Community Choices

Public Policy Education Program

Module Two

Identifying Local Decision-Makers

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Module Two Instructor's Guide

Identifying Local Decision-Makers

Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to do the following:

- Understand the U.S. system of government and the importance of local government;
- Assess the role of social stratification in shaping local involvement;
- Understand the levels of influence in the community and apply techniques designed to identify these influential leaders; and
- Gain a greater sensitivity about the importance of including members of the community who are often not heard in local public policy deliberations.

Procdeures and Timeline:

- The first portion of this session should present the key information in the overview document, *Identifying Local Decision-Makers: Expanding Citizen Involvement in the Public Policy Process.* To avoid presenting a formal lecture on this topic, involve participants in your presentation as much as possible. For example, when discussing levels of leadership and influence in the community, ask participants to offer their views on who is influential in local issues and policy activities and why. Use this type of group discussion as a bridge to present the leadership pyramid (Figure 1). Do all that you can to invite discussion and debate throughout the presentation of the overview. Spend 30 to 40 minutes on the overview.

- Let the participants systematically assess who the influential leaders are in their community by doing Activity #1. To get all participants involved, divide them into groups of 5 to 7. Have each group select someone to give a brief summary of the group's discussion and decisions. Plan 40 minutes for this activity.

- For the final 50 to 60 minutes of this session, ask each of the small groups to do Activity #2. The issue of "school choice" is a very timely and controversial issue and is an excellent example of a public policy issue that deserves discussion at the local community

level; however, the key matter you want participants to consider is what the implications of such a policy would be on various individuals and groups in the community.

Materials Needed

- ◆ Microsoft PowerPoint;

- ◆ Newsprint pad and markers, clean overhead transparencies, or both for discussion groups to use;

- ◆ Copies of the *Identifying Local Decision-Makers* overview document; and

- ◆ Activity # 1 (*Approaches for Identifying Community Leaders)* and Activity #2 (*School Choice: Exploring Its Impact on People in the Community*).

Going Further...
Things For Participants To Do

- ◆ Conduct a more formal assessment of the leadership and influence structure of the community. Contact knowledgeable community members and ask for their input on who the key decision-makers are in the community.

- ◆ Identify recent public policy decisions and explore who the central players in the issue were. Were the various socioeconomic strata of the community represented? Were some individuals/groups beneficiaries of this decision? Were any groups or individuals likely to be impacted in a negative way as a result of this decision?

Community Choices: Public Policy Education Program

Identifying Local Decision-Makers: Expanding Citizen Involvement in the Public Policy Process

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Preface

The previous module presented the public education model as a useful framework designed to walk program participants through a series of steps to arrive at solutions, through consensus, that hold promise in helping solve important local policy issues. It can be viewed as a tool in the decision-making process. This module will allow program participants to focus on the **involvement** phase of public policy education; to identify people and processes in their community that make and implement policy decisions. These individuals will be the ones who will, through their leadership roles, have an effect on getting issues resolved that address economic development and its relationship to human capital investment.

Introduction

We have emphasized that individuals in a community work together to address local problems, concerns, and opportunities. But how does this process really unfold in your community?

In fact, the most disturbing aspect of the leadership and influence structure found in many communities is that a sizable number of people—the general public—take little, if any, active part in local decisions. This module is designed to foster an understanding of who makes decisions, and how these decisions are made. Furthermore, it invites a broader segment of the local community to be better informed about important local matters and to take an active part in helping shape responses to these issues.

This overview will briefly describe the United States' system of government as one that places great importance on local decision-making activities. It also will explain how, despite this assigned importance, access to and participation in the policy-making process is not equally available to all citizens of a community. It will then discuss, in greater detail, the influence that people at different levels of leadership have on local policies, focusing on who makes the policy decisions and how they are implemented. It will conclude by arguing for the increased need and commitment to

> "As you think about policy, it's more important to recognize that, in many cases, certain people are more successful in affecting policy decisions than are others."

engage more citizens in policy discussions that address issues of importance to people in the community.

