

Trail Community Program 12 Step Process

Adapted from the Nantahala Hiking Club's Appalachian Trail Community Program
experience in Franklin, NC.

Goal: Mutual benefit to the Trail, trail users and the local community

1. Organize the planning group (nucleus of the executive committee) for success
 - Who will take the lead, set the agenda, be chairman, be secretary and define governance
 - Grow capability to support a new program in each interested organization
 - Always be thinking about who should be a partner or stakeholder
 - Develop a budget to support the effort
2. Coordinate with Trail organization and local volunteers
 - New program developments
 - Application deadline and approval process
 - Lessons learned from pilot programs, designated communities, and other models
 - Recommendations for Advisory Committee membership
 - Example applications
3. Talk to local land owners and managers about the program and get their support
 - Partnership (Trail Organization, Local Trail volunteer organization and land owner(s))
 - Land managers capacity to support
 - Impact on private and public lands
4. Collect local recreational use data to highlight impact (positive and negative)
 - Day hikers
 - Section hikers
 - Thru hikers
 - Campers
 - Other user groups (bikers, trail runners, birders, etc.)
5. Talk about economics benefits and ecotourism
 - Benefit local businesses
 - Create jobs
 - Increase local tax collections
 - Decrease local government expenditures
 - Lower health care costs
 - Promote local community
 - Take advantage of a free local resource

6. Go in with the position that the town can meet all application requirements
 - Establish a committee to guide the program (officers, bylaws and appoint at the highest level of authority)
 - Involve the local school system through place based education and service learning
 - Conduct an annual event or establish an “appreciation” period annually
 - Organize for trail protection (land use, law enforcement, way finding, etc.)
7. Talk to trail friendly businesses
 - Explain the program and get their support
 - Use them as leverage on other organizations
 - What ideas do they have for mutual benefits
 - What support are they willing to provide
 - How does the program benefit them
8. Seek out supportive “ local” town official(s)
 - Find /establish a champion
 - Identify potential supporters and stakeholders
 - Identify potential critics and their issues
 - Strategize program presentation to town leadership
 - Discuss Trail Community Committee membership
 - Discuss support for Trail protection (Town planner)
9. Seek out a supportive County Commissioner(s)
 - Find /establish a champion
 - Identify potential supporters and stakeholders
 - Identify potential critics and their issues
 - Strategize program presentation to county leadership
 - Discuss Trail Community Committee membership
 - Discuss support for Trail protection (County planner)
10. Once town agrees to submit an application
 - Develop a strategy for preparing a “strong” application
 - Develop a time line for submission
 - Identify influential people and supportive organizations
 - Identify who to approach for application letters of support
11. Begin a support campaign
 - Speaking engagements (government and non-government)
 - Seek application input from businessmen, school system and land use policy organizations
 - Look for volunteers to serve on the Trail Community Committee
 - Collect letters of support
 - i. Town and County committees (TDA, TDC, EDC, etc.)
 - ii. Civic organizations

- iii. Business groups
- iv. Like minded clubs and non-profits

12. Develop a press coverage strategy

- Learn who the local media contacts are
- Know what meetings they usually cover
- Send out press releases for major activities
- Provide copies of presentations and handouts
- Provide draft articles and photos

Lessons Learned:

- Get appointed at the highest level (Authority versus committee)
- Write by laws
- Think through education requirement due to turn over in partners' and stakeholders' leadership
- Committee member replacement planning
- Add to employees' job descriptions
- Press coverage of meetings
- Letter head/business card "makes it official"
- Volunteer recognition program
- Appointment letters with term specified for committee members
- Coordination/synergy with other organizations (Chamber, TDA, TDC, EDC, MSP, etc.)
- Elected officials on the Trail Community Committee

Food for thought:

- What is your culture/what makes sense and will work best for you
- Trail Community Committee membership
 - County Commissioner
 - County Planner
 - Town Alderman
 - Town Planner
 - Trail Volunteer organization
 - Main Street Program
 - School System
 - Library
 - Tourism related businesses
 - Land managers
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - Recreation department
 - Tourism Development Authority (Bedroom Tax)

- Capture Trail user information (survey)
- Trail head improvements
 - Way finding signage
 - Recognition (Kiosk, etc.)
 - Parking
 - Security
 - Signage
 - Pedestrian Crossing signs
- Trail Community Supporter Program
- School Outreach Program
- Trail celebration event
 - One big event
 - Appreciation period with several smaller events
- Local Trail volunteers capacity to support the program

Franklin, NC and the Appalachian Trail (AT)

- What makes the AT special?
 - Respite from everyday life
 - Solitude
 - Natural beauty
 - Cultural history
 - Achievable
- Thru hiker impact on Franklin, NC
 - Potential 2000 actual 1000
 - 1 night in town and \$160.00
 - March 15- April 15
 - August 15- Nov 15
 - Establish “your” season and direction (“walking with spring” March to June)
- Section hikers impact on Franklin (mechanical counters)
 - April –May
 - June –Aug
- Day hiker impact on Franklin
- Hiker services
 - Overnight accommodations
 - Resupply
 - Laundry
 - Internet
 - Mail
 - Rental car
 - Medical

- Shuttle service