

## **Blending the Strengths of Governments and Nonprofits: An Exercise in Siting a New Community Program**

This training exercise was developed by  
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as part of the Project to Strengthen Nonprofit-Government Relationships,  
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### **Target Audience:**

- ◆ Graduate students who are preparing for careers in government or nonprofit management.
- ◆ Professionals in the public sector or community volunteers who want to learn about the process and alternatives for creating new services.

### **The Purpose:**

- ◆ Participants will experience a group process in deciding how and where to create a new community service.
- ◆ Participants will identify the relative advantages and disadvantages of alternative organizational structures for the new service.

### **Time Needed:**

(Note: This format is designed for a classroom experience. It can be modified to meet the time limits of a conference or one-day training event.)

**Preparation:** Assign participants into small groups, each representing a constituent group within the community. Allow them ample time to meet outside of class to complete the group process of decision-making as they prepare for the role-play.

**Role Play and Debriefing:** Allow 45 minutes for the role-play and up to one hour for the overall class discussion afterwards.

### **Materials Needed:**

- ◆ The teacher provides copies of the class exercise.
- ◆ The students in the role play dress in character and bring any appropriate props.

## **Blending the Strengths of Governments and Nonprofits: An Exercise in Siting a New Community Program - Class Hand Out**

### **Prior to class:**

- Sign up for one of four groups representing the Town of Whitfield, the county's Economic Development office, the Community Center in Edgewood, and a neighborhood resident/leader. If desired, the class could add a group of Concerned Citizens, and allow that group to create its own character.
- Read "The Situation."
- Meet in your group to discuss The Situation.
- Devise a plan to implement Good Business programs that will meet the needs of your group.
- Elect one person from your group to role-play the designated character.
- Help that person put together the necessary costume or props in order to play the role convincingly.

### **In class:**

- The five characters role-play the informal meeting in which each group representative presents a plan for implementation. The group should try to decide on a final recommendation for implementation. (The role-play will last no more than 45 minutes.)
- The rest of the class will observe the role-play.
- After the role-play, the entire class will discuss:
  - 1) The potential effectiveness of the recommendation coming from the meeting.
  - 2) How the politics of both the situation and the different organizations affected the recommendation.
  - 3) The advantages and disadvantages of implementing such a program through city, county, or nonprofit organizations.
  - 4) The sources of conflict within your group or between groups. How did the conflict show or manifest itself?

### **The Situation**

Whitfield is a town of 65,000 in a county with a total population of 110,000. It is near a large urban area; the more rural areas of the county are being developed as bedroom communities. The Economic Development office is enjoying some success in keeping jobs in and near Whitfield instead of losing them to the larger urban area nearby.

There is one particular neighborhood that is working especially hard to revitalize itself. Edgewood has historically been a minority neighborhood; many families have lived there for generations. The neighborhood used to contain all the businesses it needed to meet the needs of the residents. Those businesses gradually died off after desegregation. Hippies moved in during the late sixties, and then moved back out later on. The area eventually became somewhat seedy, with drug dealers standing on the corners and boarded-up houses contributing to an air of hopelessness. Key informal leaders in the community challenged the status quo and began working with their churches, law enforcement, and local governments to bring services into the

neighborhood, create a neighborhood center, work with their community police officer to start a neighborhood watch program, etc. Good things are happening, even if the process of change has had the drama of a soap opera from time to time. As growth occurred, Edgewood is no longer on the edge of town but is close to the geographical center.

**The Issue:**

People in town learned of a program that encourages micro-enterprises, *Good Business*. *Good Business* trains people in basic business skills (how to make a business plan, keep records, file governmental reports, etc.) so that they can become successful small business owners. Classes can be targeted for particular fields, such as day care providers or construction trades, or they can be generic. In other communities, similar programs have proven to be particularly effective in reaching women and minorities.

Everybody in Whitfield agrees that they want to implement a similar program in their community. It could potentially benefit many different local residents, and especially people in Edgewood. The people in this role-play agreed to get together to discuss what should happen next.

