The CAFÉ Approach:
New Tools to Foster Citizen Involvement in the Community Development Process in Small Rural Towns.

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Building citizen participation is a prerequisite for community economic development. In order to participate in development activities, local residents must have a level of trust and feelings of reciprocity with their neighbors. Otherwise, collective action will not occur. A challenge for community developers is to help residents strengthen their relationships and improve communication so that people can work together effectively.

This may be particularly challenging in small towns that have been stunned by adverse changes to their economy and institutions. In these communities, once bustling main streets, church socials and weddings, high school proms and football games are mere nostalgic memories. Future hopes seem dim and collective action may appear fruitless. Of course, the irony is that these struggling communities are most in need of community economic development.

South Dakota has more than its fair share of struggling small towns. With a 2000 population density of less than 10 persons per square mile, South Dakota is among the most rural states in the U.S. Thirty-two of South Dakota's 66 counties - almost one-half - showed declines in population between 1990 and 2000. Thirty of those 32 counties had populations of fewer than 10,000 people. South Dakota has about 100 towns with fewer than 1,000 people. These communities need citizens who care, get involved, take responsibility, and are capable of implementing community economic development strategies.

The purpose of this paper is to share with community development practitioners a community development resource tool which has had some success in stimulating citizen involvement and ownership of the community development process in selected South Dakota small towns. The Community and Family Enterprises, or CAFÉ strategy, continues to evolve and improve as participant communities get deeper into the program and new communities are added.

CAFÉ Philosophy and Tools

The underlying philosophy is that community development strategy must have a broad citizen base, be compatible with the community's culture and traditions, and be seen to be building upon the community's inherent strengths. Central to that small town culture and traditions are its institutions - schools, churches, farm and commodity organizations, service clubs, senior citizen and youth groups, and, most importantly, family and friendships.

The goal of CAFÉ is to help build a community of citizens that can perform and function as a development organization which consciously and continuously seeks new opportunities for the community, including economic opportunities. CAFÉ's primary methodology is to facilitate citizen involvement and ownership of the
development process. Equally important, CAFÉ objectives and strategies are determined and tailored by the citizens themselves. This ensures that they reflect the characteristics of the community, such as its culture, traditions, history, reputation, business mix, volunteerism, leadership, and demographics. Another important characteristic of CAFÉ is that, not only is it educational and skill building, it is also fun.

The ultimate mission of CAFÉ is to leave in place a citizen development tradition of community opportunity awareness, creation, discovery, and pursuit. CAFÉ communities will be communities with proactive citizens who are agents not victims of change. CAFÉ communities will be populated by citizens who have both the passion and the skills to make their communities better places to live, work, and raise a family.

CAFÉ Process and Tools

To facilitate learning and momentum, the CAFÉ program is composed of a series of events, workshops, and surveys spanning an 18 to 24 month period. All of these activities have the common objectives of facilitating citizen communications and interaction, skill development, awareness of community conditions, confidence, and unity, all essential attributes of successful development. In a sense, CAFE is a long-term, continuing education program on a community-wide scale. Continued on next page...
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The process starts with the CAFÉ facilitator being invited into the community. It is important that the community initiate this first contact to ensure community ownership in the process. Following this first contact, the facilitator must perform an assessment of the community and a make judgment relative to its “fitness” for the model. For example, a community that is self-sustaining may not need the help of CAFÉ. On the other hand, a community’s needs may be beyond the scope of the CAFÉ process. Demographic trends, particularly the average age of the population as well as trends in retail sales and property taxes, are illuminating. Asking town officials about the physical condition of the town’s sewer system, water lines, and roads is important as well. Evidence of substantial deferred maintenance on infrastructure is also significant. Once a community is identified a good CAFÉ candidate, it begins the following five step process:

Step 1. The facilitator meets with development company/chamber/select citizen group to describe CAFÉ. If there is a mutual interest, go to the step 2 meeting, requiring each participant to bring with them three friends.

Step 2. The facilitator meets with an expanded, more diverse group to describe CAFÉ, usually about 25 to 30 people. A community “Business Inventory” survey is completed during this meeting and the “Perceptions and Evidence of Change” survey is distributed. The business inventory survey identifies what businesses are not available in the community and are therefore possible business opportunities. The “perceptions” survey is designed to gauge community strengths and weaknesses as perceived by the community’s adults and youth. To get as broad a representation of the community as possible, attendees are asked to take home and distribute copies to their neighbors, and high school officials take copies to distribute to students.

