



COMMUNITY VISION AND
ACTION PLAN
COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

Above: Citizen Topic Groups were convened to turn the ideas generated by the public into the vision statements, goals, strategies, and action steps that comprise the vision for Columbia's future.

2. The Public Process

Introduction

Imagine Columbia's Future is a citizen-driven vision that utilized a carefully crafted public process to ensure the participation of a broad array of community members. Residents played a critical role in the effort by actively participating in every phase of the vision. This chapter describes the steps and methodology used to involve Columbia residents and conduct the public process. It is organized into four parts:

1. **Preparation** – This encompasses the preparatory steps used to set the stage for the public process.
2. **Gathering Ideas** – The Big Idea Gathering Meetings (BIG Meetings) were the central feature of this part of the process, and resulted in the identification of 13 vision topics.
3. **Strategizing the Vision** – This section features the work of the Citizen Topic Groups who volunteered to meet regularly to develop a vision statement, goals, strategies, and action steps for each topic.
4. **Revisiting the Vision** – This section provides an overview of the Community Choices Open House, which brought the work of the Citizen Topic Groups back to the general public for comment.

The Fall Vision Festivals

In preparation for the Idea Gathering Meetings, Columbia area residents were encouraged to submit ideas during the Fall Vision Festivals and through an on-line survey. The Fall Vision Festivals were held on October 7, 2006 and conducted at Douglas High School, Smithton Middle School and Gentry Middle School and also on October 14, 2006 at Jefferson Junior High School and Lange Middle School.

Throughout October and November 2006, 1,500 ideas were gathered from a variety of sources. Over 60,000 surveys were sent to residents and more than 500 people submitted ideas during the Fall Vision Festivals and BIG Idea Gathering Meetings.

1. Preparation

Preparation is an important part of any vision. The preparatory phase gave the consultant team an opportunity to better understand the community. It served as an opportunity to initiate publicity and outreach efforts, and allowed for the collection of technical data that could be used by the public during the course of the vision. This section describes the major preparatory steps of *Imagine Columbia's Future*.

Stakeholder Interviews

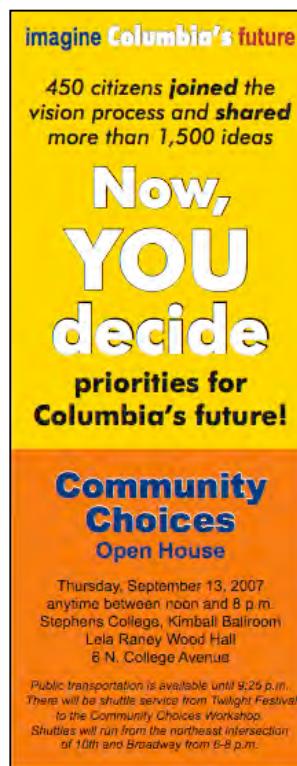
In order to become more familiar with the Columbia community at the start of *Imagine Columbia's Future*, ACP conducted a series of focus group-style interviews with a variety of stakeholders in the fall of 2006. Groups included representatives from arts and culture organizations, business, the development community, education, environmental groups, religious organizations, and health and social services, among others. The interviews helped ACP understand the prevailing attitudes in the community, as well as perceived strengths and weaknesses. In addition, the interviews served as an opportunity to initiate outreach to different groups in the community. All interview participants were encouraged to attend the Big Idea-Gathering Meetings and invite their colleagues, neighbors, friends, and constituencies to participate as well.

Publicity and Outreach

Publicity and outreach were used to generate awareness about *Imagine Columbia's Future* and to encourage participation from all segments of the community.

Publicity. Publicity efforts included developing flyers to distribute electronically and by hand, PSAs to air on local television and radio, an FAQ sheet, and other collaterals. Contacts were established with media and public relations channels in order to boost awareness for the process. The City developed a webpage dedicated to the visioning process, at http://www.gocolumbiamo.com/Public_Comm/Visioning/. The Vision Committee Co-Chairs and others involved with the project also submitted several opinion editorials to local papers over the course of *Imagine Columbia's Future*.

