

Community Goal # 9

GOAL STATEMENT: Our citizens will have opportunities for civic engagement that promotes well-being and a higher quality of life.

Leadership Team

Mr. Everett Powers, The Arts Partnership of Greater Spartanburg (Chair)

Ms. Mary Deku, Community Volunteer (Co-Chair)

Mr. George Loudon, The Arts Partnership of Greater Spartanburg (Facilitator)

Membership & Diversity

The Taskforce comprises thirteen members including eleven general members. Leadership rests with the Chair and Co-Chair: one male and one female, one Caucasian and one African American, one a white-collar executive and one a retired educator/counselor. The Taskforce has three African American and ten Caucasian members, of whom eight are women and five are men. Collectively, they represent the rural, urban, educational, local governmental, cultural, foundation, voter education/registration and business sectors of Spartanburg. They range in backgrounds from community volunteer to office worker to white-collar manager to executive level leader of major non-profit organizations, educational institutions and governmental agencies

Approach & Methodology

Community Indicators impacting this goal are:

1. Voter Registration and Turnout
2. Charitable Giving
3. Attendance at Cultural Events

During the course of its work, the Taskforce met four times in two-hour sessions and convened a two-hour public forum which was held at the Spartanburg County Library Headquarters.

Assumptions

Civic engagement at one level fosters engagement at other levels

Civic engagement is good for a citizenry and fosters positive feelings and a sense of connectedness within and among the citizenry

The Community Indicators for Goal 9 were not prioritized by the Taskforce. Taskforce members thought the three indicators, as well as those things being measured to gauge the progress of each Indicator, were too problematic to generate any quantifiable targets that would be meaningful in significant ways. They did not view any one indicator as having a higher priority over another. The Taskforce specifically cited the following:

1. Voter Registration Turnout

The Taskforce decided that rather than identifying targets for a focus year, 2010 and 2020, it would recommend that current targets be monitored to assess any loss, rather than advocating a specific numeric change, until such time that knowledge is gained specific to Spartanburg's situation, either through commissioned surveys or other avenues of information exchange. In lieu of targets, the Taskforce

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identified strategies to clarify Spartanburg's situation. Those are discussed below under Strategic Recommendations.

Inconsistencies in the data available at the national level and as compared to data generated by the local voter registration office in Spartanburg made it difficult to project an indicator target. The situation was worsened by a lack of access to information specific to Spartanburg County as to why people either don't register or, having registered, failed to vote in an election.

The Clemson University research on voter registration and turnout proved helpful in understanding the complexity of the issue, but seeming contradictions in the report at the local election level, such as "Increase in voter education decreases voter turnout," left members confused and wondering how it all applied to Spartanburg. While the Clemson study identified a number of "Influence Factors/Determinants" affecting voter turnout, the Taskforce wasn't sure which applied to or were more crucial for Spartanburg than others. Lacking that specificity, the Taskforce was reluctant to recommend allocating resources of time and money to address something that, in Spartanburg's case, may not be making a major impact on voter turnout.

2. Charitable Giving

The Taskforce found the Charitable Giving indicator informative, but limited. It provides for only a partial view of the total giving picture in Spartanburg. The Taskforce developed specific strategies for tracking philanthropy at the local level, as well as a recommendation for an additional indicator. These will be described in the Strategic Recommendations section.

The national data used for the indicator came from the tax returns of people who earned at least \$50,000 annually and itemized deductions. However, this fails to capture a large body of giving by those making under \$50,000.

Moreover, the indicator data fails to take into account significant local sources for information about charitable giving, most notably the annual "United" campaigns conducted by the United Way of the Piedmont and The Arts Partnership of Greater Spartanburg as well as giving generated through various funds at the Spartanburg County Foundation and other private foundations.

Taskforce and focus group members noted that financial giving is only a part of the total charitable giving picture. The current indicator does not address the charitable giving expressed in volunteer time given to community organizations and causes which represents a significant financial contribution by those volunteering.

3. Attendance at Cultural Events

The Taskforce observed that, though impressive, the data supporting this indicator captures only a segment of the total participation at cultural events in Spartanburg County. The current indicator is too one-dimensional.

