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## **Community COMPASS Significantly Improves Citizen Engagement**

Community COMPASS advances the science and art of community consensus building by applying cutting-edge technology in public involvement and communication. Community COMPASS is a groundbreaking alliance of government, planning, civic and private organizations and individuals focused on planning the future of **Hamilton County (Cincinnati), OH (pop. 823,472)**. The Vision for Hamilton County's Future is the foundation element for the comprehensive plan being developed between 2002 and 2004.

To build consensus on a collective unified vision for 49 governments and planning commissions, COMPASS gathered input and ideas from a Community Values Survey of 4500 households and held a Youth Forum, an on-line Internet forum, and 11 Community Forums throughout Hamilton County.

On January 12, 2002, more than 1,300 people came together at the first Countywide Town Meeting – using cutting-edge communication technology - to discuss participant findings and recommendations and set the course for Hamilton County's future. Four interconnected core goals emerged from this meeting: assure economic prosperity, embrace diversity and equity, balance development and the environment, and build collaborative decision-making.

The uniqueness of this electronically enabled visioning process for Hamilton County's Countywide Town Meeting and its results accountability focus set a new standard for communities using a citizen-based approach for planning and implementation. The town meeting event demonstrated the use of technology that allowed real-time input and feedback for all participants.

"By using wireless keypads connected to a mainframe computer, participants were able to see the views of the group instantaneously – a giant step beyond the dot stickers that planners have long used to gauge public preferences," said Ron Miller, Executive Director for Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission.

Transferring successful tools and techniques developed in this process provides opportunities for more thorough discussion of very tough issues and greatly heightens the effectiveness and efficiency of public involvement for communities. Also, the COMPASS model enables high-quality, informed citizen input and direction from one large meeting (with over 1,000 attendees), which is more cost-effective and time-effective than holding a series of smaller meetings with less feedback.

The clear direction given by vision attendees at the Countywide Town Meeting is now serving as the basis for goal implementation through the results accountability process.

Beyond visioning, Community COMPASS developed and employed a Community Results Accountability Framework integrated with a consensus process and aspects of appreciative inquiry. The unusual combination of methodologies produced successful community visioning, planning, implementation and measurement.

The community planning process was designed to include an efficient research process driven by results indicators. The integrated process improved planning efficiency and effectiveness through community focus on community measurement of community results.

According to Miller, community plans, especially comprehensive plans, too often take forever to complete and then fail at the critical step of moving from talk to action.

The framework is based on Mark Friedman's work at the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute, which focuses on results accountability for human service agencies and programs. The Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission (HCRPC), in search of an efficient and effective community planning process for its comprehensive plan (Community COMPASS), adapted Friedman's human services planning model to create an integrated community planning and implementation framework.

"Demonstrating a disciplined business-like decision-making process – a focus on implementation, results measurement, and accountability – was essential to sustaining community participation, private sector support, and government funding for the HCRPC's comprehensive plan," said Miller.

Elements of appreciative inquiry were used in the implementation process to assure affirmation of what works best and to invite positive revolution, transformation, and change management. The strength-based approach to community conversations and action planning helped to mobilize people to action and maintained a focus on imagination and innovation related to affirmative topics instead of negation and criticism of deficit-based change approaches."

CRAF breaks with traditional planning and the past military model of mission, goals and objectives and goes directly to the questions: "What do you want? How will you recognize it in measurable terms when you get it? What will it take to get there? What works? CRAF starts with ends and works backward to means. As a result, research is highly focused and relevant and implementation is continuously supported.

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