Outreach. Outreach efforts worked through institutional and grass roots channels to generate participation, with the understanding that people are more likely to get involved in a visioning effort if someone they know and trust invites them. Various community leaders and residents were invited to attend an orientation meeting and become Outreach Ambassadors for the process. Outreach Ambassadors were given tools such as flyers, timelines, and suggested strategies for conducting their outreach campaigns. Their efforts targeted the diverse geographic, demographic, and special interest segments of the community, and helped to bring a large number of residents to participate in public meetings.



Community Choices Workshop flyer.

Data Compilation

A final element of preparation for conducting the vision involved researching and assembling technical information related to Columbia's existing conditions and trends. ACP drew information from the City's publications, reports, and data resources in order to develop a simple, easy-to-read Fact Sheet for distribution at the initial public meetings. The purpose of the Fact Sheet was to give all members of the public a common understanding of the community's characteristics, including its history, geography, demographics, development patterns, economic traits, and major institutions, among others. This Fact Sheet was later expanded into a detailed Fact Book for use by the Citizen Topic Groups who were involved with strategizing the vision. The complete Fact Book is available online at http://www.gocolumbiamo.com/Public_Comm/Visioning/Fact_Book/index.php.

2. Gathering Ideas

The vision for Columbia's future is built upon the ideas and aspirations of the community. Therefore it was imperative to create safe, fun methods for area residents to share their ideas for the future of their community. Ideas were collected mainly through the Big Idea Gathering Meetings, and citizens also had opportunities to submit ideas through online surveys or at Fall Vision Festivals (see sidebar). All ideas received were included in the *Imagine Columbia's Future* database and considered in the formulation of the vision, goals, and strategies.

Big Idea Gathering (BIG) Meetings

In November and December 2006 area residents came together at one of two Big Idea Gathering Meetings, held at Stephens College and Rock Bridge High School, and shared their ideas for the future of Columbia. These meetings were widely publicized and open to anyone who lives, works, studies, or shops in Columbia. An extensive outreach effort was conducted to reach out to the diverse demographic, geographic, and special interest groups in the community. More than 450 members of the public participated in the Big Idea Gathering (BIG) Meetings for *Imagine Columbia's Future*.

The participants at the BIG Meetings worked in small groups to brainstorm answers to the question: *What should be done to make Columbia the best that it can be in the future?* Trained discussion leaders documented participants' ideas verbatim on flipchart paper. In addition to the two BIG Meetings, additional brainstorming sessions using the same small group format were conducted in Spanish at the Boone County Community Partnership and Pueblo de Dios. In total, 1,510 ideas were generated as part of the idea-gathering phase of *Imagine Columbia's Future*.

All of the ideas were reviewed to identify emerging topics that suggest the areas of greatest importance to the Columbia community. These emerging topics were validated by the Vision Committee and served as the



This Flier was used to advertise the Big Idea Gathering Meetings.

The 13 Topics

1. Arts and Culture
2. Community Character
3. Community Facilities and Services
4. Community Pride and Human Relations
5. Development
6. Downtown
7. Economic Development
8. Education
9. Environment
10. Governance and Decision Making
11. Health, Social Services, and Affordable Housing
12. Parks, Recreation, and Greenways
13. Transportation



Volunteer Citizen Topic Group members discussing strategies and action steps.

basis for organization of the 13 Citizen Topic Groups in the second phase of the visioning process.

3. Strategizing the Vision

The next phase of the visioning process focused on taking the ideas generated by the public and turning them into vision statements, goals, strategies, and action plans that describe the community’s collective desired future as well as the most effective means of achieving that vision. Citizen Topic Groups were organized for the 13 emerging topics identified during the idea gathering and charged with preparing the vision and action plans for each topic. (See sidebar for an alphabetical list of topics.)

