Non-Profit Partnerships in Community Planning
Washington County, Oregon
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Washington County, Oregon
Local Government Data Sheet

Form of Government	Council-Manager
Legislative Body	Five member non-partisan board; Chairman elected at-large, four commissioners elected by district
Election Schedule	Chairman and commissioners elected every four years with no term limits
Population*	450,000
Area	721 square miles
Budget	$508 million; $390 million operating
Revenue Sources in FY02 Total Budget	25% Property and other taxes 25% Intergovernmental (state and federal) .5% Fines 2% Licenses and fees 12% Charges for services 7% Interfund revenues 15% Transfers 14.5% Miscellaneous
Bond Rating	Aa1
Number of Employees	1600

Socio-Economic Indictors:
    Median Household Income
    Percentage of Owner-Occupied Housing
    Percentage living below poverty status
    Percentage of College Graduates
	
	$51,775 (US)
	57.2%
	7.4%
	36.5%

Leading Employers	Intel Corporation 14,500 Tektronix 4,200 Beaverton School District 3,400 Nike 2,850
Other Distinguishing Characteristics	The previous decade saw Washington County's population increase by 43%, due largely to major investments by large technology companies and their spin-offs. Intel, which has focused much of its worldwide R&D in Washington County, continues to make major investments. The overall downturn in the technology sector has resulted in significant job losses and is creating new challenges for the community.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Today, the newly established Vision Action Network (VAN) fills that role. A non-profit organization initiated by Washington County, the VAN's purpose is to establish a permanent forum that involves leadership from all sectors in developing, prioritizing and implementing a true community agenda. The VAN's fifteen-member board includes representatives from business, education, non-profits, public agencies, health care and the faith community. Though less than a year old, the VAN already has a key early success under its belt: the establishment of the Inter-Religious Action Network. This group is made up of faith leaders dedicated to working with one another and within the VAN structure to resolve quality–of-life issues for county residents.

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

PROBLEM ASSESSMENT

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

Often referred to as the "Silicon Forest," Washington County is home to technology leaders such as Intel, Tektronix and IBM and is world headquarters for Nike, Inc. Jobs in the high-tech industry have drawn people from around the world, so diversity within Washington County is growing as well. Outside the nationally acclaimed urban growth boundary, the county transitions to nurseries, wineries, farmland and miles of evergreen forest that blanket the eastern flank of the Coast Range Mountains.

Growth Yields Change
The quality of life in Washington County has attracted large numbers of talented people, some of whom have taken up leadership roles in every sector of the community. But the dramatic growth – a 43% population increase in the last census period alone – has come so quickly that the area's young institutions have had to devote the bulk of their energies to internal dealings to try to keep pace with the county's growing demands. This inward focus has certainly been true of the Washington County government.

In the mid-1980s, the county drafted its "County 2000" plan that transformed the organization's largely scattered approach to service delivery into a much more tightly focused vision**.** This plan clearly defined the county's financial and services strategies and changed the mindset of the organization. It called for the county to concentrate its primary efforts on providing only those services that fit within its distinct mission, rather than trying to be all things to all people. This changed the county from a reactive organization into a *mission-driven* organization.

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

Missing Links
Yet the county's inward attention also made it difficult to see or seize opportunities to work collaboratively. In fact, some issues not directly related to the county fell by the wayside or were never even heard. "We had blinders on that allowed us to concentrate on our particular objectives, and we achieved success in many areas because of our focus," says Walt Peck, Washington County Communications Officer. "At the same

time, we were less willing to engage with other organizations around their priorities if we didn't share them. We got good at saying 'No.'"

