

DEVELOPING THE VISION STATEMENT

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Summary

This fact sheet describes what a vision statement is, its importance, how it is developed, and how it is used by a community.

Keywords:

community engagement, reporting back, collecting data, managing the process, direction setting, Elders / knowledge keepers, youth, planning team, oral tradition

Vision Statements as Community Storytelling

Your vision statement for your community is like a story you share with your loved ones. Through stories, people talk about their history, their fears, their hopes for the future, and their differences. Through stories, people may share with others the reasons why they care about their neighbourhoods. Through stories, people can imagine what once was, and what is yet to come. Stories help lift people's spirits. They entertain, they give people hope, and they inspire. They put people in others' shoes. They motivate people to find answers and solutions. They help people reflect and reimagine. Stories can take people to different worlds, to different places where possibilities are endless.

People tell stories in many ways: through spoken word, literature, community gatherings, pow wows, song, dance, and more. A vision statement is just another way for people to share their stories. Figure 1 shows different things that make up a vision.

Vision statements weave together features such as language, values, beliefs, culture, and the land that we live on. Just as stories come in different shapes, sizes, and genres, developing the storyline about what is important for a community, the vision statement can be a challenge.

As kids, we grew up storytelling. As adults, we forget to tell stories - to imagine and dream- as we sometimes get stuck debating daily issues like road repair. People often want realistic plans and in this case, the "how" can become more important than the "why."

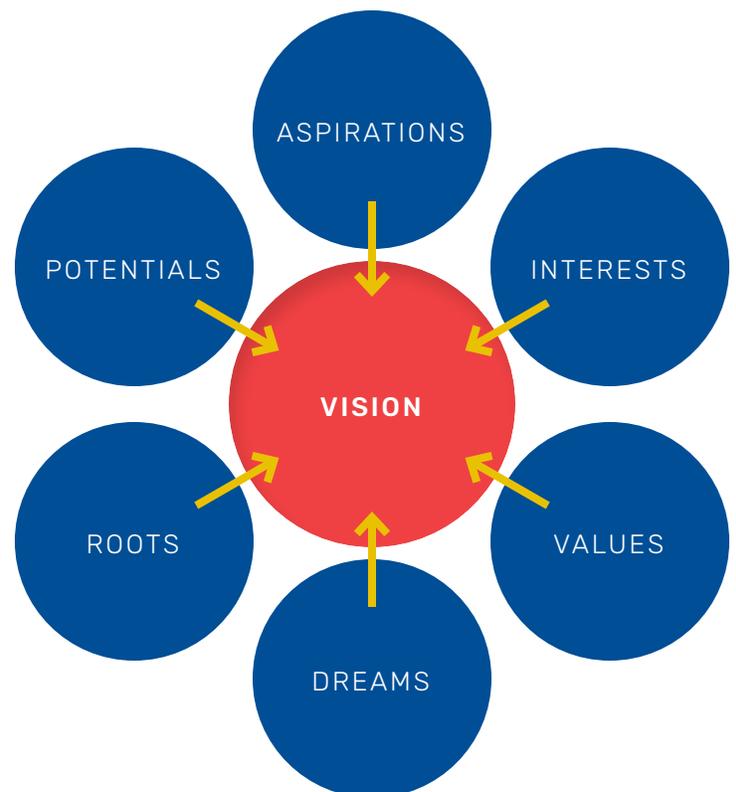


Figure 1 | Driving factors of a vision statement.

Adapted from (Indigenous & Northern Affairs Canada / Indigenous Services Canada. "CCP Handbook: Comprehensive Community Planning for First Nations in British Columbia, Third Edition." Digital image. 2013. Accessed October 11, 2016. http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-BC/STAGING/texte-text/ccphb2013_1378922610124_eng.pdf. p. 33.) Used with permission.

This thinking is perfectly summed up in Figure 2 from the Community Vision Handbook.¹ But without the “why” – the vision statement – the plan can become just a set of actions without a focus. The vision statement keeps the community focused. It is important that the process provides all relevant stakeholders an opportunity to participate.