Citizen Topic Groups

The Citizen Topic Groups worked over a six-month period beginning in January 2007 to turn the ideas generated by the public into the vision statements, goals, strategies, and action steps that comprise the vision for Columbia’s future. The groups were made up of volunteers who were knowledgeable or passionate about a particular topic area, and who were committed to working through an exciting and challenging process. In total, more than 340 people participated in the Citizen Topic Groups. Each Citizen Topic Group had a Co-Facilitator that was appointed by the Vision Committee Co-Chairs, as well as Co-Facilitators elected from within the group. Participants selected their preferred group based on their own interests and expertise.

The table below lists each of the Citizen Topic Group meetings and the major activities conducted at each. In addition to the scheduled Citizen Topic Group meetings, many groups held interim meetings in order to complete their work. The time, dedication, and hard work that these citizens committed to the process ensured a timely, quality vision that represents the consensus of the community.

Activity	Date	Major Activities
1. Kick-off Meeting	January 17, 2007	For the first meeting, group members were introduced to the process and one another. They reviewed all of the ideas generated by the public related to their chosen topic. They formed small groups on subtopics and began to identify themes and prepare a preliminary goal. The groups also discussed recruitment efforts and nomination of Co-Facilitator candidates.
2. Meeting #2	February 21, 2007	At this meeting, the elected Co-Facilitators were confirmed. The goals were refined and the groups began developing strategies.
3. Meeting #3	March 14, 2007	Draft strategies were refined and preliminarily prioritized.
4. Exploring the Vision	April 4, 2007	The draft goals and strategies were presented to the public and other Topic Groups for review, feedback, and rating.
5. Meeting #4	April 18, 2007	The goals and strategies were revised based on feedback received from the community.
6. Meeting #5	May 16, 2007	The Community Resources Scan was introduced and groups began identifying implementation steps.
7. Meeting #6 & 7	June 20, 2007 and July 13, 2007	Groups finalized their action plans for each strategy and prepared the vision statement for their topic.

Exploring the Vision Workshop

Exploring the Vision Workshop was conducted on April 4, 2007 as a mid-course check-in to confirm whether the work of the Citizen Topic Groups was headed in the right direction. There were 278 participants in attendance at the meeting who evaluated the draft goals and strategies and provided feedback during two key activities. During the assembly, the draft goals were presented and participants rated the level of importance for each one on a scale of one to five (1 = not important and 5 = very important). During the Marketplace of Ideas, participants visited stations for each of the Citizen Topic Groups, spoke with group representatives, and completed Comment Cards on the goals and strategies.

4. Revisiting the Vision

Community Choices

The Community Choices event was conducted on September 13, 2007 from 12:00pm – 8:00pm in the Kimball Ballroom of Stephens College. Forty large displays presented the 41 subtopic goals and 128 supporting strategies that resulted from the recommendations submitted by the Citizen Topic Groups. Participants were given six sticky dots to indicate the six strategies they felt to be most important, and they were also able to sign up to help work on implementation for any of the topics. Approximately 470 people attended the event. The preliminary drafts of the Action Plans that spell out the implementation details for the goals and strategies were also available for review.

The Community Choices was a success in that it was well attended and generated a lot of interest. Some controversy arose when some people used each of their six dots for six separate strategies while others used most of their dots for a single strategy. This event was designed to provide a “snapshot” of public concerns to be evaluated along with the information from the initial Big Idea meetings and the efforts of the Citizen Topic Groups. All the strategies in this document are there because the Citizen Topic Groups read through the ideas from the Big Idea meetings and decided that they represented themes in those ideas. The number of dots placed by each strategy during this workshop is shown in the chart set forth in Appendix VIII titled Community Choices Tally Sheet.



A celebratory ribbon cutting took place to initiate the Community Choices event.



Participants at the Community Choices Workshop.