The county was moving so quickly to accomplish its own objectives that other opportunities may have been overlooked, not consciously, but due to preoccupation with its own mission-driven good work. People within the county organization did not necessarily know who was involved with which issues outside the county and therefore missed opportunities to serve as conveners for issue resolution. "We were absorbed with our own issues, as were other key institutions in this fast-growing, increasingly diverse community," remembers Peck.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

An All-encompassing Look
In the fall of 1999, as part of updating the strategic business plan, the Washington County board of commissioners asked the county to take an all-encompassing, honest look at community issues. In essence, their idea was to "turn the lens around." Rather than concentrating on the county's specific mission to see where it applied to the needs of the larger Washington County community, they suggested that the county take a broader view of all of the area's current and anticipated issues and then evaluate its position in relation to them. This was the start of the project to be known as VisionWest.

The first substantive task was to hear from community leaders. The county invited 110 key players – representing a more diverse group than any that the county had worked closely with in the past – to attend one of six meetings for a "community visioning process," a general discussion of needs in the community. County staff members were stunned to receive 100 positive RSVPs. The overwhelming response further supported the suspicion that there was a fundamental need to talk across sectors about issues of community concern. This was an area ripe for exploration.

Two primary themes emerged from the focus group discussions: 1) despite unparalleled economic growth, many basic needs in Washington County were not being met, and 2) the county lacked any real sense of community. Another outcome was that leaders from many of these institutions and organizations were given the opportunity to come together, often for the first time. The fact that they didn't already know one another, despite being in important leadership positions throughout the county, is testament to the "silo" separation of the different segments at work in the greater community.

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

With senior deputy county administrator Don Bohn taking the lead, the county went to unparalleled lengths to truly listen to the community, holding over 200 separate

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discussions over a four-month period. These meetings involved talking to everyone from CEOs to groups of newly arrived migrant workers, from faith leaders to special interest groups. Some meetings involved whole groups of people, while others were one-on-one conversations. Each included the same basic set of questions: "What is it about Washington County that you value? What concerns do you have about your community today? In the future?"

"We walked through a lot of doors to find out what people's concerns were and then we took the time to really talk about them," describes Bohn. By spending hundreds of hours in discussion and talking to over 1400 county residents, the county was laying the foundation for the other VisionWest objective: building a lasting collaborative model for community problem-solving that could help address the issues that were being raised.

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

As a product of these meetings, the value of the county's stock in the community rose considerably. People began to gain a more complete understanding of the county and its responsibilities and concerns while the county, in turn, learned more about its community partners, their capabilities and concerns. "We became more relevant to each other," states Bohn. "Each conversation produced a better understanding of how we fit into the larger community puzzle."

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

During an evening of community celebration, the county put the eight issue areas up for discussion to assess the accuracy of what they had heard. Most of the nearly 600 attendees cast their votes for the issues they felt were of the greatest importance. This celebration helped to reshape the VisionWest issue list, adding some areas that had previously been missing and removing others. For instance, Transportation and Economy had well-developed planning processes already underway in the community, and the decision was made to avoid duplication of effort. "There was a long-standing focus on these issues in Washington County and they had interested, savvy constituencies," says Charlie Cameron, Washington County administrator. "Because many on our issue list suffered from a lack of attention, we decided it was best to let others handle the more established issues."

The final eight issue areas were:
- Aging & Disabilities
- Basic Needs
- Behavioral Health
- Children & Families
- Education
- Environment
- Housing
- Primary Health Care

Delving into the Issues

Washington County's citizens had identified the issues. Now it was time to decide how to handle them. The county developed Issue Teams made up of concerned citizens and leading figures from business, government and the community to grapple with the particular issue areas. "We were aware that, up to this point, the discussion had been a mile wide and six inches deep," explains Peck. "But now we had to dig deeper to get practical and highlight achievable strategies."

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

These individuals participated in six to ten Issue Team meetings that were held throughout the Fall of 2001. Their charge was to develop an in-depth survey of the outstanding challenges and most promising opportunities in their particular areas. In cases where the county was viewed as a fairly impartial party that could evenhandedly mediate discussion, staff served as facilitators for many of the groups. In others, such as Housing and the Environment, where it was perceived as too closely aligned to a particular point of view, the county relied on consultants to lead and simply came to the table as one of many participants.

