

Back Home
with
Blueprint
COMMUNITIES

**Ideas for Informing,
Involving & Inspiring
Your Community**

Back Home

with

Blueprint Communities

The success of your Blueprint Communities (BC) team and your community plan will, in large part, hinge on the buy-in you get from other leaders and from community residents back home. Included in this booklet are ideas to help you achieve the following goals:

- Inform your community and other leaders about the BC initiative and your community plan
- Involve other leaders and community residents in executing your plan
- Inspire your community to support your plan and help make it successful

The booklet is divided into three sections:

- Briefing key community leaders outside the BC team (p. 2)
- Getting information on BC and your community plan out to the public (p. 5)
- Hosting/supporting BC events or special projects (p. 13)

The ideas in these sections can help you gain community support and improve your chances of successfully executing your community plan.

If you have questions about any of the ideas presented, feel free to contact FHLBank's Corporate Communications Department at 1-800-288-3400 (x7696) or via e-mail at pr@fhlb-pgh.com.

Briefing key community leaders outside the BC team

The Blueprint Communities initiative underscores buy-in and support from other leaders throughout your community. Local legislators and council members, business owners, school officials, nonprofit providers – all of these people have a vested interest in the success of your community plan. They can play key roles in executing the plan and acting as ambassadors to ensure the plan’s success. Here are some ideas you can use to inform and involve other community leaders.

Host a “Power” Breakfast or Luncheon

One effective way of informing and involving leaders in your community is to host a “power” breakfast or luncheon at a local restaurant, civic club or place of business. As you know, community leaders typically have very busy schedules, often including family activities in the evening. The power breakfast or lunch maximizes available time while offering you a chance to brief other leaders and, if you so desire, get feedback from them on your community plan.

You might consider using the opportunity to provide a brief outline of your BC objectives and plan. Ask leaders if they can be counted on to offer assistance as various leadership tasks become necessary in carrying out your community plan. Encourage them to be good ambassadors and spread the word about the plan to others in the community.

Attend Neighborhood, Town or City Council Meetings

One good way of spreading the word to other leaders and ensuring that it's in the public record is to get on the agenda for the next neighborhood, town or city council meeting. Giving the heads-up to local decision-makers will involve them in the BC process and give them a stake in the outcome of your plan. It's also a good way to spread the word to residents in your community, since press coverage of such meetings is routine.

Network on the Street

Sometimes the best support you can get is generated via word of mouth. When you run into other leaders on the street, tell them about Blueprint Communities and your community plan. Explain to them the benefits of the plan and how it will strengthen your community. If they would like more information, direct them to www.blueprintcommunities.com. If they want to know how they can help, ask them to spread the word on BC and support it publicly.

Provide Regular and Timely Updates to Other Leaders

A regular and steady stream of information is vital to gaining and holding the support of other local leaders. One excellent way to keep the lines of communication open is to create a mailing or e-mail list of the leadership base in your community. Then send periodic letters or e-mails updating leaders on progress benchmarks and milestones. These do not have to be epics. They can be short and to the point, touching on the progress and milestones of your plan.

Newsletters or e-newsletters allow you to get into more depth on issues vital to your community plan. You can also include photos, as well as special features, such as bios of your BC team and other local leaders. Whether you want to print hardcopy newsletters or send them directly through e-mail, out-of-the-box software (available at media stores) can be easy to use, often including pre-designed templates that are effective in putting together attractive newsletters at minimal cost.

Getting info on BC and your community plan out to the public

Public support for your Blueprint Communities planning effort can inform and inspire another level of support. When the whole community is behind your efforts, you stand a much better chance of succeeding. Here are some ways to inform the public of your BC team effort and your community plan.

Provide a Press Release to Local Media

Local media often rely on press releases to write news stories about issues important to their readership. To get the word out to the public, consider writing and sending a press release to media in your local area anytime something newsworthy happens with respect to your BC team or plan. In addition to publicizing the formation of your team and the initial development of your plan, you might also publicize large funding commitments, groundbreakings, ribbon cuttings – anything that shows progress you are making toward accomplishing your BC plan.