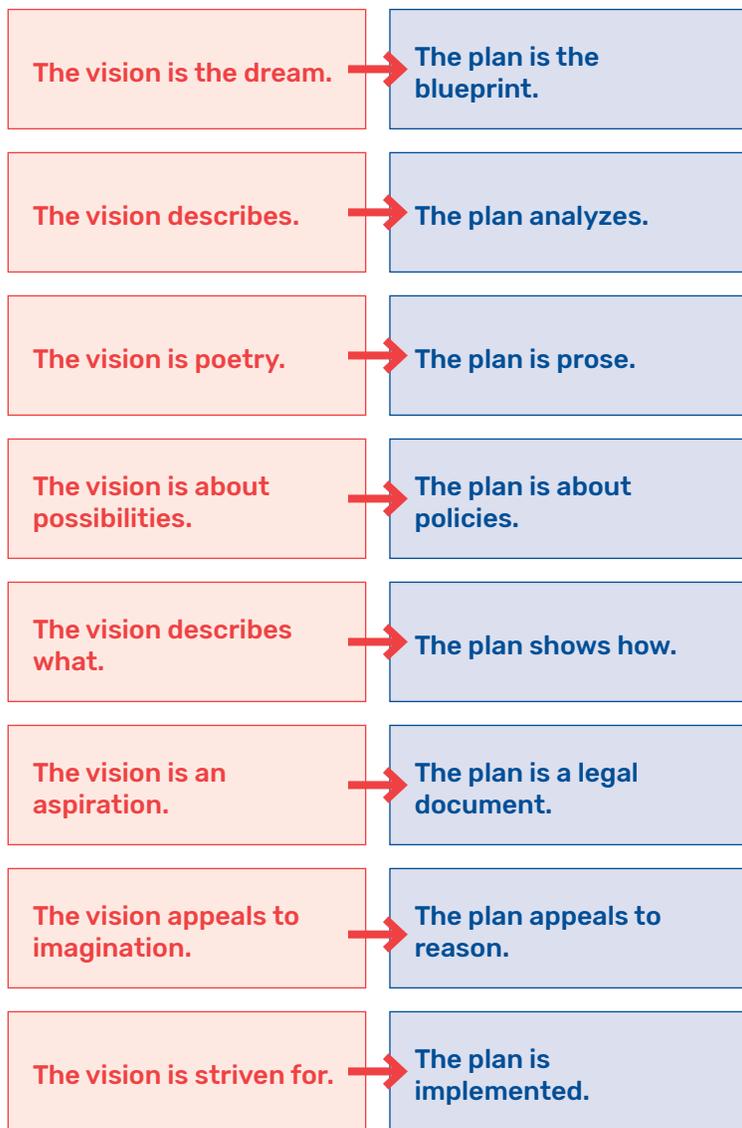


Figure 2 | How the vision relates to the plan.
 Adapted from (Maine State Planning Office. “Community Vision Handbook.” 2003. Accessed October 10, 2016. <https://www.maine.gov/dacf/municipalplanning/docs/visioning.pdf>. p. 5.) Used with permission.

“We will be a community with a strong and distinct culture, where our language, traditions, and the teachings of our ancestors live on throughout the generations. We will continue to be caretakers of our sacred and important places. We will gather often to celebrate and support each other.”
 – Excerpt from Gwa’sala-’Nakwaxda’xw First Nations Vision Statement

Inspiring Community Participation

Just like a story, the beginning is sometimes more important than the end. People might jump to the end of a book, but they often want to understand the reasons behind the conclusion. The same is true for vision statements. While the final statement is necessary for a community to move forward, consideration of how it was drafted and who helped to form it is necessary to ensure buy-in from a community. The vision statement process helps residents to take a realistic look at their community; not to assign blame but to establish an honest appraisal of what their community is.

By encouraging community members to participate early on in the visioning process, “the more likely they are to invest in its outcome and work towards its achievement.”² When participants come together, it is important to ensure that one particular issue does not drive the entire visioning process. As one handbook on community vision states, “This process addresses where the entire community will be in the future, not how some individual issue will change. While these individual issues need to be examined and addressed, they should not be the sole focus of the community’s vision.”³ Ensuring the “page is blank” and not predetermining outcomes of the visioning process will ensure that there is citizen buy-in from the onset and “because it needs to be the community’s vision (not only the leadership or the administration’s vision) to remain strong over time.”⁴

“We are Syilx who receive our strength from our timix and encompass what is good for our livelihood. We are committed to our language and the teachings of our captiklw and respect that everyone has value and purpose to come together as one.”
 – Penticton Indian Band Vision Statement

