

**Nebraska Department of Economic Development
Consolidated Plan Public Input Meetings
May 2004**

Prepared by Panhandle Area Development District under Contract # 04-03-137

Introduction:

The goal of the Consolidated Plan Public Input Project is to assist the Nebraska Department of Economic Development in obtaining public input for the annual consolidated plan created by the department to assist in the department's development efforts. Public input was obtained in the areas of housing, homelessness, community development, economic development, small business & job creation, and planning. Recommendations resulting from this input are made at the conclusion of the report.

Process:

A Public Service Announcement was sent to the 22 media outlets in the Panhandle Region. A Copy of the announcement and the media outlets contacted are attached to this review, along with two examples of stories published in print media detailing the meetings.

A survey incorporating the requirements of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development regarding requested input was developed and mailed to 113 individuals in the Panhandle Region. Those receiving surveys included county board chairmen and clerks, community board chairmen and clerks, housing providers, economic development entities, and other interested parties.

Town Hall Meetings were held in five communities across the region and with the Panhandle Networks Group. In addition, the Panhandle Area Development District Board of Directors discussed the NDED Consolidated Plan. The Town Hall Meetings were held in Chadron, Alliance, Bridgeport, Gering, and Sidney. The Facilitation Guide prepared by NDED was used to conduct these Town Hall Meetings.

Recent community surveys conducted by PADD were reviewed for pertinent comments concerning the areas of housing, homelessness, economic development, community development, and planning.

The results of the survey, Town Hall Meetings, and community surveys were compiled to provide this report. Copies of the comments from the town hall meetings are included in the attachments section of this report along with the sign-up sheets for each meeting. Additional comments from the survey questionnaire are also included in the appendix.

Questionnaire Results:

Of the 113 questionnaires that were sent to local government, housing, community and economic development practitioners, 26 were completed and returned. This is a return rate of 23%. A copy of the questionnaire is included in the attachments. An overview of the comments made in the questionnaires is also included in the attachments section of this report.

A recap of the ‘yes, no, don’t know’ questions on the survey shows:

Affordable Housing:

1. Are you and your clients better off now than they were last year relative to this goal?

Yes:	6	23%
No:	14	54%
Don’t Know:	6	23%
Total No and Don’t Know:	20	77%
2. Are you aware of any cooperative efforts that have, or are taking place, among governmental entities, housing providers and/or lenders in your area to provide affordable housing?

Yes:	17	68%
No:	8	32%
Don’t Know:	-0-	-0-
Total No and Don’t Know:	8	32%

Homeless Assistance:

1. Are you and your clients better off now than they were last year relative to this goal?

Yes:	0	-0-
No:	12	50%
Don’t Know:	12	50%
Total No and Don’t Know:	24	100%
2. Has homelessness been reduced?:

Yes:	0	-0-
No:	11	48%
Don’t Know:	12	52%
Total No and Don’t Know:	23	100%
3. Are you familiar with the continuum of care process to assist the homeless?:

Yes:	10	48%
No:	11	52%
4. Has the focus on the continuum of care improved assistance to the homeless?

Yes:	2	13%
No:	7	47%
Don’t Know:	6	40%
Total No and Don’t Know:	13	87%

Economic Development:

1. Have DED programs supported economic development projects in your community during the last 12 months?:

Yes:	11	44%
No:	9	35%
Don't Know:	5	20%
Total No and Don't Know:	14	55%
2. Are you working to identify projects that could be assisted through use of DED programs?:

Yes:	17	74%
No:	5	22%
Don't Know:	1	4%
Total No and Don't Know:	6	26%

Community Development:

1. Have DED programs supported infrastructure development projects in your community during the last 12 months?:

Yes:	3	12%
No:	14	56%
Don't Know:	8	32%
Total No and Don't Know:	22	88%
2. Are you working to identify projects that could be assisted through the use of DED programs?:

Yes:	11	50%
No:	9	41%
Don't Know:	2	9%
Total No and Don't Know:	11	50%

Business Development:

1. Have DED programs supported small business development and/or job training assistance programs for businesses in your community during the last 12 months?:

Yes:	6	25%
No:	11	46%
Don't Know:	7	29%
Total No and Don't Know:	18	75%
2. Are you working to identify projects that could be assisted through the use of DED programs?:

Yes:	10	48%
No:	9	43%
Don't Know:	2	9%

Total No and Don't Know: 11 52%

Planning Assistance:

1. Have DED programs supported your community's efforts to identify and plan for your future during the past 12 months?:
 - Yes: 3 12%
 - No: 16 67%
 - Don't Know: 5 21%
 - Total No and Don't Know: 21 88%
2. Are you working to identify planning projects that could be assisted through the use of DED programs?:
 - Yes: 8 38%
 - No: 12 57%
 - Don't Know: 1 5%
 - Total No and Don't Know: 13 62%

As can be seen from the survey results, there is a preponderance of 'No' and 'Don't Know' results from those responding. There are, however, a significant number of respondents who want to use DED programs. The challenge will be to allocate DED resources to assist those who need them.

The reader will note in the comments section located in the attachments that most respondents feel that they have a good working relationship with DED BUT they also feel that there needs to be additional communication between DED and the region. In addition, the regulatory paperwork is felt to be burdensome by many respondents.

Overall, the survey results were similar to the results obtained in the Town Hall Meetings described below.