Step 3. A community potluck supper is held, during which the CAFÉ program and “Menu” is introduced and survey results released and discussed. As the community business survey revealed “business opportunities,” citizens are asked during the potluck supper to provide their judgments as to which of these business opportunities would have the greatest chance of success in their community (0 – 10 probability). These results are tabulated and published in the newspaper. Citizens interested in exploring any of these identified business opportunities are asked to contact the CAFÉ facilitator for assistance.

The results of the "Perception and Evidence of Change" survey is also revealed during the potluck supper. The results of this survey are greatly anticipated by citizens as it contrasts youth and adult perceptions of such community conditions as quality of education, retail and job opportunities, openness of community leadership, and judgments on the future of the community.

During the potluck supper, individual citizen/attendees select or "vote" their preferences for six CAFÉ events and six workshops which when totaled will constitute their community’s CAFÉ program. This vote also secures a list of volunteers as each citizen is asked to place their name and phone number next to three of the six events and three of the workshops they selected. This list is extremely valuable to any community development effort, especially in light of the method in which it was obtained (volunteered).

**Step 4.** At this point in the process, leaders (including youth) are identified for each event and workshop. These people are brought together to form the CAFÉ committee and develop an event/workshop schedule for the community.

**Step 5.** Finally, the first event or workshop is held.

As there should be balance in all things, the CAFÉ program alternates fun with work. Fun events such as a community talent show, farmer and rancher appreciation night, intergenerational sports challenge, and ethnic festival are important to community-building and unity. In addition, these events have been used as fund raisers. The primary role of the facilitator with respect to events is to provide ideas and contacts in communities who have completed the same event.

Workshops are the educational or skill-building dimension in the CAFÉ process and are staffed and conducted through a collaboration of a variety of local, state, university, non-profit, and volunteer organizations. The list of these resources is also expanded as more and more communities have experience in conducting workshops. Examples of workshops include leadership training, entrepreneurship, conflict management, grant writing, and identifying community priorities.
Premises Underlying the Approach

Underlying the practice of any profession, including that of community development practitioner, are foundation principles and premises (such as the "Community Development Society's Principles of Good Practice", www.comm-dev.org).

The CAFÉ model is founded on the following 13 premises:

1. A community must have "potential" and the necessary physical infrastructure and capacity to be successful. Some communities have limited economic potential and not every small town can (or should) be saved. The CAFÉ model is only applied in communities where there is a good probability that the effort can make a difference.

2. The relationship between the business establishment and the community is symbiotic, characterized by an extreme degree of mutual dependency. As goes the community, so goes business, and visa versa. A new business in town raises the value of all community assets, publicly or privately owned.

3. Development opportunities are created and discovered internally and are supportive of and consistent with community values, institutions and traditions. They must be seen to be within the communities "comfort level" and to strengthen the fabric of the town. Opportunities cannot be defined and imposed by external or alien forces no matter how "expert."

4. CAFÉ applies the "CASE" method of economic development where "C" stands for business Creation (entrepreneurship), "A" for business Acquisition, "S" for business Strengthening, and "E" for business Expansion. While a comprehensive development strategy calls for all four approaches, initial efforts are directed at helping existing businesses get stronger and expand (after all, a business saved is a business earned) complemented with entrepreneurially-trained citizens "growing their own" businesses.


6. A successful community is one which consciously and continuously creates opportunities for its youth. Opportunities include social, cultural, and political, as well as economic. The youth need to know that they will be the primary beneficiaries of the development effort.

7. The uniqueness of each community must be identified,
appreciated and incorporated into the development process. Superficial, generic, one-size-fits-all development strategies don't work in the long term. Each CAFÉ community chooses its own path to community and economic development.

8. The process must assist citizens to discover and apply their talents and recognize their obligations. At the very center of the CAFÉ process is volunteer identification and involvement.

9. Success is pursued through learning, and people learn primarily through their interactions with other people. Testing ideas is learning, taking positions is arguing.

10. The burden and responsibility for community development outcomes must clearly and squarely rest on the shoulders of the citizenry of the community. The best result is the belief on the part of citizens that they could have achieved success without external facilitators.

