



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
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Building Character Education In Your Community

A Resource Guide for Communities



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Building Community Support For Character Education

Much has been said about the need for character development in our youth. Cheating in schools, bullying, pervasive youth violence and other problems are well documented. In the last ten years, increased attention has focused on the lack of virtues development in youth. One well-known initiative, CHARACTER COUNTS!tm, was created to offer a simple framework for a comprehensive approach to teaching and modeling core ethical principles. This model promotes the *Six Pillars of Character*:

Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship as traits from which good behaviors will naturally flow if these virtues are Taught, Enforced, Advocated and Modeled (TEAM).

According to the Josephson Institute of Ethics, a basic tenet is that good character should, first of all, be taught in the home and in the faith community. Character education then, according to the Josephson Institute, is to “supplement and enhance, not substitute for, family efforts to instill positive ethical values and good character.” Student behavior has indicated a lack of basic competency of these virtues—causing many schools to begin teaching character education, with promising results.

The African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child” comes to mind as we think of a whole community teaching...

When a comprehensive character education program is instituted in schools, evaluations indicate a drop in referrals for problem behaviors, more respect and better class discipline—all conducive to learning.

The “person in environment” model (also called the ecological model) suggests that for long-lasting change, it is necessary to impact not only an individual, but also to impact their social environment for maximum

benefit. The rules and norms of a society affect how people behave. This suggests that for maximum effectiveness in building good values or virtues in young people, a caring and involved community is essential. The African proverb, “It takes a village

to raise a child” comes to mind as we think of a whole community teaching, enforcing, advocating and modeling good character to young people. A community that identifies certain behaviors as important, develops—over time—what is acceptable and normal in the community. Thus, involvement of the faith community, civic groups, law enforcement personnel, parents, schools, social service representatives, business leaders, governmental leaders and the local media is necessary for a comprehensive community approach to character education.

Building Effective Collaborations in Communities

A collaboration is a mutually beneficial, well defined and formal partnership between at least two individuals, agencies or organizations designed to maximize one another's capacity to achieve a common goal or set of goals. A collaboration requires a considerable distribution of time and resources from all the collaborating partners, with the principal agency taking on the greatest responsibility of time and resources. Such partnerships require flexibility, commitment to process and open communication.

It is often possible to have greater impact on an issue by bringing together existing organizations, groups and individuals, rather than having a single person or organization working alone. Collaborations are effective in combining services so that resources are not wasted and efforts are not duplicated. Collaborations often find new strengths and new solutions to old problems.

Collaborations allow for shared leadership, decisions, ownership, vision and responsibility. A collaboration discovers solutions and expands capacity within the organization and the community. It is important to have well-developed ideas and flexibility to allow for input and modifications by the members.

The lead agencies should expect staff time demands in the following areas

- Clerical
- Meetings
- Membership
- Research and fact gathering
- Public relations and public information
- Coordination of activities
- Fundraising

Suggestions for Collaborations

- Recruit the right people—those who can offer skills, resources, network access, and relevant information. They also must be willing to share power and resources and commit their time and energy to the collaboration. They need to be willing, involved participants.
- Appoint a leader to chair the collaboration.
- Develop detailed roles and objectives for the members based on their interests and strengths. Make sure there are not controversial issues or conflicts of interest for members.
- Members need to commit their time and energy to maintain the collaboration.
- Have regular meetings to assess the collaboration's progress and address problems and barriers.
- Maintain records of the meetings.
- Build in time for evaluation, change and reflection.
- Celebrate collaboration success and recognize the contributions of all partners.
- Keep assignments of partners simple and achievable. Remember, this is probably not their main job assignment.
- Share reports with all partners.

“Collaborations are effective means for combining services so that resources are not wasted...”

Collaborations Can . . .

- Conserve resources.
- Achieve more extensive contacts within the community.
- Accomplish more goals and objectives than a single person or agency.
- Have greater credibility, reduce suspicion of self-interest, and be seen as reliable and competent, not fly-by-night.
- Effectively network.
- Provide more perspectives, ideas and advice on the issue or problem.
- Build trust and consensus between people and organizations that have similar responsibilities and concerns.

Recommended Member Characteristics

- Mutual respect, understanding, and trust
- Able to have open and frequent communication
- Appropriate representation of cross section of community
- Members see collaboration as a benefit to their own interest, not just the interest of the group
- Ability to compromise

Process, Purpose and Structure

- Members share an interest in both the process and outcome
- Flexibility
- Adaptability
- Shared vision
- Unique purpose

**Build in time for
evaluation, change and
reflection.**

Tips for Sustaining a Collaboration

- Schedule meetings well in advance.
- Stick to meeting time schedule and agenda.
- Decide on a leader who has organizing and interpersonal skills.
- Allow all parties to be heard.
- Experience a progression of successes.
- Periodically report on progress.
- Send minutes to all interested parties.
- Evaluate each project.

Developing Mission and Vision Statements: Important Road Maps for Your Community Organizations

Mission and vision statements, they're different right? How often have you been confused over which is which? How many times have you sat in a meeting with a group trying to create a mission statement or a vision statement and ended without either being completed? Well, it really doesn't have to be that difficult at all if you follow a process.

The Vision Statement:

A vision statement is your group's "shared vision" for what your group or organization ultimately wants to accomplish. It is not the details, but rather the overall picture painted in a relatively short statement. When you read a vision statement of an organization you should be able to, "have a vision" of what that organization is about. An example for a community wide character education group might be:

"Creating an environment where children learn virtues that are important to a healthy community."

