- Imagine Student Success

Sparked by the Ontario Ministry of Education's Student Success mandate in 2004, Imagine Student Success was the catalyst for looking at how to engage the student voice in all aspects of education - teacher/student relationships, curriculum delivery, teacher professional development, and ongoing dialogue with school trustees. It began with an inquiry into “student success” followed by a 1000-person summit from which emerged 5 key Board mandates that continue to come to life through student, teacher and staff application of the Appreciative Inquiry process. This "conversation for possibility" continues to expand through various think tanks, conferences, and most importantly in the classroom and the operational work of Toronto District School Board (TDSB). TDSB is the 4th largest school system in North America, with over 600 school, 18,000 teachers and staff and 285,000 students. More than 80 languages are represented and spoken in the system with 41% of the students speaking English as a second language.

Link to information on Imagine Student Success: [www.thesumoexperience.com/tdsb.htm](http://www.thesumoexperience.com/tdsb.htm)