Taskforce members noted that targets for tracking progress needed to be set against a meaningful comparative standard. Tracking the increase of attendance at cultural events provides one kind of measure of civic engagement. However, a clearer picture of the impact of that increase is received when that increase is set against the total population growth or decline of the area.

Attendance at cultural events provided by other significant providers and not captured through reports submitted for grant awards are not included in the indicator data. These include events presented by

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Spartanburg Memorial Auditorium, local colleges and universities and local major festivals such as "The Mighty Moo Festival" as well as "ad hoc" events that pop up at various places around the county year-round.

Taskforce members and public forum participants recognized that there seems to be a mindset in Spartanburg County that believes that there's little to do in Spartanburg. Changing this mindset is a major challenge.

Key Findings

The Clemson University Research Report concerning Goal 9 was used by the Taskforce for reference in its discussions. At times, specific points reinforced Taskforce members' own perceptions and, at other times, items in the report served as talking points to begin a discussion. The Taskforce received a copy of the Clemson University Research Report after the public forum on Aug. 9, so the Report was not used at the public forum.

Taskforce members appreciated the information in the report, but noted the listed Influence Factors and Determinants were global in nature and there was no mechanism for determining which, if any, had more impact in Spartanburg than any of the others. This information was considered crucial by Taskforce members for any decision-making process that would identify specific targets for tracking progress of the indicators. Lacking information about how these factors "play out" at the local level, the Taskforce considered it wise to just advocate an increase of activity indicating general improvement in any given indicator, rather than a specific numeric objective.

Public input was gathered through a public forum in the Barrett Room of the Headquarters Library in downtown Spartanburg, 7 – 9 p.m., Tuesday, August 9, 2005. Co-chairs Mary Deku and Everett Powers provided background on the Community Indicators project and the three indicators for Goal 9. Facilitator George Loudon provided an overview for the evening and then led the group through a discussion of the three indicators, allowing approximately ½ hour for each indicator. Key points about each of the three indicators were captured on a flip chart and this information was printed and circulated to Taskforce members for reference during its discussions. Key issues for both the public and Taskforce members are:

Voter Registration and Turnout

1. Voter apathy is a major problem.
2. Getting clear, accurate and early information about issues and candidates is difficult.
3. There is no ongoing mechanism in place to monitor accountability of elected officials.
4. There is no highly visible organization to centralize and coordinate efforts to address voter registration, turnout and communication.

Charitable Giving

1. Charitable giving is not only an issue of money, but also of volunteer time and skills.

Attendance at Cultural Events

- a) There is a mindset among Spartanburg residents that generates a negative attitude or one of indifference toward things happening in Spartanburg.

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Strategy Recommendations

Taskforce members thought the goal as stated did not reflect accurately what the indicators were meant to measure. Their concern focused on the word "opportunities." The issue is not whether or not the opportunities are present, but rather whether or not Spartanburg residents are taking advantage of the opportunities present, to what degree are they taking advantage of them and how can participation be increased?

The Taskforce recommended changing the language of Goal 9 to more accurately reflect what the indicators, collectively, are being used to measure. The Taskforce did not develop specific new language for Goal 9, but directed the Taskforce Co-chairs and facilitator to suggest some new language. To that end, Goal 9 might be expressed more appropriately as: "Our citizens will be actively engaged in the community on diverse civic levels that promote well-being and a higher quality of life," or "Recognizing a correlation between civic engagement and a personal sense of well-being and a higher quality of life of a citizenry, our citizens will be actively engaged in the community on diverse civic levels."

Overall Approach Strategies

1. Approve new language for Goal 9 to appropriately express the desired outcome for what is being measured by the Community Indicators.
2. Work with new Nonprofit Center at USC Upstate to identify local research it could undertake to develop grass roots data in support of the Community Indicators.
3. Partner with new Nonprofit Center at USC Upstate to monitor existing and develop any new indicators.

Voter Registration and Turnout

Short Term Strategies

1. Encourage and support the League of Women Voters as the lead agency to build a partnering collective of other organizations focusing on voter education and awareness, such as The Coalition (an existing group of collaborating organizations focusing on voter awareness), to coordinate efforts and communication about issues and candidates to impact voter registration and turnout.
2. Encourage the League of Women Voters to promote absentee voting to the general public.
3. Support Community Indicator Goal 2 Taskforce members in developing their strategies to impact literacy
4. Through the Spartanburg Voter Registration office, develop a realtors/renters voter change of address form that could be given to new home owners/renters to facilitate voter registration and re-registration.