Notice that this is not a detailed statement, for it does not say "how" the positive learning environment will be created. It is not the job of the vision statement to lay out the details of your group's work. The vision statement is more of a marketing piece, something quick and catchy to help promote your group's efforts. It can underscore a logo and be placed on stationary, brochures, business cards and flyers.

So how do you design a Vision Statement? Consider the following:

- What ideals are we striving for with this effort?
- What key words define our purpose?
- What do we want the future to be?
- What images or metaphors do we want to create in people's minds about our efforts?

**The vision statement
is more of a marketing piece...
Mission statements are an
important part of an
"action planning process."**

The Mission Statement:

The mission statement has different purposes than the vision statement. The mission statement is where you can briefly tell people how your group will achieve its "vision." Here's a sample mission statement for a Character Council:

"The Mission of the Character Council is to empower all children in our community with knowledge, skills, and aspiration to develop and practice positive character traits."

A mission statement is useful in getting out a consistent message to the media and public about what your group stands for and is trying to accomplish. Can an organization's mission change? Yes, absolutely. In fact, your group may accomplish its initial mission, or time and circumstances may change and steer you away from your initial mission. It is important to periodically re-examine your organization's goals and mission.

So how do you design a Mission Statement? Consider the following:

- What are the main general goals your group has identified?
- In general terms, what impacts will reaching your goals achieve?
- What is the focus?
- Is it believable? Practical?
- What is the general philosophy your group applies to it's work?
- What are the key descriptive words you think help define your mission?
- What do you want people to understand about your group's purpose?

Level I

A PLAN TO IMPLEMENT CHARACTER EDUCATION INTO YOUR COMMUNITY

Use the following outline to implement character education into your community.

I. COMMITMENT

- A. Determine who must be involved to gain the necessary commitment to begin a character education initiative.
- B. Determine the community's needs. Various ways to determine the needs are:
 - Focus Groups
 - Surveys
 - One-on-one interviews
- C. Build a coalition that includes key community leaders:
 - Consider using an existing network that focuses on community needs.
 - Form a new coalition with character education as its primary mission.

II. CONSENSUS

- A. Have the group reach a consensus on core ethical values.
- B. Determine if obstacles stand in the way.
- C. Agree to be purposeful in your approach, with clear objectives designed to influence values and behavior.
- D. Develop a vision and mission statement with a discussion on goals.

III. COLLABORATE

- A. Commit to training:
 - Schedule an evening introductory training for the community.
 - After momentum has started, schedule a one-day character training for the community. Involve key people representing various segments of your population.
 - Choose key leaders who will be your "trainers of trainers" and give them the training and the tools to use in the community.
 - Host a community-wide character education seminar for key participants.
 - Continue with short on-going trainings for different groups including sports groups, businesses, youth groups, etc.
- B. Create a common vision for your community. Determine what you would like to see happen a year from now or even three to five years from now.
- C. Interact with schools, communities and other agencies involved in similar efforts.

IV. COLLECT DATA

- A. Determine what data your community would like to gather.
- B. Collect data from the following sources:
 - Surveys
 - Level of student, parent, community involvement
 - Perceptions of community related to character education
 - Police statistics
 - School statistics such as discipline, extra curricula activities, and academic achievement
 - Other

V. COMMUNICATE

- A. Determine who needs information
- B. Establish a public relations/marketing committee
- C. Give presentations throughout the community using resources from trainings attended by key leaders.
- D. Develop a web page and/or newsletter
- E. Create a chart to assist in sharing the vision with others

Level 1 and Level 2 plans adapted with permission from the Josephson Institute of Ethics from *Charting the Course for Your Community: A CHARACTER COUNTS! Plan of Action* created by Dr. Gary Smit, Superintendent of Lombard School District - [www. charactercounts.org](http://www.charactercounts.org).

Level II

HOW TO INTEGRATE CHARACTER EDUCATION INTO THE COMMUNITY

I. EXPLORE

- A. Identify specific strategies to implement in your community that will move the initiative from words to action.
- B. Connect with appropriate existing community-wide events.
- C. Investigate funding opportunities from local sources and grants.
- D. Be creative in immersing character education in the life of your schools.

II. ENGAGE AND EXCITE

- A. Determine how the strategies will actively engage the community in the initiative.
- B. Plan and organize at least one community-wide event.
- C. Purchase materials, banners and posters that will display character messages in schools and throughout the community.
- D. Create a character education community speakers bureau.
- E. Involve media (television, radio and newspapers) through PSAs, news articles, advertisements, and articles about the trait of the month.

III. EXPAND

- A. Design a local handbook about the mission, strategy and structure of your coalition.
- B. Strive to ensure character education pervades all aspects of activity in your community.
- C. Promote the importance of character education through frequently repeated messages emphasizing the benefits of a common language.
- D. Have your own trainers train additional educators and community leaders.
- E. Develop a student leadership team. Train middle school and high school students as “ambassadors of character.”
- F. Present your initiative to as many community organizations as possible.
- G. Consider employing paid staff to coordinate efforts either locally or with a consortium of other districts/communities.

IV. EVALUATE

- A. Compile and analyze data to determine what is working.
- B. Determine ways to communicate the effectiveness of the initiative.
- C. Modify the action plan as needed.
- D. Identify ways to increase the number of individuals in the coalition and the activities in the future years.

Sources & Additional Resources

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