

Moving toward a community vision: Recommendations and next steps

Next steps in the community building process

Now that we have identified many strengths, assets, and unmet needs in Knox County, the next three steps in the *COMPASS II* community building process are to:

Phase 4: Create a community vision

Phase 5: Select priority issues and establish targeted community outcomes

Phase 6: Build an outcome-focused community impact plan

During Phase 4, “community residents create a vision that expresses what they want their community to be.” In Phase 5, stakeholders review the data collected in the community assessment and select three to seven high-priority issues that will be addressed by future joint action. Phase 6 results in an action plan, a budget, and a plan for measuring success and tracking progress. Stakeholders build a comprehensive plan for achieving specific outcomes. The *COMPASS II* guide suggests:

- Establish subcommittees of 10-15 representatives for each issue or population group of concern to work on a plan
- Include residents who may be impacted by the plan, and people who have experience with the topic, planning, and evaluation
- Identify barriers to achievement for the intended outcomes
- Identify formal and informal assets that can be mobilized to remove those barriers
- Develop a focused set of strategies
- Develop specific action plans and budgets

Top-priority issues

This Community Assessment identified several top-priority issues that should be considered and potentially be addressed in the community impact plan:

- Health care affordability, insurance, access, and quality
- Jobs, economic issues, and support for self-sufficiency (wages, benefits, unemployment, poverty, and lack of money for basic needs)
- Recreational and entertainment activities, especially affordable activities for children, families, and teens
- Mental health, stress, emotional issues, and substance abuse
- Obesity
- Teen pregnancy
- Unsafe driving habits
- Poor access to transportation for seniors and youth
- Lack of affordable housing and substandard housing
- Family violence and abuse of children or adults

Resource gaps and barriers present opportunities for improvement

It is beyond the scope of this report to make extensive recommendations. A few findings about resource gaps and barriers, however, stand out and warrant further consideration by stakeholders:

- While there appear to be several programs addressing the *symptoms* of poverty in Knox County (emergency financial assistance, food, clothing, etc.), more resources are needed for preventing poverty and promoting self-sufficiency.
- Resources for mental health and substance abuse should be improved and expanded.
- Resources for transportation assistance, public transportation, and driver safety should be improved and expanded.
- Efforts should be made to widely publicize family activities and opportunities for secondary education and job training for lower-income adults.
- The public may need better information about eligibility criteria for government programs (such as public health insurance, food stamps, and child care subsidies) and free and low-cost medical and dental care.
- Local control and satellite operations are critical when planning services for senior citizens in areas outside Mount Vernon.

Unanswered questions

Many of the top-priority issues would benefit from further research, addressing questions such as:

- What can be done at the local level to address problems with health insurance, benefits, and employment?
- What kinds of mental health problems are the most prevalent? Are stress and emotional issues the primary concerns, or more serious and diagnosable mental health problems?
- What are the specific problems related to unsafe driving habits? Who is most at risk and what are the causes of these problems (drunk driving, poor driver training, elderly drivers, road rage, etc.)?
- Why are some residents not satisfied with existing mental health and substance abuse programs? What can be done to improve them?
- What is the scope and severity of the unmet needs? How many people are affected?
- What kinds of service and programs are most effective at preventing and treating the high-priority problems? What kinds of evidence-based programs are available? What are the best practices?
- Are we able to identify and document effective programs through outcome measurement and evaluation? If not, what resources are needed to do that?
- How can we get the most “bang for the buck” in terms of prevention versus intervention?
- What are other communities doing to address these problems?
- How can we make better use of our existing assets, resources, and infrastructure to meet these needs?

Pulling it all together

The results of this Community Assessment present exciting opportunities for improving the quality of life in Knox County. The broad consensus in identifying top-priority issues lays the framework for bringing the community together to solve problems. Knox County's identity as a safe, cohesive, and friendly community, in a beautiful rural location, provides an excellent foundation for building a stronger community.