



Success Stories

Healthy Little Town on the Prairie: De Smet Now Knows What it Needs Thanks to Outstanding Planning and Public Participation

After completing a city-wide community needs assessment, physical activity was the greatest need identified. The City of De Smet used the results of this assessment to write a grant and develop a Community Event Center project that will be used for many functions including indoor activities in the winter, weddings, sporting events, etc. The project is expected to break ground in a few months.

Domestic violence is a topic that is not much discussed in a small town, and the committee thought the number of respondents who indicated its presence was significant considering the reluctance to be identified. We were able to work with the school district to have the Rural Outreach Coordinator at the Brookings Domestic Abuse Shelter begin a program at the school. Previous attempts to work with the school had been unsuccessful, but with our inclusion of school administration on our committee and the data to back up the request, an ongoing relationship was developed.

Committee members included representation from the City of De Smet, Development Coordinator, Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, Hospital, Hospital Board, School District, and ICAP. The action plan will impact all citizens. The project has created an ongoing working relationship between the organizations involved on the Committee that has led to collaboration on other projects. Citizens will see the follow through and have increased confidence in their ability to create change and be more likely to participate in the future. They will also have increased trust in the involved organizations.

Challenges

Public participation in the assessment was the greatest challenge. The committee spent the most time discussing how to communicate the importance and impact of the project to the public in a way that would compel them to participate. An equally important challenge was ease of use. The survey needed to be convenient and accessible.

Solution

Committee members included individuals from influential organizations who were able to communicate to their partners about the project. We spent time educating members of the public who participated in our focus groups. A letter to the editor was written that explained the importance of participation along with the timeline. Both paper and online surveys were available. Paper surveys were available in all café/restaurants and several other businesses locally. The greatest response came when paper surveys, along with a cover letter, were sent home with all school children in the county.



Results

Participation was high, especially considering the length of the survey – six pages. We distributed approximately 500 surveys and had 200 returned. Our focus groups were a great source of detailed information. We developed a few questions that included write-in responses on the paper survey that we also used in our focus groups. Focus group participants provided even more detail, and we were able to incorporate some of the feedback in the action plan. We would expect even greater participation had we shortened the length of the survey. Our rationale for the length was that we wanted an overall picture of the community's health rather than focusing our questions on known or suspected problems. Our future surveys will focus on areas identified in this survey.

Future Direction

The Committee's goals in the short term are to continue the action plan. Long term, we will work toward improving the health of our community and residents.

- Public education on water quality testing procedures and action steps for residents for discolored water
- Completion of the Community Event Center
- Increase cancer screenings and access to specialists through the hospital
- Continue outreach program between School District and Brookings Domestic Abuse Shelter