

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In September 2002, the Yellow Springs Men's Group released a comprehensive Cost of Living Study which was completed in conjunction with the Center for Urban and Public Affairs (CUPA) at Wright State University. That study of the village indicated a trend toward an aging, less diverse and smaller population set against a large and ever growing tax burden for our citizens. Economic Forums were held in the spring of 2004 and 2005 to facilitate elected officials to develop general strategies for addressing these concerns. Also, in an effort to spur economic development, the Yellow Springs Men's Group agreed to be the managing sponsor of the Community Information Project (CIP) to promote the many positive aspects of visiting, living, learning and working in Yellow Springs to restore the population and job level.

The Men's Group secured funding for the CIP through government, institutional and private donors. An advisory planning committee (CIPAC) was recruited including representatives of government, business and civic organizations, project sponsors, and individuals with professional public relations experience. The CIPAC then selected a planning committee (CIPPC) to conduct the planning activity, with various implementation tasks to be contracted to qualified consultants. Monthly meetings kept the CIPAC current with the project activity of the CIPPC.

PLANNING PROCESS

Research

Early in the process, the group identified that the project's goal is to develop and communicate a message that will attract more visitors to our village, attract more residents to our neighborhoods, attract more students to our educational institutions and attract new and existing employers to grow here. To achieve the goal, the CIPPC would develop a communications strategy based upon some variation of the theme that "Yellow Springs is a great place to visit, work, learn and live."

The attendees of the 2005 Community Forum were asked questions to gauge their opinion about the need to promote various aspects of the Village to those outside our community. Forum attendees were in overwhelming support of the need to communicate the strengths of Yellow Springs to the region and beyond.

More specific ideas were identified during a local brainstorming session to solicit public opinion and comment on the quality of life in Yellow Springs and recommendations for achieving the four goals set out by the CIPAC. The effort resulted in over 100 ideas that were reviewed, evaluated and categorized.

Materials used by local entities to provide information to visitors, prospective residents, etc. were gathered and reviewed as background for the planning activity.

The CIPAC retained the services of the Center for Urban and Public Affairs from Wright State University to conduct an External Perception Survey of the opinions of individuals from surrounding communities. The general conclusion of the survey is that Yellow Springs is not a major resource for education, housing, job opportunities and shopping because respondents did not have a great deal of knowledge of what Yellow Springs has to offer. Natural amenities like the Glen gave Yellow Springs high recognition for recreation and unique shops and restaurants also were identified as strong retail amenities. Additionally, respondents who scored Yellow Springs high communicated an appreciation of the population diversity, creativity, our educational values and our safe, small-town feeling.

Further research included a report from Synergy One analyzing existing Village websites to determine what already exists and what might be needed plus comparable village websites that are excellent for review and comparison.

Communication Targets

The CIPPC then defined niches of existing and potential communication targets to focus resources on potentially high payoff efforts. The group identified specific groups of people who might be attracted to Yellow Springs to visit, live, learn and work. It was quickly realized that the most efficient method would be to attract people to Yellow Springs to visit and then educate them on Yellow Springs after they are here. As identified in the CUPA survey, specific strengths in recreation and unique shopping give us the opportunity to appeal to those visitors with other features of Yellow Springs.

Sorting Strategy

From the vast amount of input received by the CIPPC, including the results from the 2005 Community Forum, the community brainstorming session and individual input, hundreds of ideas were reviewed categorized and sorted as to whether they were achievable by the CIP. The project ideas were related to niche markets and ranked as to the "highest payoff" projects based upon time frame, ease of implementation, cost, degree of organizational coordination required and number of niche markets addressed. The list was then narrowed down to thirteen projects that warranted further exploration.

THE PLAN

In developing the plan, the CIPPC identified specific communications projects to achieve our goal of first attracting visitors to Yellow Springs and thereby attracting residents, learners and workers.

CIP Leadership Projects will be conducted by the CIP with community and partnership input. They will be implemented in the first year of the project.

1. Identity Campaign

The first initiative and a core effort will be to create a "signature" for Yellow Springs. A communications campaign will be developed to clarify and focus the identity that already exists and unify the message we convey and how we convey it.

The purpose of the Identity Campaign is to solidify and expand upon the positive image of Yellow Springs and broaden its appeal to communicate more effectively the message that Yellow Springs is a great place to visit, live, learn, and work. The CIPPC will work with consultants to create a clear identity that will be an immediate "flag" to visitors about what they can expect in Yellow Springs.

The key to the success of this campaign is broad acceptance and implementation of the program by the community. The more ways in which a unified message is being communicated, the stronger the Identity Campaign will be and the more success Yellow Springs will have at attracting visitors, residents, learners, and workers.

2. Targeted Communication Initiatives

The second initiative of the plan will be to develop strategies to communicate specific messages to targeted audiences such as those in search of housing opportunities who might find the community a good fit. Materials will be developed and distributed to realtors and other housing search portals to inform them about the community. Employees of local businesses, organizations and educational institutions are the primary target of this initiative.

Other targeted communication initiatives can be designed and implemented as opportunities arise.

Short-Term CIP Partnership Projects will be carried out in partnership with other community groups and be implemented in the first year of the project.

1. Website

An official visitor's website will be designed to communicate effectively with residents and non-residents alike. It will follow the message of the Identity Campaign with links to specific community sites for more in-depth information.

2. Information Center

The function of a full-fledged and vigorous visitor information center is viewed as a vital core activity in the CIP plan. This plan will pursue implementation of an expanded information center as a very high priority.

3. Support and Enhance Chamber of Commerce

As the Chamber of Commerce clarifies its role in the community, the CIP will work in a supportive role to assist and facilitate the activities and initiatives described in this plan. Project responsibilities will be turned over to the Chamber when possible.

4. Supplementary Information Materials

The CIP will work with community groups to develop materials to fill gaps where nothing exists and to update existing materials with the signature identity.

Long-Term CIP Partnership Projects will be carried out in partnership with other community groups and be implemented in the second and third years.

1. Information Distribution Network

This project will make every visitor contact point an information center location. Local retail business, events, or service vendors can become Visitor Contact Sites, creating an integrated network for distribution of information about Yellow Springs.

2. Improved Signage

CIP will work with village government and the Design Advisory Commission for integrated directional signage for the community.

3. Visitor Newsletter

A newsletter containing information about upcoming events, special promotions and featured businesses will be distributed locally, via mail and electronically.

CIP Monitored Projects are beyond the direct scope of the CIP but have great potential for success. The Cultural Corridor Project, a regional economic development activity, promises to be a major factor in communicating the arts and cultural assets of this community to a wider audience and will be monitored to determine if it might later fit more directly into the scope of the CIP.

CIP Referral Projects are ideas and initiatives which are not part of or go well beyond the mission of the CIP. Many of these are good ideas with great potential. Although CIP cannot take the leadership in pursuing these we will advise/support others who want to do so.

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The CIPPC has developed a schedule and budget and identified key personnel for the balance of the three-year course of this project.

An Implementation Coordinator will be contracted to assist in implementing the plan. Co-op students from local universities will be an additional resource for website update Information Center supervision. Volunteer help has always been a part of staffing the Chamber of Commerce visitor facility and will likely continue.

As part of the Implementation Planning process, CIP will identify milestones to gauge progress and success. Objective information about economic activity, demographic change and other useful parameters will be gathered periodically in cooperation with other organizations so that the information can be used not only to evaluate the CIP program but to help guide other decision makers in the community.