Think of a press release as the news story you would love to see in print. Begin with a catchy headline that puts your news in a nutshell. Then lead with the basics: who, what, when, where, how, why. Include quotes from key individuals – the more known, the better – involved in the story. Provide additional, in-depth detail that includes the specifics of your news. Finally, end with some “boilerplate” (basic background information) about your BC team, your plan and maybe even the BC initiative as a whole.

Send the release to editors of newspapers or other local publications. You can find their names on the editorial page of the publication. Also send the release to news directors of local radio and television stations. You may have to call the main number from the phone book; ask for the news director or news editor. If an important event is coming up, make sure you send the release ahead of time, so that media can decide whether they want to send a journalist or photographer to cover the event in person. Or you can send a shorter version of the release, a "media advisory," to entice the media into coming. Then make sure they have the full press release on the day of the event.

There's a high degree of trust implicit in press releases, so make sure you've got the facts straight, names spelled correctly, titles identified appropriately and quotes approved by those who provided them.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Minner, Carper, Castle Unveil Delaware's 'Blueprint Communities'; New Community Development Initiative Offers Tools for Success so Nine Neighborhoods Can Plan for Widespread Renewal

Newark, DE, March 10, 2008 - First State Gov. Ruth Ann Minner, U.S. Sen. Thomas Carper and U.S. Rep. Michael Castle took the stage at the University of Delaware today to help induct nine new leadership teams who are being given a unique opportunity to reinvent their communities.

Standing before a crowd of more than 100 community advocates at the Louise & David Roselle Center for the Arts, three of the state's highest elected officials joined together to welcome the nine communities, who have been chosen to participate in a comprehensive revitalization initiative called Blueprint Communities. The initiative is designed to help older neighborhoods get their second wind and plan for community renewal more effectively.

Named as Blueprint Communities today were: Belvedere/Cedar Heights and Vicinity; Dover Community Partnership; East Side, Wilmington; Edgemoor; Hilltop/Little Italy, Wilmington; Historic Overlook Colony Vicinity; Riverside Initiative, Wilmington; Rose Hill, New Castle County, and Second District, Wilmington.

Sponsored by the Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburgh (FHLBank) and the University of Delaware's Center for Community Research and Service, the new Blueprint Communities initiative provides each team with community development training valued at approximately \$25,000, a mini-grant and improved access to funding sources. The Delaware program follows launches in Pennsylvania and West Virginia in 2005 and 2007 involving a total of 32 communities.

Delaware's new Blueprint Communities were chosen based on their current capacity to plan and implement community revitalization initiatives and assemble diverse, broad-based teams that will develop detailed strategic plans for their communities' futures.

"Blueprint Communities helps cities and neighborhoods develop stronger leaders, a clear community vision and a detailed plan for sustainable community growth," said Gov. Minner. "The teams we induct today - nearly 100 members strong - will engage in months of hard work and personal sacrifice, with no pay, for the betterment of their communities. We salute them for their leadership and wish them much success."

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Blueprint Communities-2

"Expanding Blueprint Communities to Delaware will enable even more communities to take part in an initiative that's proven to be highly beneficial in helping local leaders make a real difference in their own backyards," remarked Sen. Carper. "Community leaders will be able to pull back and examine their neighborhoods' long-term needs and come up with a practical blueprint for success. The result will be stronger neighborhoods and a more vibrant local economy."

The \$25,000 in benefits that each community team receives as part of Blueprint Communities training includes:

- Six days of community revitalization training by the University of Delaware's Center for Community Research and Service including materials, meals and lodging
- A community profile including important key indicators and trends for planning
- Access to a community development consultant for coaching and resources
- A mini-grant for technical assistance, project implementation or predevelopment needs after successful involvement in training
- Improved access to funding sources upon successful completion of the program.

"Each planning team will reflect the diversity of the community they represent and will bring together a variety of stakeholders, including local residents, government officials, developers, bankers and others," said University of Delaware President Patrick T. Harker, who hosted the event. "They will seek to collectively identify community needs and formulate feasible revitalization projects. Our university is extremely pleased to be associated with this significant initiative."

The university's Center for Community Research and Service is primarily responsible for team training. Training begins in April and runs periodically through January 2009. Teams that develop a clear vision for their community's future and a comprehensive strategic plan will be given access to a network of potential public and private funders for coordinated investments as well as ongoing technical training.