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

At the first meeting for each Issue Team, the group received a loose "table of contents" to help focus discussion. The objective was to develop an Issue Paper, which included an overview of the trends and conditions pertaining to that issue, specific issues and

strategies identified by each team and a short list of key recommendations that participants felt could be implemented in the following few years. These papers were to provide quality information and recommendations that any Washington County institution could refer to as it worked within a given issue area.

The county did not control or edit the content of the Issue Papers or water them down to suit any one organization. "We had to let things ride," recalls Charlie Cameron. "We certainly have a large stake in the outcome of all this, but we needed to make sure people understood that we had hands off."

By the same token, the county wanted to prevent VisionWest from turning into a typical planning process. The Issue Papers were intended to inspire action, not sit on a shelf. "It was time to really dig in," says Bohn. "We weren't interested in gathering dust. We wanted to get at these issues and strategies and make a difference *soon* in Washington County." Issue Team members were asked to develop strategies that they could embrace and work to support in the future. They were encouraged to keep their recommendations in mind as they prioritized initiatives, developed budgets and set strategic vision for their own individual organizations.

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

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

This is the point at which most strategic planning efforts cease. Yet VisionWest and its Issue Teams highlighted numerous challenges that required enhanced, ongoing community involvement. "No single institution has the ability to take on tough issues like school drop-out rates or affordable housing," asserts Charlie Cameron. "We need to work together, but we've lacked a common table that we could gather around."
This is why, as the Issue Teams worked away, the county took the early steps to create the Vision Action Network (VAN), a non-profit organization whose purpose is to establish a permanent forum that involves leadership from all sectors of Washington County in developing, prioritizing and implementing a true community agenda. The VAN serves as a catalyst for bringing people together, identifying challenges and

promoting community action that delivers real benefits for people and institutions throughout the county.

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

Gathering Forces

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

It was time for the hundreds of hours of community outreach and relationship building by Bohn and other county officials to pay dividends. The county and the community's various organizations had become more relevant to each other, thus making it easy to identify the right people for the board.

County leadership played an active role in establishing the original VAN board of directors, purposely selecting a group of strong individuals with deep and varied ties to the community. "We wanted to take the idea of civic infrastructure to a new level and create an ongoing legacy here, but without it being a county-run effort," says Charlie Cameron.

The VAN board's original nine members included a city manager, the Executive Directors of two key non-profit organizations, the Executive Dean of the community college, two business leaders, a Catholic priest, Cameron, and Tom Brian, chair of the Washington County board of commissioners.

One of the VAN board's first significant actions was to recruit six additional members from the community. Any notion that the county might try to control the board disappeared when the VAN's leadership voted to recruit these additional members from outside of government. Rather than being threatened by this sentiment, Cameron viewed it as a sign of progress, commenting that, "Government is just one of many players in this community – we were at the table, and others needed to be invited."

Community Cohesion

One of the VAN board's most important functions is to legitimize the organization and its initiatives. The board's objectives are to:
- Provide a forum for ongoing relationship building, information sharing, community dialogue and problem solving.
- Serve as a clearinghouse for accurate and timely information.
- Establish linkages between individuals, organizations and sectors and provide information for planning and implementation efforts.

- Develop collaborative action plans that seek to coordinate efforts and mobilize action toward community-based strategies and interventions.
- Increase awareness of the Vision Action Network in order to accomplish its mission and goals.

With a formidable board in place and after hiring an Executive Director, whom it oversees, the VAN turned its attention to moving forward on the recommendations developed by the VisionWest Issue Teams. As it had for other organizations involved in the process throughout the county, a fundamental question arose: "What is our role?"

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

The VAN identified three levels of participation that organizations could use to help take on community issues: actions that could be taken by individual organizations, actions through enhanced partnerships between specific organizations and full community mobilization fostered by the VAN.

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

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

Examples:
Disabled access to services
Washington County pursued a merger between the county's department of aging and veteran's services and the state office of disabilities to improve access to services for the disabled population without regard to age.