Long Term Strategies

1. Build a campaign to change election day for local and state elections to Saturday (Network with League of Women Voters statewide to facilitate)

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2. Urge the League of Women Voters to develop an educational initiative to inform people about the impact of erratic and confusing voter District lines on people getting out to vote and encourage a redrawing of District voting lines in simpler, more consistent ways.

Charitable Giving

Short Term Strategies

1. Develop a new Indicator to track volunteer hours.
Use United Way of the Piedmont to logistically handle this Benchmark: end of 2006 to establish baseline Benchmark: end of 2007 for 1st year of data for comparison

Long Term Strategies

1. Develop an additional new indicator to track the Per Capita giving in Spartanburg County.
 - A. Develop baseline figure from data being collected by United Way of the Piedmont, The Arts Partnership and the Spartanburg Community Foundation.
 - B. Work with new Nonprofit Center at USC Upstate to develop mechanism for getting data from all nonprofits in Spartanburg County.
2. Establish criteria for and develop a "What it Takes to be a Good Citizen" campaign to increase awareness of and communicate the responsibilities of a good citizen at various civic levels (personal, corporate, etc.), from voting to charitable giving to being active in the community.
3. This would make philanthropy, voting and other civic duties a priority in the community
4. Campaign would articulate community expectations for being good citizen (these need to be crafted in a nonpartisan manner).
5. Establish a "Good Citizen Day" in the schools to discuss and have information about what it takes to be a good citizen (including a sample curriculum, derived through a community consensus process).
6. Establish a "Good Citizen" recognition at various levels in the community, from the schools to business to volunteers.
 - A. A "standard" would have to be established for criteria.
 - B. Recognition conducted through a city/college town/county partnership.

Attendance at Cultural Events

Short Term Strategies

1. Within the indicator showing attendance at cultural events, show the ratio of attendance against total population figures for the county.
2. Support The Arts Partnership in its efforts to strengthen the network and cooperation among those doing events and those "getting the word out" about events.

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Long Term Strategies

1. Develop mechanisms to impact the mindset of Spartanburg residents to take a more positive outlook on Spartanburg and things to do here. Responsibility for this has yet to be determined.
 - A. Use the notion of marrying a grassroots mindset (family, home, neighborhood oriented) with a cultural mindset (one accepting of broadened and diverse cultural horizons).

CONCLUSIONS

The Taskforce identified a number of strategies for improving civic engagement that promotes well-being and a higher quality of life for Spartanburg County citizens. They range from promoting absentee voting for increasing voter turnout to establishing a "Good Citizen" campaign for stimulating greater charitable giving to increasing marketing efforts for building greater audiences at cultural events.

While these efforts should help move the community forward in realizing its goal for civic engagement, the Taskforce also recommends more comprehensive indicator baselines be developed that would reflect more accurately the broad spectrum of civic engagement in Spartanburg County. Strategies to accomplish this range from incorporating per capita spending and volunteer hours as further expressions of Charitable Giving to partnering with a research based organization such as the Nonprofit Center at USC Upstate to generate more consistent, comprehensive data.

TASKFORCE PARTICIPATION

| | <u>NAME</u> | <u>ORGANIZATION</u> |
|-----|--------------------|---|
| 1. | Billy Spencer | Greater Pacolet Area Council |
| 2. | Barbara Blanchard | Registration and Elections |
| 3. | Kathy Dunleavy | United Way |
| 4. | Mary Deku | Community Volunteer |
| 5. | Susan Schneider | City of Spartanburg |
| 6. | Liz Patterson | Community Volunteer |
| 7. | Rose Mary Ritchie | League of Women Voters |
| 8. | Phillip Belcher | Mary Black Foundation |
| 9. | Everett Powers | The Arts Partnership of Greater Spartanburg |
| 10. | Leon Wiles | USC-Upstate |
| 11. | Pam Prevatte | Spartanburg Area Chamber of Commerce |
| 12. | Benjamin Wright | Spartan Terrace Tenants Associates |
| 13. | Mandy Merck | City of Spartanburg |