11. Citizen-versus-citizen conflict is guaranteed and a well thought out and well-publicized process of conflict resolution is required. However, an active, objective, constructive, and appreciated program critic is a necessary component to a successful community development effort. Make criticism part of the solution.

12. CAFÉ is designed to create its own resources, the trained citizen. The absolute best small town community and economic development program is neighbor-helping-neighbor.

13. The first 12 don't matter if many residents do not see themselves as stakeholders in the community and, as a result, really don't care about neighbors, the place, or the future. Citizens need to see and appreciate that they personally have something to lose from inactivity and something to gain from pro-activity.

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Case Study of South Dakota CAFÉ Communities

Seven communities are currently enrolled in the CAFÉ program. Alcester, the first community, began the program in March 2003 and has completed five events and five workshops. Irene, the smallest community with 450 people, has completed four events and three workshops. Freeman, the largest community with a population of 1,300, has a professional development officer and has rapidly completed four events and four workshops. Hurley and Lake Preston, following the publication of their “CAFÉ Calendars,” have each had an event and workshop. New Underwood is in the process of assembling its calendar. Viborg has not selected its events and workshops and appears to be re-evaluating its involvement in the CAFÉ program.

If attendance is an indicator of citizen “buy-in” to a community development program, the CAFÉ program has shown some solid results. As was the case with the potluck suppers in all seven communities, attendance at all events and workshops has been remarkable. Typical attendance at Alcester events, a town of about 850, has been around 250. Alcester workshops have averaged about 30 people. Freeman had similar numbers. Attendance at events in Irene has averaged over 150 people. Workshops in Irene have attracted from 10 to 60 citizens (the workshop that drew 60 dealt with “Strengthening Volunteer Organizations”).

The most popular events thus far are “Youth Appreciation Night,” “Community Talent Show,” “Farmer and Rancher Appreciation Night,” and “Ethnic Festival.” The most popular workshops are “Entrepreneurship,” “Leadership Training,” “Conflict Management,” and “Grant Writing.” The “staffing” of workshops was not as difficult as originally feared. For example, “Conflict Management” workshops were conducted by a retired professor from the University of South Dakota; the “Community Leadership” training workshop was performed by the Farber Center for Civic Leadership at University of South Dakota aided by volunteers from the community of Vermillion, South Dakota; and “Grant Writing” workshops were offered by Dakota State University’s Non-Profit Management Institute. Several entities including the SBA’s Small Business Development Center, SCORE (Senior Corp Of Retired Executives), the Center for Women Business Institute at the University of Sioux Falls, and local “entrepreneur heroes” team taught the “Entrepreneurship” workshop. CAFÉ citizens now regularly seek help from their sister CAFÉ communities via the facilitator. To further encourage this “neighbor-helping-neighbor community development methodology, the Web site cafecommunities.com is in the development stage.

It is important to highlight that a major accomplishment of the CAFÉ strategy is the identification of new volunteers for the development initiatives of the community. A typical volunteer list garnered during the event and workshop selection process consisted of about 15 to 30 names per event and workshop depending on the attendance at the potluck supper. These names are essential to anyone trying to facilitate or promote a community development...
Alcester, the most senior CAFÉ community, has shown some new business and job growth during this period, although no claim is made that this is a direct consequence of the CAFÉ program. -Irene has experienced some business closures. It is too early in the program development and application stage to identify, let alone claim, attributable outcomes. All CAFÉ communities will be monitored in the future relative to participation at events and workshops and business and job growth. Additional surveys, including exit surveys, are being drafted.

**Summary**

Extensive citizen participation is a necessary condition for effective, long-term community development. The fundamental strategy of CAFÉ is to secure broad-based citizen “buy-in” and involvement over the long term in the community development process. This condition is met by offering opportunities for citizens to essentially design their own community development program through the selection of fun, community-building events and educational/training workshops. As attention-getters, provocative surveys have played a role as well.

The CAFÉ model is still evolving, but seems to offer promise as a community development tool, particularly in small towns. For example, South Dakota CAFÉ communities are implementing the event/workshop sequence, albeit some slower than others. More significantly, the number of engaged citizens has expanded dramatically in some towns. The key will be to examine whether this enthusiasm continues so that sustained projects can be accomplished. While more extensive evaluation is forthcoming, CAFÉ may be an effective tool for community development practice in small rural towns.
Appendix A: Perceptions and Evidence of Change Survey Instrument

PERCEPTIONS AND EVIDENCE OF CHANGE IN MY COMMUNITY

You are not required to complete this survey. By completing it and handing it in you are consenting to its use. Do not put any personal information on this form, including your name.