Understanding the U.S. System of Government

If you were to examine the way our system of government is organized in the United States, you would begin to truly appreciate the significant importance that the system places on local decisions arrived at by an active citizenry. The United States has a *federal system* of government in which power and responsibility are shared among the national, state, and local jurisdictions. The functions and powers of government are divided between the national and the state governments. The governing powers of townships, municipalities, and counties are granted by the states, and in many cases, the local governmental units function as administrative units of the states.

While it is true that there is often more interest in the big happenings at the state and national levels, local government is every bit as important in its own sphere. As one author has stated so well:

> Local governing agencies exert great influence on the way we live. They are the dominant level of government within our federal sphere in such matters as the exercise of police power, public education below the college level, recreation, regulation of land use, and such unglamourous yet essential services, as waste disposal [1].

Furthermore, local government is the only echelon of our national system on which most of us can feel any direct influence or personal identity—except during moments of patriotic drama. The nation, the states, even most of the counties, are sprawling conglomerates in which most individuals can function only as minute statistics—barely affecting the averages, trends, and probabilities on which governing decisions are based.

In essence, our unique system of government calls for citizens to take an active part in decision-making. And the chance to be a "part of the action" is most readily available at the local level.

However, there are certain factors that serve as barriers to participation in local issues. A brief discussion of social differences can begin to offer us some understanding of what these potential forces might be.

Social Stratification

An important American ideal is that *all people are created equal*. This implies that, naturally, we all have the same ability to become involved and influence policy. However, social differences among people arise and exert direct and indirect effects on who has the influence to impact the policy-

"Various types of social differences lead to social stratification— a ranking process that assigns gradations of higher or lower values to individual characteristics."

making process. As Swanson and his associates have noted:

> In the end, we do not all partake or benefit equally in the opportunities of this country. The hard reality is that the cards are stacked against some groups and individuals. The belief in equal opportunity is not always translated into equal results. Differences in family education, income, occupational status, and other characteristics lead to social distinctions that shape the options and opportunities which each individual faces, regardless of the promises of the Declaration of Independence [2].

Various types of social differences lead to social stratification—a ranking process that assigns gradations of higher or lower values to individual characteristics. There are many items that can be used to rank people in a system of social stratification— race and gender, for example. For the most part, however, American social scientists agree that the most useful and powerful measure that is used to stratify people is **socioeconomic status** (or what is often simply called SES). Socioeconomic status represents a combined measure of the **income, education**, and **occupation** of individuals (or families). These factors tend to go together. People with high education usually have high status jobs that provide a good income for these individuals. Of course, the reverse tends to be true as well—people with low education have jobs which generally pay much less. Indeed, there are exceptions to this pattern, but this is usually how income, education and occupation tend to be connected.

People associated with different socioeconomic statuses have distinct interests, needs, and concerns that tend to affect how they view certain public policy issues. Social stratification has much to say about how a community might deal with key local matters and who ultimately will benefit from these decisions. For example, a downtown renewal project that renovates and converts some old apartment houses into condominiums will tend to benefit the developers and the community as a whole because of the introduction of higher income people into the area. But such a project may end up ignoring the interests of low-income people who live in these old housing complexes and who are likely to be displaced from the neighborhood (since they will be unlikely to pay the higher rents that these new condominiums will command).