Chaplains

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

Clinic staffing

Washington County is associated with a number of low-cost or free health clinics, but there were problems finding enough doctors to staff them. By getting the word out through VAN member organizations, physicians began volunteering their time.

Strategic planning

Washington County is currently updating its strategic plan using input from the VisionWest issue papers.

Mental health management

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

Level 2

An existing coalition of organizations assumes responsibility to develop action plans and implementation strategies.

The role of the VAN in this area is to:
- Facilitate, coordinate and/or otherwise participate in planning and implementation efforts, as appropriate.
- Track the issue areas and activities of the stakeholder organizations.
- Identify additional opportunities for collaboration/partnership.

Examples:

Health forum

Primary Health Care leaders now meet to follow up on VisionWest recommendations. The VAN provides a forum for the established network of issue leaders to discuss strategies for protecting and expanding the health care safety-net system.

Volunteer recruitment

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

Access to clinics

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

Level 3
The VAN assumes a lead role in areas that require broad collaboration and where no other organization (or coalition of organizations) is positioned to lead, develop and execute an action plan.

The role of the VAN in this area is to:
- Provide leadership and coordination among a diverse group of stakeholders to plan and mobilize around an urgent community issue.
- Participate in and monitor implementation efforts.
- Identify additional opportunities for collaboration/partnership.

Examples:
Inter-Religious Action Network
Under the auspices of the Vision Action Network, the Inter-Religious Action Network formed to organize the faith community to interact with each other and with the VAN. This new group comprises Christian, Jewish, Muslim and other faith traditions, coming together to improve the quality of life for all Washington County residents by pooling the resources of their respective faith communities. The group recently sponsored the county's first-ever faith forum, which attracted 150 representatives from faith, business, non-profit and public organizations. Additionally, the organization has developed and made public a comprehensive database of the various community services provided by local faith groups.

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

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

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

FISCAL IMPACT/COSTS

After an RFP process, the county entered into contracts with two consulting firms for project scope, marketing, outreach, group facilitation and product development. The total amount of these contracts was nearly $700,000.

After initial work including early outreach, the county changed course and decided to redirect internal resources to the project. The consultants continued to provide strategic services especially in the area of group facilitation.

The county ended the VisionWest process with project expense of nearly $217,000. In addition, the value of existing staff assigned to the effort is estimated at $240,000.

A breakdown is provided below:

December 2000 – June 2002 (19 months)

Project Expenses:

Office Supplies	$ 4,500
Postage	$ 5,000
Consulting Services	$190,000
Printing	$ 11,500
Miscellaneous	$ 5,500
	$216,500

Staff Investment (19 months):

3.0 FTE	$240,000

RESULTS

"While working together is what we should be doing, 'barn raising' in the 21st Century takes time and commitment," concludes Tom Brian, chairman of the Washington County board of commissioners. "The people and institution of Washington County have demonstrated both of these qualities through the VisionWest project and the creation of the Vision Action Network."

VisionWest was outcome-oriented from its inception. Washington County always measured short-term objectives against the ultimate goal of building a sustainable commitment to countywide strategic, collaborative action. In addition to the many new collaborative projects initiated as a result of the project and the Vision Action Network (pgs.11-13), the following results are evidence that Washington County met that goal.

Active involvement of every sector of Washington County: The 1400 people who participated directly in the project's outreach phase (in 200 different venues) included: retirees, business executives, migrant workers, citizen activists and many others. Project staff members were bilingual, resulting in unprecedented outreach to the county's considerable Latino community. Thousands of hours of time were donated by 400 volunteers to the development of the Issue Team reports. The 16-member board of directors for the Vision Action Network represents every segment of the county.

Identification of issues of broad community concern: Nearly 600 county residents attended an event to review the VisionWest summary of the community concerns raised during the outreach phase. County organizers invited participants to vote on which issues should be made top priority. They saw their feedback reflected in the modified list of eight main issue areas later produced by the county.