Please place a "+" sign after the word or phrase if you think the situation in this community is good or getting better,

a "0" if neutral or no change,

or a "-" if bad or getting worse.

- POPULATION? ___
- JOB OPPORTUNITIES? ___
- DIVERSITY OF ECONOMY? ___
- AGING POPULATION? ___
- ABANDONED BUILDINGS? ___
- RETAIL SHOPPING? ___
- HOUSING? ___
- RECREATION? ___
- YOUTH ATTITUDE TOWARD COMMUNITY? ___
- ATTITUDE OF COMMUNITY TOWARD YOUTH? ___
- ELDERLY ATTITUDE TOWARD COMMUNITY? ___
- ATTITUDE OF COMMUNITY TOWARD ELDERLY? ___
- ATTITUDE RE CHANGE/GROWTH? ___
- FRIENDLINESS? ___
- VOLUNTEERISM? ___


- PROPERTY VALUES?
- LAZINESS?
- APATHY?
- CONFLICT?
- COMPLAINING?
- FACTIONS/CLIQUES?
- QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP?
- LEADERSHIP OPENNESS?
- COMMUNITY "POLITICS"?
- JEALOUSY AND RESENTMENT?
- UPKEEP OF HOUSES AND YARDS?
- CULTURAL ACTIVITIES?
- CHURCH ACTIVITIES?
- "OUT-SHOPPING"?
- COMMUNICATING?
- "NEIGHBORLINESS"?
- GIVING APPRECIATION, THANKS?
- OVERALL APPEARANCE?
- PLACE TO LIVE?
- PLACE TO RAISE A FAMILY?
- SAFE PLACE?
- CARING ABOUT ONE ANOTHER?
- FUTURE?

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Appendix B : The CAFÉ Menu

(If you make use of this instrument, please alert the author, Robert Tosterud, at htosteru@usd.edu)

EVENTS
EVENTS ARE TO TAKE PLACE EVERY OTHER MONTH DURING THE YEAR

IN ADDITION TO THE KICK-OFF "MEET AND GREET" POT LUCK SUPPER, THE COMMUNITY IS TO CHOOSE 6 EVENTS FROM THE FOLLOWING 12

- Community Talent Show.
  Opportunity for citizens to demonstrate their talents, from singing to playing an instrument to what-have-you. Solo or groups encouraged. Can be used as a fundraiser for a community project.

- Wild Game Feed.
  Indigenous species only please! Walleye, pheasant, venison, ?

- Youth Appreciation Night.
  Treat the kids to a pizza party and invite a local youth band to provide the entertainment.

- Ethnic Festival.
  Entertainment and food representing the ethnic heritage of the community.

- Comedy Club.
  There are a number of individuals and teams in the area who are great comedians and provide a wonderful evening full of laughs.

- Leadership Appreciation Night.
  An opportunity for the community to thank each other and those who made special contributions during the year including politicians and leaders of volunteer, social, cultural, veteran, and religious organizations.

- Farmer and Rancher Appreciation Night.
  Farmers and ranchers remain the economic backbone of most of our small communities.

- Heritage Night.
  An opportunity for the elderly to bring to a gathering old photos and other mementos of the community to be used to assemble a community scrap book. Donations can be made to the town museum at the same time. At some later time, the scrap book can be formally presented to the next generation. Can be youth sponsored.

- Job Fair.
  This event provides a wonderful opportunity for area youth to meet and connect
with area business owners.

- Intergenerational Sports Challenge.
  "Yesterday's" versus "Today's" basketball stars. Add cheerleaders for extra fun!

- Special Holiday Celebration.
  Pick a holiday, any holiday, and make it extra special with a parade, bake sale, music, games in the park, even speeches! School reunions fit here too.

- Invent an Event.
  Start a new tradition.
WORKSHOPS

WORKSHOPS ARE SPONSORED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA BUSINESS SCHOOL. WORKSHOPS OCCUR DURING THOSE MONTHS WHEN EVENTS ARE NOT TAKING PLACE. THE COMMUNITY IS TO CHOOSE 6 FROM THE FOLLOWING.