Yet, the reality often differs from the ideal principles. In order to involve more community members in the policy deliberations that affect their lives, we must understand who usually makes local policy decisions.
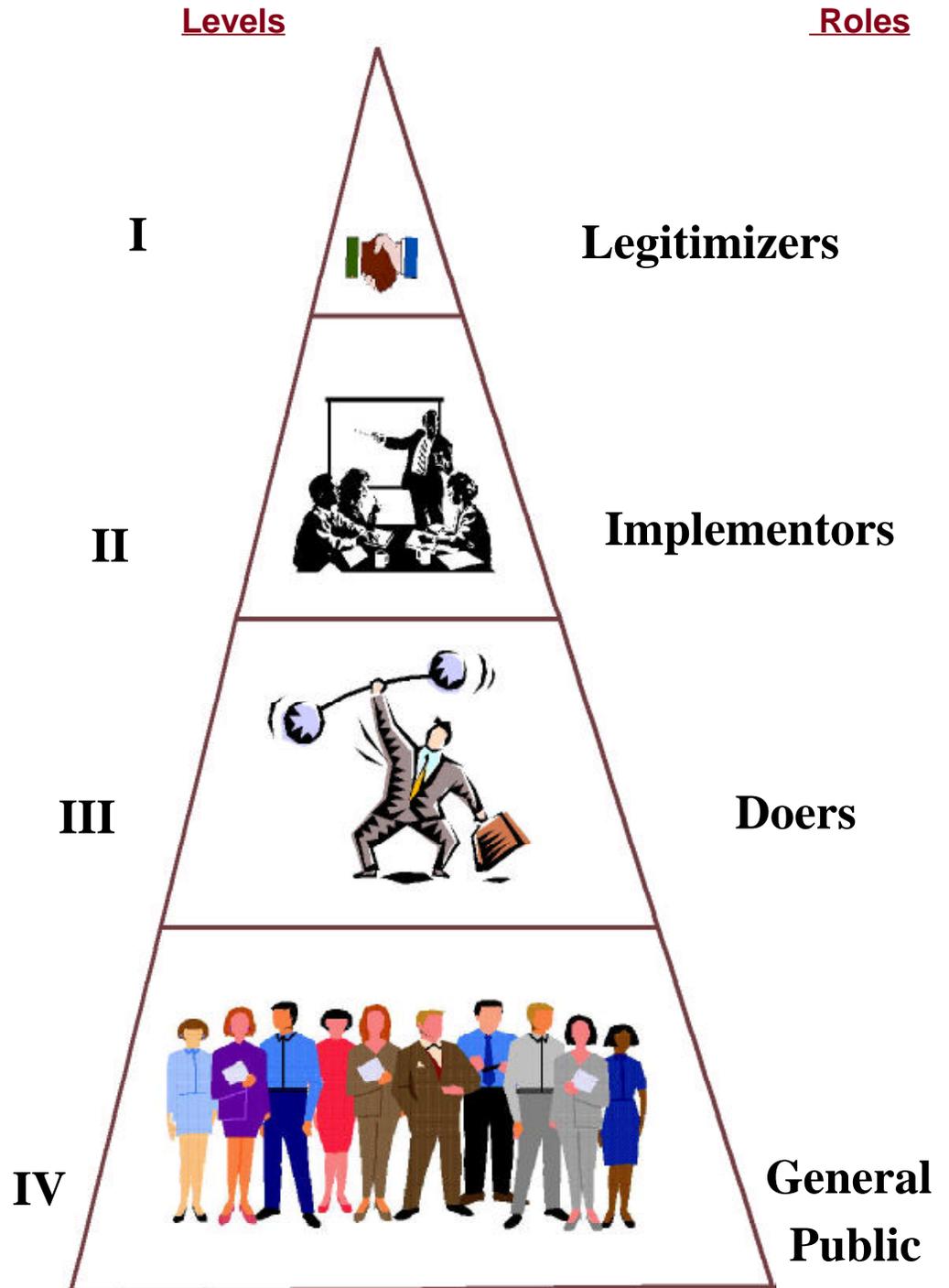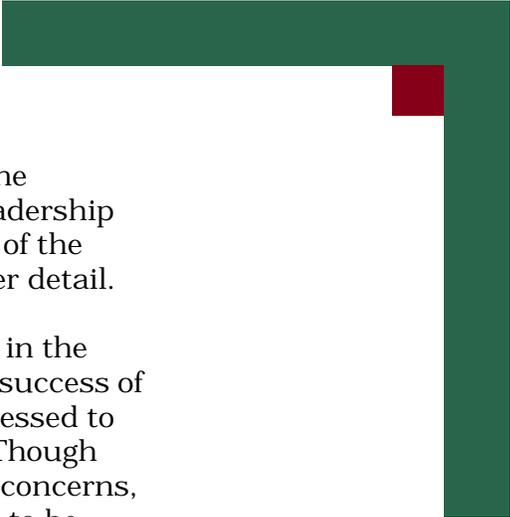
Levels of Local Leadership