Systems analysis and practical strategy development: The Issue Team reports are a critical first step in the development of a true community agenda for Washington County. Their recommendations provide a common foundation for community action and are being shared with institutions throughout the county. There was another benefit gained from the Issue Teams. As the 400 volunteers worked together, they were informally building some of the new personal and organizational alliances that the community requires – otherwise known as civic infrastructure.

Sustainability of collaborative efforts: Two organizations, the Vision Action Network (VAN) and the Inter-Religious Network of Washington County, were formed to move VisionWest strategies forward. Of the first seventeen individuals asked to serve on the VAN board of directors, sixteen said, "Yes." The VAN's newly hired first Executive Director joined an organization with $125,000 in first-year funding pledges, the promise of significant additional private and public contributions, dedicated office space and fully developed business procedures. He has also inherited the tremendous goodwill and support generated by the VisionWest process.

One year after its creation, the Inter-Religious Action Network is a recognized part of the civic and spiritual landscape of Washington County. "Working together in a forum like this is creating trust among all of us," says Wes Taylor, pastor of the Tualatin United Methodist Church and Inter-Religious Action Network Chair. The Inter-Religious Action Network is working to help address several countywide issues, including affordable housing and care for the elderly.

CONCLUSION

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

Group Discussion

1. Underlying Assumptions:
   - ❖ No one organization can solve complex community issues
   - ❖ Organizations must be relevant to a community of interests (broadly defined)
   - ❖ The future requires community-wide planning and community governance
   - ❖ All sectors of the community need to be engaged and involved (government, business, religious and non-profit)
   - ❖ Relationships are primary and make all other things possible
   - ❖ We can do better, together
   - ❖ Change is evolutionary, not revolutionary
   - ❖ Our community deserves the best of our collective efforts and passion

   Do these assumptions resonate in your community or organization? Discuss how they may or may not ring true.

2. Needs Assessment: Discuss the needs of your community that defy adequate solution from existing array of mission driven organizations. How is your community coming together to discuss, strategize and respond to critical issues?

3. Asset Mapping: What assets (institutional or otherwise) may provide opportunities for new partnerships and alliances? What assets are missing or should be encouraged or emphasized?

4. Risk Assessment: Discuss the risks and opportunities for a mission driven organization to assume the role of convenor in a community-wide, multiple issue planning process. Consider methods to develop and maintain buy-in from key stakeholders. How do you reach out to the "unusual suspects"? How do you provide process leadership without steering the content or outcomes?

5. Risk Assessment: Discuss the risks and opportunities of inviting the faith community to be involved at the ground floor of such a planning process. What role can the convenor assume in coordination and facilitation for the participation of diverse faith organizations? What are other complexities or community sensitivities?

6. Public Involvement Strategy: Discuss the elements that are needed to move a community-wide planning exercise to a community action effort. How can the planning, issue discussion and strategy development be structured to enhance a sense of shared ownership and accountability for identified strategies?

7. Institutionalizing Results of Public Involvement Process: How do you sustain the relationships and community of interest required for collaboration and partnerships? What organization specific commitments are required to make sure collaboration and partnerships are not left to chance? Discuss the various roles of council (board), executive, department directors, and staff in walking the talk.

8. <u>Institutionalizing Results of Public Involvement Process</u>: What community governance structures are required to make sure collaboration and partnerships are not left to chance? In this case study, an independent non-profit organization was created. Please discuss other options or structures.

9. <u>Measuring Progress</u>: How do you measure success for such a movement? Process? Outcomes? Sustainability? Relationships?

(Imagine It.

(Shape It.

(Live It.

VisionWest
Imagine tomorrow together . . .

The VisionWest Video is used to introduce several thousand county residents to the project. Of these, 1,400 will participate directly over the next 3 months.

www.vision-west.org goes live. The public is invited to highlight key livability concerns and track the project's progress on-line.

At the **"Evening of Celebration,"** more than 500 county residents, ranging from migrant workers to corporate CEOs, enjoy great food and music together. More importantly, they analyze the critical issues list developed during the outreach phase. By the time the evening is over, the list has expanded.

