

Citizen Topic Groups – An Overview (Draft)

Introduction

Imagine Columbia's future is a community-wide discussion to create a shared vision for Columbia's future. Imagine Columbia's Future starts without any preconceived agendas. Citizens build a foundation of ideas and issues through surveys and Big Idea Gathering meetings, which are formulated and refined into goals and implementation strategies through Citizen Topic Groups and public meetings.

This document provides an overview of the Citizen Topic Group portion of Imagine Columbia's Future. It includes:

- **Introduction:** this provides a basic overview and a summary of the ideas collected from the public;
- **Roles and Responsibilities:** Citizen Topic Group members must understand their charge and commit themselves to the process;
- **Outline of the Process:** includes information on the topics, organizational structure, and timeline; and

The Foundation of the Vision: Ideas from the Community

The process of collecting ideas began in earnest in late November and early December when members of the Columbia community expressed their ideas for the future at two Big Idea Gathering Meetings (BIG Meetings). These meetings were widely publicized, and open to anyone who lives, works, studies, or shops in Columbia. An extensive outreach effort was conducted to reach out to the diverse demographic, geographic, and special interest groups in the community. Approximately 425 people participated in these two meetings. Over 1,000 ideas were recorded at the meetings, and have been databased and categorized so that they can be used throughout the remainder of the process. The database of ideas has also been supplemented with input received from an online survey and the Fall Vision Festivals.

Roles and Responsibilities

The ideas gathered during the BIG Meetings represent the foundation of Columbia's vision for the future. Members of the Citizen Topic Groups will be responsible for taking these ideas and using them to develop goals for the future and supporting implementation strategies. As a member of the Citizen Topic Group, your knowledge and expertise are extremely valuable. Your passion for the topic and your commitment to the Columbia community will help to pave the way for implementation of the Vision. However, the central role of Citizen Topic Groups members is one of stewardship – your job is to ensure that the goals and strategies developed truly reflect and contribute to achieving the community's desires for the future of Columbia.

Citizen Topic Group members have the following five key responsibilities:

1. Attend all Citizen Topic Group meetings. Citizen Topic Groups will meet a minimum of once per month, from January to June 2007. At their own discretion, some Groups may choose to meet more often.
2. Help to finalize the membership of the Citizen Topic Group by identifying and inviting key subject matter experts and ensuring that all perspectives are represented.
3. Gather information in order to become familiar with your chosen topic and with the existing community context. Specific tasks will be outlined by the consulting team.
4. Complete additional assignments as necessary.
5. Prepare – in cooperation with the members of your Citizen Topic Group – the required deliverables for the Vision: a vision statement, goals, implementation strategies, and an implementation plan.

Outline of the Process

Topics

The topics around which the Citizen Topic Groups are organized were based on the ideas generated during the BIG meetings, thus ensuring that it is the public that is determining the agenda of the vision. You have been assigned to the Topic Group that best matches the interests that you expressed on your sign-up form. If you feel you have been inappropriately assigned, there will be an opportunity to switch groups during the Kick-off Meeting on January 17. There is much work to be done in each of the Topic Groups and once you commit to a Citizen Topic Group it will be very difficult to change.

Organizational Structure

Each Topic Group should be comprised of people who are both passionate and knowledgeable about the topic. Within your Citizen Topic Group, you will spend time working as a full group as well as working in a small group. These small groups will be organized around sub-topics and will include a minimum of three people. The small group process is designed to allow for group members to focus their energy and expertise on developing a specific goal, implementation strategies, and implementation plan (see Deliverables below). While much of your small group work can be done somewhat independently, there will be reporting periods during each meeting in order to discuss issues with the Group as a whole, receive feedback on your small group work, and provide input on the work of other small groups.

There are three key entities that will support the work of the Citizen Topic Groups: the Vision Committee, Co-Facilitators, and Staff.

- The **Vision Committee** is a volunteer body tasked to guide the process – not the content – of Imagine Columbia’s Future. There are two Co-Chairs to that Committee, Dianne Drainer and Jeffery Williams.
- **Co-Facilitators** are members of the Vision Committee and are also serving on a Citizen Topic Group to help facilitate your group’s efforts. One Co-Facilitator has already been selected by the Co-Chairs of the Vision Committee. The other Co-Facilitator will be elected by the members of your Citizen Topic Group. These two Co-Facilitators will lead your group’s meetings and ensure that all information is recorded appropriately.
- **Staff** support will be provided by the City of Columbia. A city staff member will be assigned to your Group to assist with any logistical concerns, such as finding meeting space and arranging meeting times.

Timeline

The following table provides a timeline of the Citizen Topic Group activities from January through June.

| Activity | Date | Dominant Activities |
|---|------------------|--|
| 1. Citizen Topic Groups – Kick off Meeting | January 17, 2007 | Introductions, review of Topic’s ideas, forming subtopic groups, preliminary subtopic goals, recruiting. |
| 2. Citizen Topic Groups – Meeting #2 | February 2007 | Internal reporting, refinement of subtopic goals, draft subtopic strategies, identification of Topic Group’s next steps based on strategies. |
| 3. Citizen Topic Groups – Meeting #3 | March 2007 | Internal reporting, refinement and preliminary prioritization of draft strategies, development of a Topic’s draft vision statement, outline of Resource Scan |
| 4. Public Meeting: Exploring the Vision | Late March 2007 | Presentation of draft subtopic goals and strategies to the public for review, feedback, and prioritization. |
| 5. Citizen Topic Groups – Meeting #4 | April 2007 | Internal reporting, preliminary feedback on Resource Scan. |
| 6. Citizen Topic Groups – Meeting #5 | May 2007 | Internal reporting, addressing strategic questions by strategy: who leads, who is involved, start up actions. |
| 7. Citizen Topic Groups – Meeting #6 | June 2007 | Internal reporting, finalizing strategic questions. |
| 8. Public Meeting: Community Choices Workshop | Late June 2007 | Presenting the full vision to the public for final comment. |

Deliverables

The six month Citizen Topic Group process will facilitate the formulation of the Vision for Columbia's Future. The Vision will be prepared when the following items have been submitted by each of the Citizen Topic Groups.

1. *What is our vision of the future?* – The vision statement will be a broad description of the community's aspirations for the future.
 - a. *What do we want to achieve?* – Specific goals that express the community's desired outcomes in simple terms. There will be one goal developed for each of the group's sub-topics
 - b. *What should be done?* – One to three implementation strategies will be formulated for each of the goals. There will also be an implementation plan that includes the following:
 - i. *Why should we commit to this strategy?*
 - ii. *Who should be involved?*
 - iii. *What action step(s) are necessary to implement this strategy?*
 - iv. *What will it cost?*
 - v. *What should we do next?*
 - vi. *How will we know if we are successful?*