In general, the level of influence that individuals have in local decisions is dependent upon where they are located in the local leadership hierarchy. Leadership in most communities forms a structure much like a pyramid. The leadership and influence that an individual provides is generally a function of that person's location in the leadership hierarchy.

"The principal of equity and democracy suggest that the interests and concerns of all the members of the community should be considered when public decisions that have an effect on the community as a whole are to be made."

Figure 1. Community Leadership Levels

Levels		Roles
I		Legitimizers
II		Implementors
III		Doers
IV		General Public

Community Choices: Public Policy Education Program

The four levels of leadership can be categorized as *legitimizers, implementors, doers,* and the *general public* (see Figure 1). It is the *legitimizers* who are positioned at the highest rung of the local leadership structure, while the general public is situated at the bottom level of the hierarchy. Let's describe each of these leadership levels in greater detail.

Legitimizers, as the name implies, refers to those individuals in the community who provide the approval necessary to guarantee the success of important undertakings. In most instances, their efforts are addressed to projects having important policy implications for the community. Though they may not become actively involved in all community issues or concerns, their endorsement is often essential if groups or individuals hope to be successful in accomplishing the goals and objectives of their local projects.

In many instances, you will find that these top community influential are employed in important positions within the business, industrial, financial and governmental sectors of the community. Their influence is, in no small measure, due to the tremendous human, physical and financial resources which they control or have access to. These resources can be used to guarantee or thwart the success of many local projects or policy issues.

Implementors, who form the second level of leadership in a community, are the more active participants in community projects. Their involvement is often limited to areas in which they possess technical and/or professional competencies. Their key function is to implement the plans and decisions arrived at or approved by the *legitimizers.* Given their active involvement in local projects, they tend to acquire high visibility in the eyes of most community residents.

The third leadership level in the community is that of the *doers*. They perform many of the chores associated with a project, such as stuffing envelopes, making and answering phone calls, distributing information, and rallying support of local residents behind the project. Though they are seldom involved in the planning and decision-making phases of a project, they perform a key role by ensuring that all tasks are carried out. In most cases, individuals active in community clubs and civic and service organizations are a part of this third leadership level.

Finally, we have the general public. In most cases, they remain removed from active involvement in local leadership activities. Nonetheless, they do constitute an important aspect of the locality that must be given due consideration in important decisions, particularly those directly affecting them. The general public includes both a fairly sizable number of people who never become involved in public issues, and another segment that will be involved on an occasional basis, especially if issues or policies directly affecting them are being considered.

The use of a pyramid design to visually portray leadership and

"Individuals who perform active decision-making roles in local projects are part of the communitity's leadership structure."

influence on the local level is no accident. The pyramid suggests that the most influential level—*legitimizers*—is made up of a small number of people in the community. Implementors are more numerous than *legitimizers*, but less so than the doers. And finally, the general public is the largest group in the pyramid, but the one that is least actively involved in local policy decisions and as a result, often less instrumental in helping influence or guide local policy deliberations.