Issue Teams made up of 400 community volunteers begin their work on items raised during the community outreach phase.

The **Vision Action Network** is officially established. The first Board of Directors includes representatives of faith groups, industry, education, local gov't, health care, not-for-profits and other community organizations.

Project staff assist local faith leaders in establishing the **Inter-Religious Action Network,** the county's first broad-based ecumenical organization.
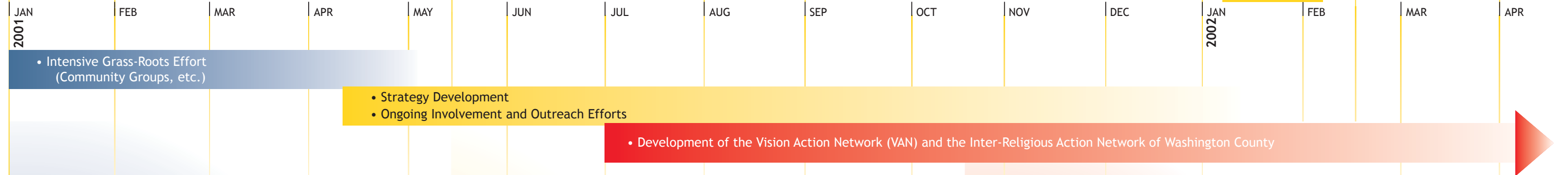
200 Applicants apply to be Executive Director of the VAN. A final selection is scheduled for May 7, 2002.

Issue Team Final Reports are released on www.vision-west.org and in CD format. Institutions throughout the county request a copy. This is a critical step towards establishing a shared community agenda.

"Celebrating Success" brings the VisionWest project to a close. Participants are challenged to embrace and act on strategies identified in the Issue Papers and become involved in the Vision Action Network.

JAN 2001 | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC | JAN 2002 | FEB | MAR | APR

• Intensive Grass-Roots Effort (Community Groups, etc.)

• Strategy Development
• Ongoing Involvement and Outreach Efforts

• Development of the Vision Action Network (VAN) and the Inter-Religious Action Network of Washington County

Community Outreach

VisionWest was a success because of the active participation of community groups, businesses, public agencies, schools, faith leaders, advocacy interests, not-for-profits and hundreds of dedicated individuals. During the outreach phase, nearly 200 presentations and focus groups were conducted, involving 1400 people. Participants identified issues they consider essential to our community's health and livability. Along the way, connections were strengthened among many different sectors and organizations, and a strong desire was expressed to work together more effectively.

Making Connections/Community Innovations

During this phase, Issue Teams composed of more than 400 volunteers considered opportunities and obstacles that confront our community today and others that are anticipated in the future. Concerns raised during the community outreach phase were the focus of the Issue Teams' work. Pragmatic innovations were identified that can help Washington County address problems that have plagued similar communities across the country. Thousands of hours of donated time were expended researching and adapting best practices that have worked well in other places.

Sustainability/Accountability

Ultimately, VisionWest had to move beyond good ideas; it required action. To be more precise, the VisionWest Issue Teams developed strategies that call for collaborative action that involves all sectors of the community. Tough problems like high dropout rates for high school students, or the lack of affordable housing can only be addressed when the entire community makes them a priority.

To encourage this kind of teamwork, the not-for-profit Vision Action Network (VAN) was established. The VAN's 16-member Board of Directors is representative of every sector of Washington County. Its mission is to encourage and facilitate community-based problem solving. In response to faith leaders' desire to participate in the VAN in a coordinated fashion, the VisionWest project also assisted in the development of the Inter-Religious Action Network, the first-ever ecumenical organization representing all of Washington County. Both organizations are speeding the development of "civic infrastructure." This connecting of institutions and individuals holds tremendous promise as we pursue collaborative responses to challenges that defy single-agency solutions.

(See It. www.vision-west.org