FHLBank is providing approximately \$250,000 to cover Blueprint Communities training while Delaware Community Investment Corporation has contributed \$100,000 to be used as seed grants by Blueprint Communities once they have completed training.

Blueprint Communities program partners include: Delaware Community Foundation, Delaware Community Investment Corporation, Delaware Community Legal Aid Society, Delaware State Housing Authority, First State Community Action Agency, First State Community Loan Fund, State of Delaware Office of State Planning Coordination, United Way of Delaware, Wachovia, Wilmington Savings Fund Society (WSFS), Wilmington Trust Company.

Financial institutions with members on the Blueprint Communities teams include Citicorp Trust Bank, JPMorganChase, PNC Bank, Wilmington Savings Fund Society and Wilmington Trust.

FHLBank Pittsburgh is a wholesale bank that serves the housing finance and community and economic development needs of its owner-members. Privately capitalized and funded, it does not use taxpayer dollars and enjoys a triple-A rating. It currently has 331 members in its district of Delaware, Pennsylvania and West Virginia and holds approximately \$101 billion in assets as of December 31, 2007. FHLBank Pittsburgh is one of twelve Banks in the Federal Home Loan Bank System, established by Congress in 1932 to support the residential mortgage activities of local financial institutions.

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Appear on Local Television or Radio Programs

The local television and radio media are frequently willing to cover a newsworthy event or initiative that interests their viewers. Often they look specifically for news that has a “feel good” element to it, using it to balance all the “bad news” that typically makes headlines. Your press release, sent directly to the news or assignment editor, should give the decision-maker all the information needed to determine if your story is newsworthy, but don’t hesitate to follow up with a phone call before 3 p.m. (when things get busier in the newsrooms), just to be certain your story has been considered.

In addition to local news programs, which cover particularly newsworthy milestones or events, most TV and radio stations produce weekly or even daily programs of local interest, called public affairs programming. These are generally longer segments, and you may be asked to come to the studio to tape the segment.

Call the main number of the TV or radio station and ask for the public affairs director. Send a letter describing the BC initiative and what your plan hopes to achieve for your community. Include newspaper clippings from noteworthy events. List the members of your team in the letter. Most important, request that the station include Blueprint Communities in an upcoming program and provide telephone and e-mail contact information for at least two of the team members. Again, don’t hesitate to follow up by phone.

Whether it's television or radio, your local media may be interested in featuring news about the formation of your team and the initial development of your plan. Later on, they may also be interested in talking with you about the progress you've made as a team toward accomplishing the goals set forth in your plan.

Write Op-ed Pieces or Letters to the Editor

Another good way to get your BC plan out to the general public is to write "op-ed" ("opposite the editorial") pieces or letters to the editor. Op-ed pieces are typically opinion articles written by someone who has specific knowledge and expertise on the issue at hand. Given that persons on your BC team are generally experts in the field, you may be able to convince an editor to publish such an article with the byline of one of your team members. Op-ed pieces tend to carry a lot of weight, are taken seriously by readers and allow you more space in which to state your points than the standard letter to the editor.

Letters to the editor are a good shortcut way of getting information out to the public. Typically editors like to publish letters that address a controversial subject. However, they are also willing to publish letters that signify progress and positive news for the community, especially if they address an existing problem. Letters that are short and to the point have a better chance of being published than rambling, detail-laden letters.

Include BC Info on Existing Community Web Sites

Many communities maintain their own Web sites that cover information about local government services, news and events, or other issues of interest to residents. Consider submitting information regarding your BC team and plan to be posted on your community's site. To provide additional information on BC to people in your community, consider linking your community's Web site to www.blueprintcommunities.com.

Make Sure Your BC Banner is Prominently Displayed

To generate support for the BC initiative throughout your community, display your BC street banner in a prominent place – across the main street, on the side of a public building, in the community park. The banner will evoke pride and interest in the work your team is doing and will help you gain valuable support from residents. It also lists the www.blueprintcommunities.com web site, directing residents on where to go for more information.

Consider making a ceremony out of the banner hanging, perhaps inviting a congressional representative or other prominent leaders to attend. Be sure to send a news release because such a ceremony could get you additional media coverage and will no doubt raise the profile of your BC team and its efforts within the community.