Public Meeting Input:

The Town Hall Meetings were conducted using the Nebraska Department of Economic Development's facilitation guide. Copies of the agenda for the meetings along with the comments from each meeting are included in the appendix. There were a total of 30 individuals who attended the meetings, an average of 6 per meeting attended when duplications are eliminated. The sign up sheet for the Alliance and Panhandle Networks meetings are on a single form as the Alliance meeting was the evening before the Networks meeting. There is no sign up sheet for the Sidney meeting as no one attended the meeting other than the facilitator. This was due to short notice of the meeting and conflicting community meetings on the same night.

Summary of Issues and Needs:

Housing:

There is a definite need for the CDBG housing programs.

Not enough articulation/communication between partners
Need for leadership
Need to recognize that there are higher costs of development in rural areas
Most communities (especially smaller communities) do not have staff capability to operate housing programs

Homeless Issues:

Insufficient awareness of programs
Some don't think that it is an issue
Point in Time Survey is a poor indicator of the problem

Community Development:

Appearance of disjointed strategy from DED
Too much paperwork/applications too complicated
Too hard to qualify (LMI vs. Blight)

Economic Development:

No programs for Retail businesses
Not enough job training funding
Need more educational programs/training/entrepreneurship

Planning:

Best when done by local organizations (PADD)
Need to combine communities with regions
Need more capacity building

Relationship with DED:

Generally Good
Need better representation in Panhandle but budget problems probably preclude it
Need better communications from top down as well as bottom up
Need better communications with regional representatives

Potential Future Projects:

- 1) Housing Projects; including rehab, new construction of both owner occupied and rental
Where: All respondents/areas of the Panhandle
- 2) Homeless Projects:
Where: Continuum of Care group, others realize need but not aware of available help
- 3) Economic Development Projects:

- Where: Alliance, Gering, Sidney, smaller communities if retail were included in program(s)
- 4) Community Development Projects:
Where: Alliance – Sewer & Water
Sidney -Parks, Storm Sewer
Various smaller communities if they can qualify
- 5) Planning Projects
Where: Various communities

Participants Recommendations:

Recommendations are in no particular order of importance:

- 1) More Flexibility in Programs
- 2) Less paperwork; a 'low doc; CDBG Application for smaller projects
- 3) More Communication from DED representatives
- 4) More responsiveness to local needs, one size does not fit all
- 5) Annual regional allocations for housing and ED funding & put state reuse funds in regional RLFs
- 6) DED needs to be more open to unique ideas for projects
- 7) More DED representation in Panhandle
- 8) Coordinate with regional entities (such as PADD)
- 9) Combine programs to provide greater funding opportunities
- 10) Utilize Development District to assist DED in delivery of services
- 11) Greater Flexibility in TIF financing
- 12) Add Retail to CDBG ED programs
- 13) More local input into program design
- 14) Coordinate regional with community planning

PADD Recommendations:

PADD's recommendations are derived from the experience of PADD's staff, the input from the Town Hall Meetings, and a review of the community and development planning work performed by PADD for regional communities

Housing:

There should be more flexibility in the use of housing funds. This could be accomplished in part by separating NAHTF funding from CDBG and Home funding. Increased flexibility would allow regions to allocate funds to areas where they are needed in the region rather than where a 'program' wants them to be used. This would also allow flexibility of use within housing programs. For example, funds may be utilized for a purchase, rehab, resale program and an owner occupied rehab program at the same time rather than for one or the other programs.

General Administration of all DED Programs:

An 'exit interview' should be conducted at the conclusion of each project. This would give the recipient, DED and the administrator the opportunity to discuss the project and how to improve delivery of services on the next project. While this may create more paperwork initially, it would pay off in the long run through more efficient use of resources both on the DED and the provider side.

Planning:

Overall needs assessment planning should be 'grounded' in a continual process whereby all communities have planning performed on a three year cycle with one third of the region's communities having an updated needs assessment plan done every three years. The individual community plans would be incorporated into an overall regional plan that would be an ongoing document, being continually updated along with the individual community plans. Regional plans could then be used by DED for program design and implementation

This process would both make individual communities more aware of the planning process and the necessity for it as well make communities more aware of how they all 'fit' into the region.

The Exit Interview and Needs Assessment Process should satisfy DED's public input requirements.

Community Development Programs:

Can the Community Revitalization Program be reinstated?

Priority Identification:

PADD would like to see regional input on priority setting for utilization of funds targeted to this region. This would also help to improve the flexibility of the programs. As an example, we were not asked to provide input on current housing priorities for the Western Region.

Regional Boundaries:

PADD would prefer regional boundaries to be identical to Development District Boundaries. DED field staff would still cover their respective areas.

Pilot Project (Creativity) Set Aside:

Set aside a dollar amount to allow for locally derived projects that cross traditional boundaries – ED, Community Development, Housing, and Planning. This might stimulate new ideas/thinking and subsequent program changes/improvements.

Applications:

Make applications more objective and standardized rather than have subjective essays that take longer to prepare and longer for DED to review and assess.

Attachments:

- 1) Copy of Public Service Announcement sent to area media outlets
- 2) List of area media outlets receiving PSA
- 3) Copies of articles from Scottsbluff Star Herald (region's largest circulation newspaper) and Alliance Times-Herald regarding the public meetings.
- 4) Copy of cover letter and meeting announcement sent to local governments, housing, community & economic development service providers with survey questionnaire
- 5) Copy of survey questionnaire
- 6) Overview of comments from the survey questionnaire
- 7) Copy of agenda for town hall meetings
- 8) Copies of sign-up sheets from town hall meetings and public comments from each meeting