

## Action Alert: A Multiplier Effect of a Positive Nature

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### Introduction

In 1984, the non-profit organization Chattanooga Venture [Chattanooga, Tennessee (USA)] organized a Community Visioning Initiative that attracted more than 1,700 participants, and produced 40 community goals—which resulted in the implementation of 223 projects and programs, the creation of 1,300 permanent jobs, and a total financial investment of 793 million dollars.<sup>1</sup>

We now live in very complex and challenging times. This writer has created a “Ten Point List of the Most Difficult Challenges of Our Times” (see [www.ipcri.net](http://www.ipcri.net)) which suggests a need for problem solving on a scale most of us have never known before. Challenge #10 reads as follows: “Sorting out what are real challenges and what are sound and practical solutions is becoming more and more difficult, as there is now, in many parts of the world, a multitude of ideas of all kinds coming to the fore in personal, family, community, and cultural life—all at the same time.”

Community Visioning Initiatives can contribute much to this “sorting out” process, and help build the kind of consensus which attracts investment from significant sources. This writer believes communities of people can experience a “multiplier” effect of a positive nature from implementing a well-organized Community Visioning Initiative. He has, therefore, created a proposal titled “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” to help bring this community building tool more to the forefront of public discourse.

### What are Community Visioning Initiatives?

Many of us will be familiar with the problem solving strategy of identifying problems and brainstorming solutions. Well organized efforts to identify problems and brainstorm solutions are a universally recognized approach to problem solving which is commonly used in family, community, business, and government settings in every part of the world. In its most basic format, a Community Visioning Initiative (CVI) is simply a more comprehensive variation of the above mentioned approach to problem solving. The more comprehensive CVIs require steering committees, preliminary surveys or assessments, workshops, task forces, collaboration between many organizations, government agencies, businesses, and educational institutions—and seek to build up consensus in the community for specific goals and action plans by encouraging a high level of participation by all residents.

## The “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” proposal

The “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” proposal advocates organizing and implementing Community Visioning Initiatives in 1000 communities (communities or segments of rural areas, towns, or cities with populations of 50,000 or less) around the world

1. which are time-intensive, lasting even as much as 1½ years (18 months), so as to give as much importance to developing a close-knit community as it does to
  - a) contributing to accumulating and integrating the knowledge and skill sets necessary for the highest percentage of people to act wisely in response to challenges identified as priority challenges
  - b) helping people to deliberately channel their time, energy, and money into the creation of “ways of earning a living” which are directly related to resolving high priority challenges
  - c) assisting with outreach, partnership formation, and development of service capacity for a significant number of already existing (or forming) organizations, businesses, institutions, and government agencies
  - d) helping to build a high level of consensus for specific action plans, which will help inspire additional support from people, businesses, organizations, institutions, and government agencies with significant resources
  
2. which establish a significant number of local community points of entry called “Community Teaching and Learning Centers” [if use of that particular description “Community Teaching and Learning Centers” is permitted by the organization “Teachers Without Borders” (see <http://www.teacherswithoutborders.org/html/ctlc.html>)] to act as information clearinghouses, meeting locations, classrooms for ongoing workshops (on a broad range of topics related to the Community Visioning Process, and building the local knowledge base), practice sites for developing “teacher-leaders”, a location for an ongoing “informal” “Community Journal”, a location for listing employment opportunities—and to provide a means of responding quickly (by changing the emphasis of workshop content) to new urgencies as they arise
  
3. and which suggest—as a way of emphasizing the need for an exponential increase in compassion for our fellow human beings—that communities (with the resources to do so) enter into “sister community” relationships with communities in other countries where there has been well documented calls for assistance with basic human needs.

## Many Difficult Challenges Ahead

More and more people, in more and more parts of the world, are coming to the conclusion that on top of the challenges of

- a) global warming and reducing carbon emissions
- b) peak oil and reducing dependence on petroleum based products
- c) global inequities and the tragic cycles of malnutrition, disease, and death
- d) an increasing world population requiring more resources when many resources are becoming more scarce (*with a special emphasis* on the increasing number of people who are consuming resources and ecological services *indiscriminately*)

there still seems to be a majority of people on the planet who do not have a clear understanding—well-grounded in personal experience—of which basic elements of community life and cultural traditions lead to mutually beneficial understandings, which lead to cycles of violence—and why it is so important for people to achieve clarity on this subject.

### If even a few...

*If even a few* of these kind of Community Visioning Initiatives generated results similar to those achieved by the Chattanooga, Tennessee (USA) Visioning Initiative carried out in 1984 (“Vision 2000”), people in all parts of the world—keenly attuned when it comes to resolving challenges which require urgent solutions at all levels of society— *could be* inspired to carry out similar Community Visioning Initiatives. And if many communities carried out similar initiatives, and also achieved significant results, our collective capacity to resolve the challenges of our times *would surely* begin to accumulate at an accelerating rate.

### Many hands make much work light

There are many important initiatives which are critical to overcoming the challenges of our times, but which are not quite “coming through the mist as much as they should be.” Community Visioning Initiatives can be very helpful in exactly these kinds of circumstances, as this community building tool encourages and facilitates the creation of a “constellation” of initiatives by which the best (*in view of the participants in the community visioning initiatives*) solutions to the most difficult (*in the view of the participants in the community visioning initiatives*) challenges can bubble up to the surface, be recognized as priorities, and therefore be brought forward as appropriate recipients of people’s time, energy, and money. Many people can realize the wisdom of deliberately focusing the way they spend their time, energy, and money. The result can be a deliberate increase in the “ways of earning a living” which are directly related to overcoming the challenges identified by residents as priority challenges. As the ancient Chinese proverb says: “Many hands make much work light.”

### Concluding Comments

The above mentioned proposal—“1000Communities<sup>2</sup>”—is accessible in pdf format for free at the website of The Interfaith Peacebuilding and Community Revitalization (IPCR) Initiative, at [www.ipcri.net](http://www.ipcri.net). (This writer is the founder and outreach coordinator for The IPCR Initiative.)

This writer has also created a Group Site for the “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” proposal through the WiserEarth networking website (see <http://www.wiserearth.org/group/1000C2>). To facilitate discussion-- and as a way of focusing member contributions towards specific and constructive results-- 26 excerpts from the original 161 page proposal have been made into Wikipages for this group. (See “List of ‘Titles’ for the 26 Excerpts” in the “Introduction” to that Group Site). Members of this group are encouraged to make posts in the “Discussion” section of this group site—or in the corresponding Wikipage area-- which are related in some way to one or more of the 26 excerpts, or to some specific element of the "1000Communities<sup>2</sup>" proposal. Hopefully, back and forth discussion on various elements of this “1000Communities<sup>2</sup>” proposal will supplement, add to, and refine the relevant and practical “how-to” and “why” information already in the proposal. Such discussions may encourage and inspire people in different parts of the world to create similar community-specific proposals, and result in active participation by many people in a Community Visioning Initiative associated with their specific community.

With Kind Regards,

Stefan Pasti  
The IPCR Initiative

#### Notes and Source References

1. The statistics included here are from “Revision 2000: Take Charge Again”, a brochure this writer received from Chattanooga Venture. These statistics are also accessible in a detailed overview of Chattanooga community revitalization efforts titled “Chattanooga: The Sustainable City”, at the website for the James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership at <http://www.academy.umd.edu/Resources/AcademyPublicationsPDF/BoundaryCrossers-CaseStudies/Ch3-Chattanooga/Chattanooga.pdf> (see Chpt. 3, p. 7) (Confirmed June 15, 2008)