



Economic Vitality: How can we improve our communities?

MODERATOR'S GUIDE

What should your community do to improve economic vitality? This Moderator's Guide is designed to help you lead a community forum to choose a path to the future for your community. The purpose of the forum and the supporting materials is not to advocate a specific solution or point of view. Rather, it is intended to inspire thoughtful examination of differing points of view and a movement towards common ground around which the community can plan for its future.

Choose the schedule and group (or groups) that best fit with your community's goals and needs. Many groups choose to organize single forums around issues of concern in their communities. Most single forums last approximately 90 minutes to two hours.

Other groups, however, plan for multiple sessions or study circles to

allow participants greater opportunity to examine issues in depth. Some groups set aside time for two meetings while others might devote a separate session to each option. And still others plan ahead for a session after the forum for participants to come back together and consider next steps.

In some communities, people begin their examination of an issue in a large-group forum and then break off into smaller groups for subsequent sessions. The reverse is also helpful—starting in small groups and culminating in a larger community forum. You may also choose to hold a forum with an existing group or groups, such as a leadership group, a service club, a youth group, or a business organization.

Suggested Format for a 2-hour Forum

- Welcome (5 min.)
- Ground Rules (5 min.)
- What is Economic Vitality? (10 min.)
- Possible Approaches (45 min.)
- Tensions and Conflicts (20 min.)
- Shared Direction (20 min.)
- Wrap-Up (10 min.)
- Post-Forum Questionnaire (5 min.)

Equipment / Supplies Needed

1. Discussion Guide for each participant
2. Post-Forum Questionnaire for each participant
3. Pencils/pens for completing the Questionnaire
4. Flip chart and markers
5. Attendance sheet

Welcome

Introduce yourself and tell participants about the organization(s) convening the forum. Stress the co-sponsorship if several organizations are involved.

Give a brief introduction that emphasizes the importance of making decisions now that can help position your community for success in the future.

Ground Rules

Review ground rules with participants before beginning the discussion. Make clear that the forum is not a debate. Stress that there is work to do (this is not just a free flowing discussion with no purpose), and the work is to move toward making plans for the community's future. The work will be done through deliberation.

The moderator should guide the discussion yet remain neutral. Make sure that:

- Everyone understands that this is not a debate.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate.
- No one or two individuals dominate.
- Every approach is considered fairly and fully.
- An atmosphere for discussion and analysis of alternatives is maintained.
- Participants listen to each other.

The moderator should ask the group if they agree with these rules and invite them to suggest others to add to the list.

What is Economic Vitality?

Connect the issues to people's lives and concerns by getting participants to talk about their personal

experiences with the issue. Some questions you might ask include:

- When you hear the words "economic vitality" what do they mean to you?
- When you think about our community, do you consider it to be economically vital? Why or why not? In terms of economic vitality, do you think our community has been improving, declining, or staying about the same over the past several years?
- If you moved here from another community, what attracted you to this community? Do you consider the community more or less "vital" than when you first moved here?
- If you are a business person, why did you move to, or start your business in this community? Do you consider the community more or less "vital" than it was when you first started out?

Reviewing Possible Approaches

The next step is to review and deliberate each approach in the Participants' Discussion Guide, one-by-one. Deliberation requires weighing the "pros" and "cons" of different approaches so it is important to be sure that both are fully aired. Questions to help ensure a fair and balanced examination of each approach include:

- What makes this approach a good idea? What do you find most appealing about it?
- What are the costs or consequences associated with this approach? Is there a downside to this approach?

- How might others see this approach?
- What would someone who favors this approach be likely to say?
- If we followed this approach, what would be the effects on your life?

Option 1: Make Our Community Attractive to Good and Stable Employers

This option holds that more attention is needed to the foundations that will make the community attractive to good and stable employers. This includes physical infrastructure such as airports and roads, as well as quality of life issues such as low crime rates and good schools.

Here are some examples of questions you might use to encourage discussion on this option:

- What about this community would make it attractive to good and stable employers?
- Does the community have the physical infrastructure (roads, water, etc.) needed by these types of employers? What about the technological infrastructure needed? Workforce skills? How might we address any weaknesses in these areas?
- What has the community's history been in terms of major employers? Have they indeed been stable, or have they left the community? If they left, why did they leave?
- Providing incentives to attract businesses and/or lowering

business taxes may reduce the amount of funding available for education and other government services. Is that a tradeoff you are willing to make?

