

## HOW TO CHOOSE A STEERING COMMITTEE

(A fact sheet from the CultivateNC curriculum: <http://communitydevelopment.ces.ncsu.edu/nc-thrive-curriculum-summary/>)

Meeting the demands of a new global economy requires a new set of leadership roles, responsibilities, and skills. The role of the Steering Committee will feel somewhat different from the *“traditional hierarchical civic structures that emphasized roles such as president, chairperson, secretary and treasurer”*. The focus of this how-to-guide is less about building development strategies and more about building local capacity, so the community can take ownership of the process for growth and development. The following are some essential roles that your Steering Committee will need to assume for this work (adapted from Hutchinson, 2011.)

*Conveners* bring together true community representatives to have community conversations and co-create together.

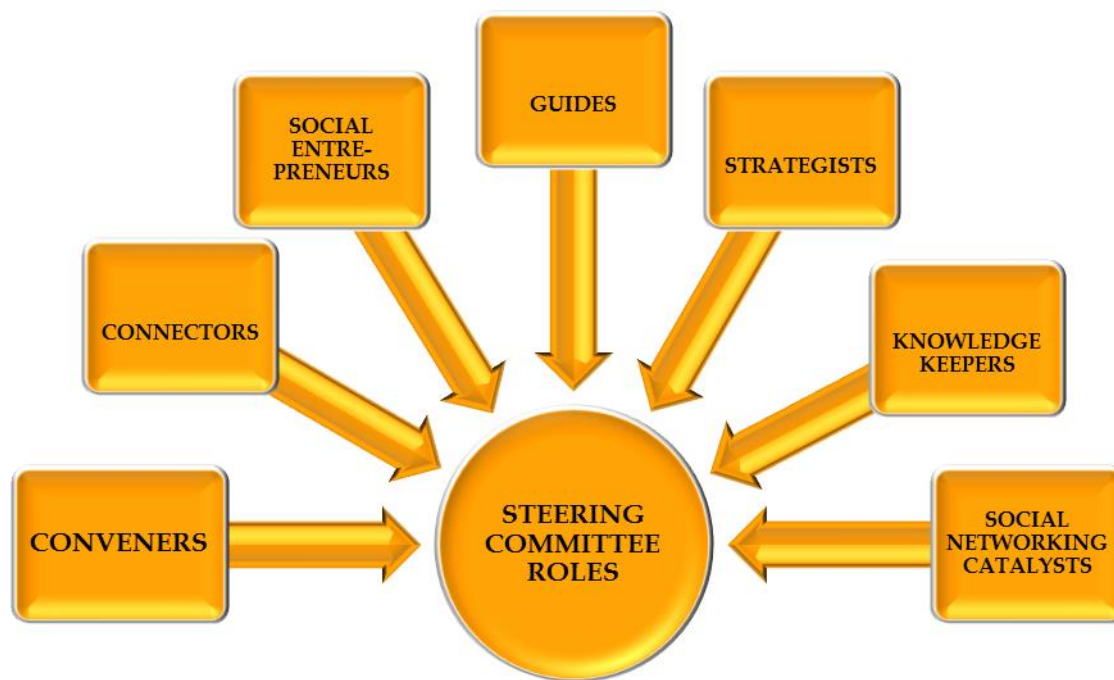
*Connectors* link people and assets together in ways that add value.

*Social Entrepreneurs* see new opportunities and ways to capitalize on them.

*Guides* are able to map complex processes so others can understand them.

*Strategists* can recognize patterns that may reveal innovative ways to move forward.

*Knowledge Keepers* are different than note takers. They distill our conversations and synthesize them into key points and patterns.



### **Composition of the Steering Committee for a Large Community-based Initiative:**

Includes 12 to 14 committee members on average

Includes one or more artists that live in the community and generate a portion of their income through art

Includes a person who is knowledgeable about public and government funding opportunities

Includes at least two teenage or young adult members who can participate on a regular basis

Includes representatives of the private, academic, public, and non-profit sectors who are familiar with local issues

Includes one or more individuals with research and analytical skills; familiarity with data bases; interviewing, design, writing, and public speaking experience

*Personal traits or characteristics can make or break a team. Consider people who will see the Steering Committee as a serious responsibility, and are able to work in a collaborative spirit*

(Adapted from Bargainer et al., 2011.)

*Social Networking Catalysts* help keep the conversations going between the face-to-face meetings, using social media and other Web tools. Networks need this special skill set.

However, to be successful, much attention must be paid to assembling an inclusive and diverse Steering Committee. The selection process should go beyond the usual civic-minded volunteers to include new and under-represented voices at the table. In addition to cultural diversity, you will want to consider *different age groups, gender, skills, economic status and experience*. No one person will fill all of these roles, but an effective Steering Committee needs to have all these bases covered. This can be done by utilizing the unique skills of its members.

### **Four options for recruiting Steering Committee Members:**

1. If you already have a community group that is familiar with and interested in the project that is a good starting point. However, to insure a diverse representation you may want to add to the group. The primary question will be: Who is not at the table that needs to be? What voices are under-represented? (See the stakeholder identification sheet below.)
2. If you are forming a new group, ask the field staff in the County Extension office to complete the Stakeholder Identification Worksheet (see below) during a staff meeting. Let them know that you are looking to recruit new voices from under-represented populations in the community.
3. If you are starting from scratch, try the “snowballing technique.” Start with the people you know and explain to them about the types of people you are looking for and ask them for recommendations. You then contact those people and continue the process until you have filled all of the Steering Committee slots on the Stakeholder Identification Sheet. One liability of this process is that you may get the usual participants. (To extend your search parameters look at businesses and associations that cater to specific populations.) It involves some extra leg work but it is essential for sustainable community development.

4. For larger scale projects, it may be valuable to create a Steering Committee of respected community leaders who can give guidance on the subject matter and use their convening power to build local support for the effort. If you can get one well-respected leader in the community, others will join more readily. One liability of this process is that you may create yet another committee of decision-makers at the top. Remember that goals created at the grassroots level reflect the needs and aspirations of the community residents and have a much better chance of succeeding.

*Note: Each community has customs and traditions that affect how they make decisions. There may be a person in the community that everyone looks to for wisdom or guidance. Take some time early in the process to talk with that person, explain the initiative you are planning, and listen to their thoughts. You are not asking them to do anything, just hearing their perspective will be insightful and you may be able to gain their support.*

One strategy for comprehensively forming a committee is to use the Stakeholders Chart (below) as a guide. Write in the names of community members who might be interested in participating on the Steering Committee. Ideally the committee will have at least one representative from each category. Remember to extend your search parameters beyond the usual civic volunteers so the Steering Committee includes more than a token representation of minority or under-represented voices in your community. (See *stakeholder chart on the next page.*)

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## STAKEHOLDERS CHART (WORKSHEET)

If your steering committee has members who either work in or are familiar with these categories, their collaborative knowledge of the community will help the steering committee make decisions that reflect a more balanced perspective.

Financial	Built/ Infrastructure	Political Capital	Natural/ Environment	Social Networks	Human Capital	Cultural
Endowments, Development groups Funding agencies	Utilities Phone Internet Industrial parks Main Street Businesses	Elected and appointed officials and those with whom they work Political groups	Parks Outdoor Recreation Farmers and Ranchers Watershed and Nature groups	Civic Clubs Associations People with links to outside resources	Facilitators Educators Service agencies and their customers Economic developers, Artists Scientists Entrepreneurs	Cultural and Religious groups, Museums and Historical Associations and their support base Performing arts Studio arts Local crafts Culinary arts

## References

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