

The Potential of Community Visioning Initiatives (in 500 words)

We live in a very complex world, and we are at one of the most critical crossroads in history. More and more people are coming to the realization that overcoming the challenges of our times will require problem solving on a scale most of us have never known before.

Community Visioning Initiatives can be described as a series of community meetings designed to facilitate the process of brainstorming ideas, organizing the ideas into goals, prioritizing the goals, and identifying realistic action plans. One of the main goals of Community Visioning Initiatives is to maximize citizen participation in identifying challenges, and in solution-oriented activity.

The IPCR Initiative advocates for Community Visioning Initiatives which are time-intensive, lasting even as long as 1½ years (18 months)—and which are supported by many Community Teaching and Learning Centers [at least 20 Community Teaching and Learning Centers (CTLCs) per 50,000 residents]. The CTLCs could function as information and resource centers, locations for workshops, centers for training “teacher-leaders”, job training and employment centers; places in local neighborhoods for discussion, information sharing, mutual support, and fellowship; places which accelerate the formation of study groups—and locations where residents “vote” (identify and prioritize challenges, solutions, and action plans).

Results from well thought out preliminary surveys (circulated to at least 150 key leaders from a significant variety of fields of activity in the community) can help residents appreciate the need for a Community Visioning Initiative, and for many “Community Teaching and Learning Centers” (CTLCs)—and help determine the topics to be covered by workshops in the CTLCs.

The job fairs which come at the end of the Community Visioning Initiative process provide opportunities for all key stakeholders in the community (businesses, organizations, institutions, government, etc) to create and offer new employment opportunities. In addition, people (especially unemployed people) who volunteer their time and energy to assist the Community Visioning process—and/or advance the resulting action plans—could receive, as compensation, local currency. There are also many opportunities for local newspapers to contribute valuable community services associated with the visioning process (making preliminary survey results accessible, providing analysis of resources in Community Teaching and Learning Centers, reporting on different phases of the Visioning Initiative, etc).

This “constellation of initiatives” approach to collaborative problem solving and citizen peacebuilding emphasizes “asking for ideas”; personal and civic responsibility; and maximizing citizen participation in identifying challenges, and in solution-oriented activity—and provides local residents with many new ways to encourage and support each other in the everyday circumstances of community life. This “constellation of initiatives” approach creates affordable education systems with numerous associated local learning networks; assists with outreach, partnership formation, project development, and service capacity for both existing (and forming) organizations and businesses; and will inevitably create increasing numbers of solution-oriented and sustainable jobs.

1000 time-intensive Community Visioning Initiatives, in communities around the world, would create an exponential increase in solution-oriented investment, an exponential increase in solution-oriented employment, and an exponential increase in our collective capacity to overcome the challenges of our times.