Option 2: Prepare Workers and Communities to be More Self-Reliant

This option holds that we need to do more to make workers and communities more self-reliant, to reflect the fact that employers – faced with global competition and the need to be more flexible – no longer provide the long-term security they once did.

Here are some examples of questions you might use to encourage discussion on this option:

- What assets do we have in the community that we could build on to strengthen our economy?
- How often do you shop in the community compared with outside the community? What types of goods and services do you currently purchase from outside the community? Of the goods and services you purchase inside the community, what percentage would you say are from locally-owned businesses? Are you willing to pay more to support locally-owned businesses?
- How would you describe the community in terms of its support for existing businesses? For example, is there a directory of locally-owned businesses and/or a buy-local campaign? Are there classes or support programs to help businesses learn how to expand their markets or cope with financial problems? How might the

community be more supportive? How knowledgeable do you think businesses in the community are about help that is available to them?

- Are you, or any family members self-employed? What do you see as the pros and cons of such work arrangements?
- Would you be willing to relax zoning restrictions to allow more home-based businesses in your neighborhood?

Option 3: Provide everyone in our community with opportunities for success

Unfortunately, many people who work hard and play by the rules still can't get ahead because they have little access to opportunities for success, be it because of their lack of family support, lack of connections or simply their address. This option holds that we need to do more to ensure that everyone has opportunities for success.

Here are some examples of questions you might use to encourage discussion on this option:

- Do you see widespread opportunities for all groups in our community, or are some left behind?
- There is a broad trend of widening income inequality in the U.S. Is this a trend you see in our community, or not?
- Raising the minimum wage may enable more of our community members to take care of their families, but it has the risk of employers cutting back on new, or even existing, jobs. In your view, is it better to have fewer

good quality jobs – or jobs for more of our citizens but at lower pay?

- Mentorship programs and other efforts to provide role models and connections to young people require a lot of volunteers. How willing are you to personally commit to this kind of effort?

Working through tensions or conflicts

Help participants see and work through the tensions or conflicts between the approaches by asking some of the following types of questions:

- What do you see as the tensions between the approaches?
- Can anyone think of something constructive that might come from the approach that is receiving so much criticism?

Moving towards a shared sense of purpose

Remind people that the objective is to work toward a decision. Test to see where the group is going by asking questions such as:

Can someone suggest areas that we seem to have in common?

- What values appear to be in conflict?
- What trade-offs are we willing (or unwilling) to accept?
- What are we willing to do as individuals or a community to solve this problem?

Ending the Forum

Before ending a forum, take a few minutes to reflect on what has been accomplished. Questions like the following have been useful:

Individual Reflections

- Did you hear anything that surprised you?
- Has your thinking about the issue changed?
- Has your thinking about other people's views changed?
- What might you personally be able and willing to do to help take action on this issue in the community?

Group Reflections

- What remains unsolved for this group?
- Can we identify any shared sense of purpose or direction?
- What trade-offs are we, or are we not, willing to make to move in a shared direction?

Next Steps

- What do we still need to talk about?
- How can we use what we learned in this forum?
- What is one step that we could take in the next 60 days to take action on this issue in the community?
- Do we want to meet again?
- Who else do we need to get involved in this discussion?

Post-Forum Questionnaire

Distribute the *Post-Forum Questionnaire* and ask participants to respond before leaving the forum. Please collect the Post-Forum questionnaires and return them to:

Linda Hoke
104 Cumulus Ct.
Cary, NC 27513

Please complete and return a *Moderator Summary Sheet* at the same time.

Moderator Summary Sheet

Economic Vitality

After the forum, please complete this brief Moderator Summary Sheet and return it with the Post-Forum Questionnaires to:

Linda Hoke
104 Cumulus Ct.
Cary, NC 27513

Moderator's Name _____
Title/Position _____
Division/Dept. _____
Company/Organization: _____
Address: _____
City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____
Phone _____ Email _____

Date of Forum _____ Number of Participants _____

Location of Forum _____ (City) _____ (State)

1. Briefly describe the participants (age, ethnic diversity, educational level).