Use the Blueprint Communities Toolkit

You received this booklet as part of your BC Toolkit. Feel free to share it with anyone who might find it useful.

Also included in the toolkit were BC signs that can be posted anywhere they might be viewed by local residents – store windows, post offices, government buildings, libraries, schools. The signs will serve as steady reminders that your team is working hard to bring about positive change in the community.

Finally, don't forget about sharing the Banner Day event video, which may help to get the word out to local residents, at public meetings or other gatherings.

Hosting/supporting BC events or special projects

Sometimes simply informing the public is not enough. In some instances, you may want to actually involve your community in the BC initiative. Following are some suggestions to inspire and involve your community in your BC effort. Remember to send a press release or media advisory beforehand to let people know about your event or project. Another way to get the word out includes posting information on community bulletin boards (fliers) or in church bulletins and school newsletters.

Hold a School Assembly to Discuss BC

A good way to involve children and families in your BC efforts is to hold a school assembly that addresses the BC initiative in easy-to-understand terms. Your BC team members can discuss their roles and the goals of your community plan, perhaps even asking students for feedback or ideas about how they envision their community in the future. Children often have a unique and original outlook on their communities, which might generate ideas for change you haven't even thought of yet. They also tend to go home and talk about what was discussed, getting the word out to more parents in the community.

Design a BC Essay or Art Contest for Children of Other Age Groups

You might consider designing and holding an essay or art contest that features a Blueprint Communities theme. Essays or artwork from such a contest could serve as an excellent written or visual reminder of the importance of community revitalization and the part children and their families can play in it. Winning entries can be displayed in school hallways and on Web sites, and may be picked up by the local media for publication.

Sponsor a BC Pancake Breakfast/Spaghetti Supper

Everybody has to eat, and what better way to spread the word on your BC initiative than to celebrate it over a pancake breakfast or spaghetti supper held in a community space? (Blueberry pancakes would be particularly apt.) Use the event to provide information on the BC initiative, to introduce your team and to discuss your community plan. Perhaps this event could be held in conjunction with a BC “banner raising” or other BC celebration. Make sure you invite local elected officials to such an event.

Have a BC Booth at the Town Fair

Town or county fairs are excellent places to inform and inspire community residents in a fun setting. Consider hosting a booth staffed with members of your team, ready to discuss the BC initiative and your plan for bettering the community. Perhaps you could even sponsor a Blueprint Communities “best blueberry pie” contest, awarding Blueprint Communities blue ribbons to the winners. The informal setting of a town or county fair can also give you an opportunity to network with other community leaders.

Coordinate a BC Clean-up Day

Giving community residents of all ages a specific role in helping to better the neighborhood can make them feel a part of the BC initiative and will likely maximize their support. A BC clean-up day for your community would be an ideal way for residents to be a part of the BC plan and feel like they were making a difference. Such an event would engender a sense of renewal that's wholly compatible with the BC initiative.

Organize a BC Plant-a-tree Event

Another good way to engage the community and demonstrate a long-term commitment to BC planning would be to organize a BC plant-a-tree event. Blue spruce trees would be especially fitting. Trees planted in a public place, perhaps marked with a plaque, will remind residents on a continuous basis that your community is being nurtured and is growing.

Trees may be planted from seed, as saplings or as developed young trees. A local nursery can facilitate delivery of any of these, or there are a number of Web sites selling seeds and saplings at reasonable prices (check out The GreenWorld Project at www.greenworldproject.net). Invite everyone in the community to participate. Consider a BC plant-a-tree event to mark the beginning of your community's growth cycle.

Share Your Ideas with Others

As a Blueprint Communities participant, your team's experience can be valuable to the other teams, and you can learn from them, too. FHLBank encourages you to share what worked – and what didn't – through the BC Web site, www.blueprintcommunities.com. Send ideas, stories and photos to pr@fhlb-pgh.com. Then be sure to check the site to see what the other teams are doing in their communities.

This booklet is a publication of FHLBank Pittsburgh's Corporate Communications Department. You may duplicate all or parts of it for any nonprofit use. For more information or to consult a communications professional, feel free to call Corporate Communications at 1-800-288-3400 (x7696) or via e-mail at pr@fhlb-pgh.com.



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