**The questions are:**

- **Who will run the program?**
- **Where will it be located?**
- **What structure should it take?**

**Small Group Work, Role Play, and Class Discussion:**

Break into groups. Four groups represent the interests of

- the Town of Whitfield (Town Manager),
- the Community Center in Edgewood (Executive Director),
- a resident of Edgewood (Resident/Informal Leader), and
- the county ( Director of Economic Development).

An additional group could be Concerned Citizens who are simply interested in having Good Business offer effective programming in a responsible way. Create your own “Concerned Citizen.” You can do anything you want. Think back to public meetings you’ve seen, and develop one of characters you saw there. Decide on the concerns this person might hold dear in this kind of situation. Exaggerated examples include:

- well-meaning, mini-van driving, somewhat naïve soccer mom
- ex-hippie turned successful small business owner
- wealthy, retired VIP who means well but doesn’t recognize his own privileges
- activist/pillar of the community

NOTE: The more groups/roles you add, the more time you will need to allot to the role play.

**Each group meets separately (BEFORE the role play) to discuss the scenario, identify the group’s interests, and come up with a plan to implement Good Business programs in this county.** Identify someone to play each role. Those people will role-play an informal meeting, in which they discuss their proposals for implementation and come up with a plan they can all support. They should be in character while expressing their viewpoints. (The rest of the class will observe the role-play.)

## **The Cast of Characters:**

### The Town Manager of Whitfield.

Nice, competent, and well intentioned. Whitfield funded some programs in Edgewood in the past with mixed success. Most programs worked out just fine. However, accountability for the ways in which funds were spent leaves much to be desired with one agency. The Manager is frustrated that the director of the Community Center (a nonprofit) in Edgewood cannot or will not provide overdue program and financial reports. People are muttering about racial and organizational bias from all directions: The Town is (too tough/too lenient – the instructor should pick one) on the Community Center because it is a nonprofit serving Edgewood.

### The Executive Director (ED) of the Edgewood Community Center (a nonprofit).

The Director's family members are long-time residents and community leaders of Edgewood. Like the Town Manager, the ED also has good intentions; but some staff and clients may have abused her/his trust, and s/he doesn't want to acknowledge that. The ED's kindness is well-known. Her/his brother is a county commissioner. Her/his interests and skills are primarily programmatic, not administrative. S/he thinks Good Business would be of strong benefit to people in the Edgewood community. S/he thinks there would be the best participation if mostly minority teachers taught classes in Edgewood. S/he is frustrated that the Economic Development office has historically ignored the needs of people in Edgewood, and s/he does not feel comfortable or accepted at the few meetings s/he attended with them.

### The Director of the Economic Development Commission (a county department with a volunteer advisory board)

The Economic Development board is in favor of any effort that will keep small businesses running in this county. The volunteer board of advisors has been professional and philosophically diverse (Republican/Democrat; developers/environmentalists/planners; etc.) but has historically been a white, male organization. A few women business owners are beginning to become involved, but few minorities. The Director wants Good Business to be open to serving the whole county, not just Edgewood or not just women and minorities.

### Resident/Informal Leader of the Neighborhood (You name the character)

This person's family has lived in Edgewood for several generations. S/he has informal power in the community and basically is concerned about the teenagers in Edgewood being on the street. There is obvious evidence of drug use and gang-like mentality. Lots of people don't feel safe around the teens, and they sure don't like the occasional acts of vandalism, fighting, etc.

An underlying issue is that this person likes being the center of attention and has learned to maintain his/her position of influence and prestige by becoming involved in local politics at the committee/task force/public meeting level. Some community leaders have figured out that involving him/her in a process saves public sniping and grandstanding later on. This person feels, but would never admit, that the Edgewood ED, by simply doing her/his job, provides competition for attention.

### Concerned Citizen (Optional extra group)

The group can create a person with any kind of relevant characteristics, values, and communication style.