Powered by the People: A Grassroots Approach to Community Development
Most Communities Today

“If we can just get that one, big, transformational investment done, it will change everything for us.”

[years of effort…no visual progress during this time…loss of excitement…bottom falls out.]
The Snowball Effect

“a figurative term for a process that starts from an initial state of small significance and builds upon itself, becoming larger and faster at every stage”

Applied to a community, this is a *transformational* principle...
MOMENTUM!

MOMENTUM

MOMENTUM

MOMENTUM

MOMENTUM

MOMENTUM!
What is a DAT?
The DAT program brings together multidisciplinary teams of professionals to work with community stakeholders and decision-makers in an intensive 3-5 day planning process.
What distinguishes it?

• **We are NOT:**
  – Another Consultant Team
  – A process to produce a planning document
    • “Please don’t give us another plan. We have plenty – they all sit on the shelves. We need implementation strategies.” – Almost Every community
  – Government-focused
  – “Green”-focused
  – Building-focused

• **We ARE:**
  – Public Service in the Public Interest
    • “Consultants work for somebody. Design Assistance Teams work for everybody.”
  – Action-Oriented
  – Community-focused
  – Holistic, Customized, Integrated
Objectivity
Multi-disciplinary Expertise
Community Participation
Results Over the Years
Portland
Today: The Pearl District
The Embarcadero, San Francisco - 1984
Today: Iconic Place
“When looking back on how far downtown Austin has come in the last 20 years, many newcomers to Austin would be surprised by the state of downtown in 1993. Few people resided in downtown and retail in the urban core was nearly non-existent. Needless to say, Austin was faced with a fairly dormant downtown.... From the plan came a number of recommendations that began the wheels of transformation to create the vibrant downtown we all know today.” – Downtown Austin Magazine
SAN ANGELO, Texas - A report from the Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team, which convened in 1992 to set goals to improve Downtown San Angelo, presented a bleak list of the historic district’s weaknesses: a lack of connection to the rest of the city, neglected structural landmarks and leadership reluctant to implement change.

A lot can change in 20 years.

“You gave us hope. Back in 1992, your ideas seemed like dreams. Now we are living those dreams.”

Port Angeles, Washington = +$100 million in 5 years

• “This opportunity for our community was a catalyst for action, implementation and improvement. Three years after the SDAT team arrived, the progress and excitement continue. A primary outcome has been that the process awakened community pride and inspired a “together we can” attitude.” – Nathan West, Community Development Director
Newport, Vermont = +$200 million in 5 years

• “The biggest change here has been one of attitude. Now we realize that through partnerships, we can do anything. Now, nothing is impossible.” – citizen, 2 years later
Further Information

Joel Mills, Director, Center for Communities by Design
joelmills@aia.org

Erin Simmons, Director, AIA Design Assistance
esimmons@aia.org

www.aia.org/liv_sdat
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkiEWreNnWs