

LOUISIANA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NEWSLETTER



Building Community Leadership

We talk a lot about communities and how they become successful. We know that success doesn't just happen, it takes work driven by great leadership. Although we may not consciously think about leadership on a daily basis, we are generally quick to spot its absence. Sometimes it is because we hear or read about situations of poor leadership. Sometimes it is because we encounter situations where we know that things would be better if effective leaders were present and involved. Leadership is important because community objectives cannot be accomplished by one individual. Leadership can be defined as:

A process through which people are influenced to accomplish common goals.

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There are three key words in this leadership definition – **people, influence** and **goals**. **People** are important because they provide the resources and talent necessary to achieve the goals. Generally these people are on the same committee or are working toward the same objective. **Influence** is the ability of one person to cause a change in the behavior of another person. **Goals** represent the expected result of strong leadership and are the objectives that the group wants to accomplish.

This definition may apply to many different leadership situations, but with a little tweaking, the definition becomes more specific to community leadership.

Leadership is a process through which community members are influenced to accomplish shared goals.

Strong leadership can be commonly identified through key characteristics, including:

- Resiliency
- Energy
- Confidence
- Decisiveness
- Integrity
- Tenacity
- Strong communications skills
- Expertise

Many traits are generally formed early on in life, and behaviors are learned later, but individuals can always work to develop and strengthen desirable leadership traits. Leaders can improve their effectiveness through training and experience. The training can be formal (e.g., classroom training) or informal (e.g., self-study or mentoring). Although some individuals seem to be natural-born leaders, most of us develop leadership skills the old-fashioned way – through hard-work and the help of others.

Community leadership development involves both individuals and the community as a whole. Some individuals seem more naturally inclined toward leadership roles. Other individuals have leadership potential, but may not be as apparent. Communities need both. The key question you will need to ask is, “What can the community do to identify, develop and utilize all of its current and potential leaders?” How does your community rate at leadership development?

This can be found by assessing the community's leadership development R.A.T.E.:

- **Recruiting** potential leaders to the community.
- **Assessing** leaders to determine how to best utilize their skills for both individual and community success.
- **Teaching** leaders how to become more effective.
- **Engaging** leaders in assignments.

You can learn how to R.A.T.E your community's leadership development by visiting the [Community Development Toolkit](#) on LED's website.



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