Locating Local Influentials

There are approaches that can be used to gain some idea of who might be located in the different influence levels in the leadership hierarchy (see Activity #1). There are two techniques that social scientists have used quite successfully in determining who the local *legitimizers* might be. These approaches are called the "***Positional***" and "***Reputational***" techniques.
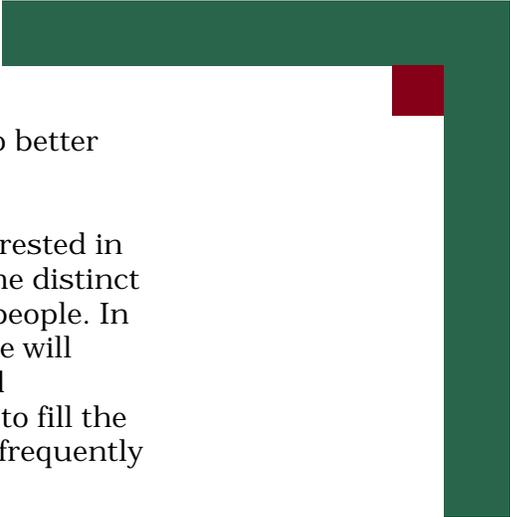
The idea behind the *"Positional"* approach is that individuals who occupy the top spots in the major organizations of the community are the local leaders. Their key roles in the various organizations provide them with access to important resources which they can mobilize and bring to bear on any community project or important policy issue.

A second approach that is useful for uncovering the list of *legitimizers* in a community is called the *"Reputational"* technique. This method begins with the assumption that those individuals who have the "*reputation*" for power constitute the community's leadership structure.

List the names of individuals nominated on a notepad and tabulate the total number of times each individual's name is mentioned. The persons receiving the greatest number of nominations are often viewed as the community leaders and part of the group of local legitimizers.

The *"Decisional"* approach tends to be the most helpful method for determining who the implementors are in the community. This approach assumes that active participation in community projects or issues is leadership. Therefore, individuals who perform active decision-making roles in local projects are part of the community's leadership structure.

Finally, the *"Social Activity"* procedure tends to be effective in tapping the so-called doers of the community. This approach focuses specifically on those individuals who are active and who hold office in local clubs, voluntary and civic/service organizations in the area. These people tend to be the ones who are willing to take on the multiple and time-consuming

" There are two techniques that social scientist have used quite successfully in determining who the local *legitimizers* might be—the **"Positional"** and the **"Reputational"** techniques. "

tasks associated with getting projects off the ground or helping to better inform the community of important problems or policy issues.

It's important to point out that if the community you are interested in tends to be moderate to large in population size, it is likely that the distinct leadership levels shown in Figure 1 will be occupied by different people. In smaller communities, on the other hand, the same group of people will likely carry out multiple leadership roles, such as *legitimizers* and *implementors*. This is because fewer persons tend to be available to fill the various leadership roles. So, the same individuals tend to appear frequently on more than one of the leadership levels presented in Figure 1.

Expanding the Breadth of Local Participation

Public policy education has as its very foundation the value of public participation in governmental decisions. It is assumed that if the democratic system is to function effectively, the citizenry must be well-informed of the major issues of the day, and must have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. This is no less true in the local community than in national affairs. No doubt, an array of community problems clamor for attention including those that deal with economic development issues. Expanding the participation of local citizens in addressing these important local issues is of paramount importance.

In this module, we have described the people who tend to be influential in deciding important policy issues. We have noted that many people remain uninterested or uninvolved in local matters. In some cases, the socioeconomic status of people often limit their access to the decision-making process. As public policy issues are debated, it is important to remain sensitive to the fact that probably not all perspectives or voices are being heard. In order to ensure fairness and equity at the local level with regard to public policy activities, the public policy education participants must make every effort to recruit and involve people of racial/ethnic diversity or of lower socioeconomic standings. Their interests and concerns cannot be ignored or dismissed.

Granted, *legitimizers* and *implementors* will continue to command influence in deciding important policy matters. This does not mean, however, that the common citizen is powerless. Organizing as a group to understand the policy issues, and working together to help shape the strategies for responding to these issues, represents a valuable mechanism for ensuring that they will be heard. Ten people working together in cooperation to achieve a common goal can accomplish more than 10 people working separate from one another. By organizing, you

magnify the power and influence of individuals. In fact, forming an organization to deal with an issue of concern will strengthen the group's capacity to influence public policy in the following ways:

- A division of labor can take place that will allow your group to take advantage of the special skills and talents of the various members of the group.

