



# The Center for Governmental Studies

at Northern Illinois University

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR ARRIVING AT A REGIONAL VISION USING GROUP CONSENSUS BUILDING

*This is a rough guide for moderating your focus groups. It is not meant to be used verbatim. Moderators need to follow the flow of conversation. The important thing is to elicit all the information we need to get from the session. Don't try to force consensus...there may be some real difference (among rural and urban participants or between those who want growth and those who don't). We need to capture those differences.*

Good morning. I'm \_\_\_\_\_ and I'll be serving as your facilitator this morning. With me is \_\_\_\_\_ who will be recording your ideas on the flip chart at the front of the room. We hope you enjoyed the opening session and that it stimulated your creative juices. What we want to accomplish in the next 50 minutes or so is to come up with a vision for the economy in this region in the year 2005.

Process: Be honest; allow for differences of opinion; be considerate of each other; one person speaks at a time, don't be argumentative. When we've heard everyone's views, we'll have time to add, combine or refine ideas. The recorder will try and write down what she/he hears. Please be sure to correct the record if it doesn't accurately reflect what you've said.

Each of 4-5 groups is meeting and will be doing the same thing. While you're having lunch we will join the other facilitators and try to combine ideas into one grand vision.

In order to accomplish our goal, I'll need everyone's participation. To start things off I'd like to go around the room and have everyone introduce themselves, giving your name, where you are from, and what business, organization or agency you represent..

Thanks, let's get right down to business. I'm going to start with this table on my right and ask you to give one example, a word or phrase that describes in economic terms, what you like about this region and what you would want to see continue in the future.

*Moderators: Go around the room and ask each individual for one idea. If they are still going strong after one round, continue on, otherwise simply ask if there is anything missing and call on people with additions. Example: industrial mix, well maintained roads; strong community college programs.)*

Do we have some major categories developing here? Are there ideas that can be combined? Is there anything on this list that anyone has a problem with?

Good. That gives us a flavor of what good things currently exist in this region. Now let's try to build on some of the things we heard in our earlier session and make a list of things we would like to add to or change in the economy of 2005 in this region.

*Moderators use same process as above. Examples: high tech business parks, more highly skilled work force, focus on global business opportunities.*

As I look at these lists, I don't see anything about \_\_\_\_\_ (infrastructure, community betterment, etc.) Do we want to include anything related to that in our vision statement?

Are there ideas we can combine? Anything anyone really disagrees with?

*At this point the moderator should be able to sum up and see if people basically agree with what's been said. Bring your list of phrases with you! Together the five moderators will develop a vision statement over lunch and present it to the group for concurrence before the strategic issues sessions.*



## Hand-out: Components of an Effective Vision Statement

*"If you don't know where you are going, you will probably end up somewhere else  
Laurence Peters*

The purpose of a vision statement is to develop an agreed upon image of the region's future. A vision should incorporate a view of the future which is better in important ways than what currently exists. It should cause participants to stretch but it should be realistic and attainable. In terms of economic development, it should contain elements which describe the region's desired: - quality of life - work force - industry mix - infrastructure

A vision statement should be no more than 1-2 pages long and should inspire actions which can lead to the fulfillment of the vision. The statement becomes the grand design against which proposed actions can be measured. --Is what we are doing or planning to do going to lead us to realize the vision we've set for ourselves?" The vision statement sets the direction for all that follows.

The following is a sample vision statement taken from *Strategic Planning for Economic Development* by David R. Kolzow.

It is the year 2005. The Midcity area has gained recognition nationally as a livable community that combines a central location in the Midwest with an attractive and inexpensive quality of life. The cooperation and coordination of local government and development organizations is a model that is envied by other communities in the region. Leadership throughout the community works together to continually improve the local working and living environment.

The Midcity community continues to attract a diversity of businesses and industries resulting in a low unemployment rate. The skilled and educated workforce is able to find a wide range of quality job opportunities. Attractive industrial sites are continually developed in anticipation of new occupants, particularly along U.S. Highway 51 south of the city. The downtown is economically sound and attractive, and is a growing center of retail, social, and recreational activity.

The ongoing development of U.S. Highway AB as a four-lane divided highway has further expanded access to and from the community, improving Midcity's central location. Local traffic flows smoothly due to the construction of an overpass over the Norfolk Southern rail line and other road improvements. The local water supply was expanded to meet future needs of both residents and industry.

Midcity continues to be a great place to live, learn and play. Its friendly, attractive, clean, drug-free environment is appreciated by residents and visitors alike. Educational resources are excellent from kindergarten through the post secondary institutions, meeting the diverse career and workplace needs. The regional medical center in the community provides quality health care. New apartments, middle-income subdivisions, and executive-level neighborhoods provide affordable housing for all existing and prospective residents.