Steps Towards a Vision Statement

Assessing Community Strengths/Weaknesses and Opportunities/Threats

Before you organize a community workshop and ask people to gather and participate, your planning team should create an outline for the visioning process. What questions will be asked of the participants? What information will be provided? It is important to get people thinking about community assets. Often, this can be done by asking community members to write/mark down on a map of their community what they believe to be the important strengths/weaknesses, as well as “information on economic, demographic, and social conditions.”⁵ Starting with this type of analysis can encourage participants to then think about what is missing, as they begin to answer questions like: “What types of changes do you think will happen in the next five to 10 years?”⁶

Visioning Exercise

CCP conducted a visioning exercise which focused on participants using their imagination. They asked participants to think about what was good about their lives, their communities, and the things they used to have in their neighbourhoods but have lost and want to get back. They asked people to picture in their minds what their community would look like at its best and to share these ideas and stories with other participants, using the following script:

So please take a minute now to close your eyes and imagine that you are a bird or in a plane soaring over the community, looking down on it 20 or 30 years from now. Imagine into the future when your grandchildren are starting to have families of their own. Think about what the community looks like at its best – what features does it have, what facilities, what are people doing, how to they relate to each other and to the land, what is the economy like, or the education and health services?

(wait approximately 1-2 minutes)

You can open your eyes now. Please share your ideas with the people at the table and have someone write down these ideas. We also have a piece of chart paper up on the wall here in case anyone wants to write down some of his or her ideas to share.

Community mapping is another effective tool when creating a community vision, particularly in small group settings and should “Start with a map of your traditional territory. Fill in existing communities, infrastructure, and activities. Then fill in what the community would like to see in the future: infrastructure development, cultural zones, traditional gathering areas, economic development opportunities, and others.”⁷ This exercise requires the facilitators to listen, not to educate, and to attempt to form consensus. This process will help in the development of a Vision Statement and is often similar to the work undertaken when developing a community plan.

For more information about community mapping, see *Mapping Assets and Building a Community Atlas*.

Writing the Vision Statement

After the mapping exercise, discuss the opportunities and their level of importance. This process should involve your entire community and give participants a chance to “select the scenario they believe best reflects their community’s

hopes and dreams.”⁸ Once the first draft is created, an opportunity for more fine-tuning and editing should be encouraged. The statement should be 2-3 paragraphs. Vision statements are broad descriptions of a community’s values and beliefs, hopes for the future, and do not include specific actions, as those should be located in your Community Plan. The language in each of the statements below outlines the strengths of the community, and reflects on how to enhance and build on those assets. The vision statements are inclusive, incorporating words like “we,” “us,” and “our.”

One process to create a vision statement is shown below. Keep in mind there are many ways to go about the visioning process.



Timeline

The time it may take for a community to form their vision statement varies from place to place. Some communities have the capacity and organizations to encourage public participation. Other places need to spend more time reaching out to community members. As one handbook on community visioning states, “many rural communities need between

eight to 12 months to write a vision statement and another three to six months to have it widely adopted. With a larger population base and many organizations, urban and suburban areas may take shorter periods of time. There is no exact timeframe for the implementation of the vision statement. In general, vision statements should have a five to 10-year timeframe.”⁹

Further Reading

CCP Handbook by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada

The Comprehensive Community Planning (CCP) Handbook includes practical tools to encourage community involvement and develop the plan based on the community’s vision and goals. The final section includes funding, educational and planning resources to support the development and implementation of your community’s plan.

http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-BC/STAGING/texte-text/ccphb2013_1378922610124_eng.pdf.

Ideas for Introducing Vision by Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources

http://www.yourcier.org/uploads/2/5/6/1/25611440/ccp_training_session_1_-_introducing_vision.pdf

Endnotes

- 1 Maine State Planning Office, “Community Vision Handbook,” *Maine State Planning Office*, 2003, Accessed October 10, 2016, <https://www1.maine.gov/dacf/municipalplanning/docs/visioning.pdf>.
- 2 The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, “Planning for the Future: A Handbook on Community Visioning,” *The Center for Rural Pennsylvania*, 1998, Accessed October 11, 2016, <http://www.rural.palegislature.us/visioning3.pdf>.
- 3 The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 1998.
- 4 Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, “CCP Handbook: Comprehensive Community Planning for First Nations in British Columbia, Third Edition,” *Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada*, 2013, Accessed October 10, 2016, http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-BC/STAGING/texte-text/ccphb2013_1378922610124_eng.pdf.
- 5 The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 1998.
- 6 The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 1998.
- 7 Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2013.
- 8 The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 1998.
- 9 The Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 1998.