- Establishing an organization will increase the public's awareness of the issue and goals being promoted by your group. For example, the local news media are more likely to give attention to the public policy recommendations of a citizens' organization than they would to a "Letter to the Editor" prepared by an individual.

- Local influential leaders are more likely to take the effort seriously since the concern is being expressed by a group of local residents.

- Working as a group gives each individual a sense of confidence in his/her ability to make positive changes in the community. The person begins to feel empowered.

- Working in a mutual effort with others in a group can, to some extent, make up for economic and social disadvantages that one may have due to income, occupational, educational, or minority racial/ethnic status.

Concluding Comments

This overview has built on the public policy education model's **involvement** phase by emphasizing the importance of understanding how local decisions are made and identifying who is involved in these activities. This base information will be useful later on in this program, when participants examine specific community economic development issues and seek to expand the people and groups who are engaged in discussing and shaping policy recommendations.

References

[1] Berkeley, George E. 1978. *80,000 Governments: The Politics of Subnational America.* Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

[2] Swanson, Bert E., Richard A. Cohen, and Edith P. Swanson. 1979. *Small Town and Small Towners.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Module Two Instructor's Guide

Identifying Local Decision-Makers

Small Group Activities

Activity #1
Approaches For Identifying Community Leaders

In this session, we discussed the importance of being aware of how local decisions are made. Where a person is located in the leadership hierarchy has much to do with how influential that person might be in affecting local policy decisions.

Think about the leadership structure of your community. Who do you think are the local *legitimizers* and *implementors*? To help develop a list of possible *influentials*, use the three approaches below (that is, the *positional*, the *reputational*, and the *decisional*) to generate names of individuals. Work on the list in small groups.

1.   The Positional Approach

Use the following guideline to identify individuals in your community who are viewed as positional leaders. Remember that the list you generate is generally considered to be people who serve as local *legitimizers*.

◆   Identify those persons who occupy the top formal positions or offices in the public and private sectors of your community. Some of these formal positions include the mayor or city manager, city or county commissioners, key business people, bank officers, and others who hold important positions in government, business, industry, and finance.

◆   List these names on the attached sheet.

As you compile the list, pay special attention to whether there is much overlap among names. That is, if one or more persons hold several leadership positions across these different types of firms, this may be an indication of an **elite** or **clique** leadership structure. This may suggest that a small group of people dominate community decision-making. If such overlap is rare, this suggests that a pluralistic pattern might predominate, one in which a wider range of people are giving leadership to those issues deemed critical to the economic and social health of the community. Discuss the meaning of your findings.

2.   Reputational Approach

This method focuses on those persons who have the "reputation" for being influential on important local issues. This method also helps identify community legitimizers.

◆   Have each member of your group identify 5 to 10 people in the community who come to mind in response to the following questions: "Who has the most influence in your community in deciding important matters facing it?" and "Whose support would you like to have if you

wanted to propose something new for the community?"

- List these names of the individuals nominated on the attached sheet and tabulate the total number of times each individual's name is mentioned. The persons receiving the greatest number of nominations are often viewed as the community leaders and part to the group of local ***legitimizers***.

3.   Decisional Approach

This approach suggests that active participation in important community projects or issues indicates a person with influence in local matters. As a technique, it tends to be successful in identifying community *implementors*. See if you can list some of the people in your community who are *implementors*.

- Identify the significant local projects, issues, or policy decisions that have been addressed in the past 2 to 3 years or the 3 to 4 key issues with which your community is currently dealing. Now, determine the persons that have been significantly involved in one or more of these issues. If you have access to newspaper accounts of these activities, it can prove quite helpful in identifying active participants.
- List these names on the attached sheet. The names that are generated through this process are ones that are commonly viewed as community ***implementors***.

4.   The Social Activity Approach

This method is effective in identifying individuals who are the doers in the community. It focuses specifically on those individuals who are willing to take on multiple and time-consuming tasks associated with getting projects off the ground or helping to better inform the community of important problems or policy issues.

