



Texas Community Futures Forum

2004

Identifying Community Needs

What does our community need? What would make life better for the people who live here? Do we need a stronger, more diverse economy? Access to more resources and services? A clean, safe environment for children and adults?

When we think about the future for our fellow Texans, our communities, and our state, we all have visions of progress and improvements.

What's your vision for a strong, healthy community?

- ◆ livable neighborhoods?
- ◆ decent wages?
- ◆ a competitive and sustainable economy?
- ◆ affordable housing and health care?
- ◆ clean water and air?
- ◆ skilled workers and profitable businesses?
- ◆ places for recreation?
- ◆ effective community leadership?
- ◆ strong families?
- ◆ competent, caring young people?

These good things don't just happen. It takes concerned people from all parts of the community thinking, planning, and working together.

That's why we're asking you to join us in looking at the health and economic well-being of our communities. Involving people like you is the first step to creating our future.

Thank you for your participation in this important process. We value your ideas and your vision for the future.

The County Forum

In our County Forum, you and your fellow residents will:

- ◆ Identify the most critical needs and concerns in our county
- ◆ Prioritize the issues in terms of importance and ability to make an impact.

Facilitators will assist you in identifying the needs and concerns in our county. You and your fellow residents will be divided into small groups to identify, discuss, and prioritize the needs.

What Is an Issue?

Issues can be defined as complex human problems. They are topics of broad public concern and often have no easy answers. The problems and concerns facing Texans are not caused by just one factor but have roots in a whole array of interrelated factors.

Issues are all around us—maintaining a productive workforce,

enhancing the health and well-being of the elderly and of our children and teenagers, changing family relationships, and building a viable economy. Issues may be controversial because differences in people's understanding, beliefs, values, and situations lead them to prefer different solutions.

An issue is stated in such a way that it does not include positions of for or against. For example, saying "lack of family values" assumes that traditional family values are absent and implies a judgment that may or may not be accurate. On the other hand, saying "shifting family values" provides a starting point for encouraging more people to take part in determining the outcome.

Where Do Issues Come From?

Issues arise out of the needs and concerns of people as they cope with the changes going on around them. Our world is changing rapidly, and the issues change right along with it. All issues begin, flourish, and end. During the County Forum you will not only decide what the issues are, but which issues take priority over others.

What Can You Do to Prepare?

With your help, we will look at the complex issues facing all of us in the coming years.

Observe, listen to others, read, and talk to people about their concerns. Ask questions. What are the major concerns in our community? What do you think are the current and emerging problems facing our county, city, or region? What outside forces may impact our county? The following sources of information should help:

Media sources—local and national newspapers, magazines, trade publications, professional journals, newsletters, specialized newspapers, and electronic media.

Information and data sources—opinion polls; records of social and economic trends and indicators; shifts in agricultural production, population, housing, crime, labor, education, health, and nutrition.

Public and private organizations—civic organizations, Chambers of Commerce, church groups, and major employers in the area. What are the issues facing the people they serve?

Recognize your own values and biases. We all have different things that we value, and we all evaluate issues in relation to our values, interests, and beliefs. It is important to remain open, inclusive, and tolerant of others when identifying concerns that affect our county.

What Happens Next?

After the County Forum, you will receive a report highlighting the priorities that were identified.

The County Forum priorities from our county will be added to the results from Forums across the state and will contribute to planning Texas Cooperative Extension's educational programs for the next 5 years. They will also be shared with other agencies and organizations to encourage broad-based cooperation and collaboration in addressing community concerns.

We encourage you to remain involved in the Futures Forum as we make progress towards addressing our community's priorities. We look forward to your participation!