- **Entrepreneurship.**
  Learn the basics on how to identify and pursue new business opportunities in the community.

- **Family Business Dynamics.**
  The business as a family and the family as a business. Survival lessons.

- **Leadership Training.**
  Fundamentals of taking responsibility. Somebody has to do it.

- **Personal Finance.**
  A financially healthy community is composed of financially healthy citizens.

- **Starting/Strengthening Volunteer Organizations.**
  Everybody needs to be a volunteer.

- **Economic and Public Finance Issues.**
  Smart citizens make for smart communities.

- **Living in a Healthy Environment.**
  Steps you and your community can take to feel better.

- **Conflict Management.**
  Change brings conflict. Better know how to deal with it.

- **Identifying Community Priorities.**
  Discussion and debate without arguing. Possible?

- **Grant Writing.**
  Getting more than your fair share.

- **Post Cafe.**
  Maintaining the momentum.

- **Workshop Wish.**
  Design your own workshop.

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**To contact the editor or send submissions, please contact**

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http://www.comm-dev.org/cdpractice2/wkshp.htm

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Appendix C : Events and Workshop Ballot.

Please look over the list of 12 possible events carefully. Circle 6 events which you think will best benefit the community. Now choose 3 of those and write in your name and phone number following "I'LL HELP!" to volunteer to help organize those events. THANKS!!!

- Community Talent Show.
  Opportunity for citizens to demonstrate their talents, from singing to playing an instrument to what-have-you. Solo or groups encouraged.

  (I'LL HELP!______________________________)

- Wild Game Feed.
  Indigenous species only please! Walleye, pheasant, venison, ?.

  (I'LL HELP!______________________________)

- Youth Appreciation Night.
  Treat the kids to a pizza party and invite a local youth band to provide the entertainment.

  (I'LL HELP!______________________________)

4) Ethnic Festival.
  Entertainment and food representing the ethnic foundations of the community.

  (I'LL HELP!______________________________)

- Comedy Club.
  There are a number of individuals and teams in the area who are great comedians and provide a wonderful evening full of laughs.

  (I'LL HELP!______________________________)

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  An opportunity for the community to thank each other and those who made special contributions during the year including politicians and leaders of volunteer, social, cultural, veteran, and religious organizations.

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  Farmers and ranchers remain the economic backbone of most of our small communities.
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  An opportunity for the elderly to bring to a gathering old photos and other mementos of the community to be used to assemble a community scrapbook. Donations can be made to the town museum at the same time.

- Job Fair.
  This event provides a wonderful opportunity for area youth to meet and connect with area business owners.

- Intergenerational Sports Challenge.
  "Yesterday's" versus "Today's" basketball stars. Add cheerleaders and a pep band for extra fun!

- Special Holiday Celebration.
  Pick a holiday, any holiday, and make it extra special with a parade, bake sale, music, games in the park, even speeches!

- Invent an Event.
  Start a new tradition.

With the help of some friends, workshops are sponsored by the USD School of Business. Workshops occur during those months when events are not taking place. Please choose and circle 6 which you believe will best meet the needs of your community and then write your name and address next to 3 of your choices indicating your willingness to help.

THANKS!!!

1) Entrepreneurship.
Learn the basics on how to identify and pursue new business opportunities in the community.

2) Family Business Dynamics.
The business as a family and the family as a business. Survival lessons.

3) Leadership Training.
Fundamentals of taking responsibility. Somebody has to do it.

4) Personal Finance.
A financially healthy community is composed of financially healthy citizens.

5) Starting/Strengthening Volunteer Organizations.
Everybody needs to be a volunteer.
(I'LL HELP!

6) Economic and Public Finance Issues.
Smart citizens make for smart communities.
(I'LL HELP!

7) Living in a Healthy Environment.
Steps you and your community can take to feel better.
(I'LL HELP!

8) Conflict Management.
Change brings conflict. Better know how to deal with it.
(I'LL HELP!

9) Identifying Community Priorities.
Discussion and debate without arguing. Possible?
(I'LL HELP!

10) Grant Writing.
Getting more than your fair share.
(I'LL HELP!

11) Post Café.
Maintaining the momentum.
(I'LL HELP!

12) Workshop Wish.
Design your own workshop.
(I'LL HELP!

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