- Have group members identify those persons who they know are active in community activities such as local clubs, voluntary and civic/service organizations or who they know can be counted on to become involved in community issues.
- List the names of the individuals nominated on the attached sheet and tabulate the total number of times each individual's name is mentioned. The persons receiving the greatest number of nominations are often viewed as the community ***doers***.

Discussion Questions

1. To what extent are the same names being uncovered using the three different techniques? Do the positional and reputational methods tend to have considerable or only minor overlap in names? Are some people that you have identified as legitimizers also viewed as implementors?
2. Do you think that knowing who the local legitimizers and implementors are can be helpful to individuals or groups who are trying to help shape local policy decisions? Why or why not?
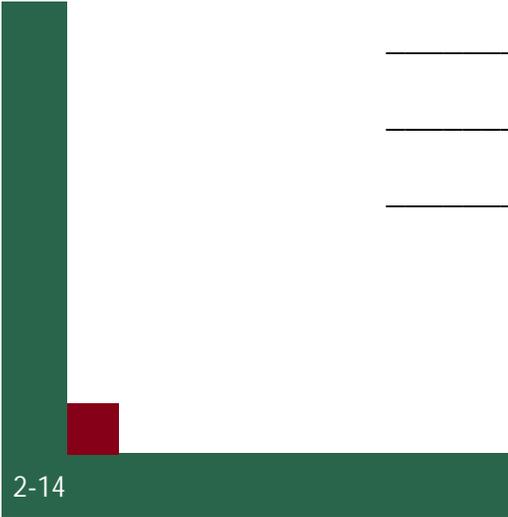
Community Leadership Worksheet
Activity #1

Leadership Approach	**Names Identified**

Positional Technique

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Reputational Technique

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Community Leadership Worksheet
Activity #1

	Leadership Approach	**Names Identified**
Decisional Technique	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____

Social Activity Technique

	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____

Activity #2
School Choice: Exploring Its Impact On People in the Community

1. Assume that th following represents an actual event that is taking place in your
    community.

    *In respones to a call by the State Department of Education to improve the quality of
    the state's primary and secondary school systems, a proposal has been made to
    introduce "choice in education." Under the proposal, parents could choose which
    school to send their children. Those schools doing a better job of educating their
    students would attract more students, thlus rewarding ther more innovative, hard
    working schools. Because school funding i based on student attendance, the better
    schools would be reinforced in thier practices by recieving more money. The
    resulting competition among schools, it is argued, will improve the overall quality of
    education.*

2. In the basis of what you have heard and discussed during the session on "How
    Local Decisions are Made," how do you thing the proposed public policy change
    concerning the local school system will affedt your local community? Who is likely
    to support the effort and who is likely to be against it? Are there certain groups
    that you think will benefit or lose as a result of these proposed changes?

Think of your responses along these lines:

   a. On the basis of the leadership hierarchy portrayed in Figure 1 of the overview
       document on "How Local Decisions Are Made," who at each leadership level is
       likely to be involved in helping influence the outcome of this issue? For
       example, what legitimizers (if any) are likely to get involved? How about the
       imiplmentors?

   b. When considering your community's social stratification system, are there
       certian groups or individuals who would benifit if this proposal were
       approved? Are there individuals or groups that would benifit if this proposal
       were approved? Are there individuals or groups that would be impacted in
       negative ways? Why do you think so?

   c. What organizations or groups are likely to be in favor of this proposal? What
       groups/organizations are likely to oppose it? Why?

3. Meet in small groups (5 to7 people) to discuss this possible change in policy. As
    a group, address the questions that have been outlined for you to debate. As a
    group, identify other key points that would need to be considered if the "school
    choice" issue were to be considered for approval by people in your community.

4. Record the major points of your discussion on newsprint or an overhead
    transparency. Select a member of your group to share the highlights of your
    group's discussion with the rest of the sessions with the rest of the sessions
    participants.