

How to Build Your Own Village

HUDDLE:

Form a core group of a dozen or so neighbors with diverse skills and backgrounds. Talk around the kitchen table. Join the Village to Village Network (www.vtvnetwork.org) and study everything there. Buy Beacon Hill's book: "The Village Concept: A Founders' Manual" (www.beaconhillvillage.org).

COUNT YOUR CHICKENS:

Research your community, the number of residents over age 50, their average income, etc. Use census information to determine if there are enough people to support the venture. Use Google Maps Pro to aid with demographics and a determination of your catchment area.

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS:

Do a survey to find out what services people want and what they are willing to pay for. Do some focus groups. Collect emails at every opportunity. Send updates via email. Consider Constant Contact or similar.

GET NON--PROFIT STATUS:

Lots of information and examples on Village to Village website. Don't wait; this takes time.

FORM A BOARD AND COMMITTEES:

Board could be ten to twenty. Committees will do the bulk of the work of the Village. Consider: Marketing and Membership, Services, Development, Executive, and Search. Get a lawyer on BOARD if possible.

LAUNCH YOUR WEB SITE:

Village to Village Network has partnered with "Club Express" for secure web site hosting and has developed software specifically designed to manage a village. Managing member needs, a volunteer and vendor database as well as an interactive calendar for health, wellness and social programs along with document storage are handled by the website allowing the village to be managed from multiple locations.

DO THE MATH

Draw up a business plan estimating membership income and service costs. The average Village has 100 members, but you may not see that in the first year. Consider a Member Plus Program for needy neighbors.

LINE UP PLAYERS

Contact key local businesses and health providers from hospitals, home health care agencies and repair services. Start to recruit volunteers.

PASS THE HAT

Raise seed money: One third of your initial budget will come from contributions from neighborhood residents starting with the Board. Look at granting agencies. Consider selling early, tax deductible "Founding Social Memberships." Form partnerships.

GET A CHIEF

Hire a director who will be the face and voice of your enterprise as you continue to recruit members and service providers. Villages that sustain themselves have a paid Executive Director and about forty volunteers.

Written by Ed Elberfeld of Village Connections (www.villageconnectionsolumbus.org) from Beacon Hill Village original.