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Region reaches high

It will take a regional vision to make these goals reality

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After two years, more than two dozen community meetings involving the work of more than 1,000 volunteers, and a survey of nearly 5,000 people, the last thing the organizers of the Agenda 360 communitywide plan want is for their 12,000-word report, which was made public Friday, to be noted with a pat on the back, a "nice work" compliment, and then shelved.

• <http://cincinnati360.com/>">Read the Agenda 360 report

How they plan to move this far-reaching regional agenda forward and achieve some of the goals they've set will be the key to whether the report is translated into action, results and progress - which is its intent - or whether it's forgotten.

The plan is broad and its ideas big, as it lays out a half-dozen chief priorities for the entire metropolitan statistical area, followed by 18 recommendations for realizing those goals.

One key to getting the job done will be the organizers' decision from the outset to tap into the work of existing organizations and attempt to align their work with the overarching goals of Agenda 360.

"We didn't want to re-invent the wheel when we already had good things happening," said Myrita Craig, who will lead the next steps as executive director of the Office of Agenda 360.

Agenda 360 leaders have signed agreements with several civic organizations, including the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, the University of Cincinnati, OKI Council of Regional Governments and the United Way of Greater Cincinnati, which have agreed to be formal partners in working toward the goals.

"We didn't want to create a new bureaucracy and another layer of complexity," said Agenda 360 co-chair Kevin Ghassomian.

In transportation, for example, OKI has already established a Regional Freight Working Group to consider ways to improve the flow of goods through the area's roads and rail lines. That work will be used by Agenda 360 leaders, as they define transportation needs for the next decade.

"Too many community efforts have said in the past that we have to start over," said Louise Hughes, a government relations director at Procter & Gamble who will be involved in the next steps. This one, she says, focuses on "how we can get our arms around solid ideas and really leverage those."

The agenda will need some leverage to achieve its goals. The group has set several measurements by which it will gauge its success, and they could accurately be called "stretch" goals.

One measuring stick will be adding 200,000 net new jobs in the region by 2020. That would require a 50 percent increase in the region's historical job growth rate.

Another is adding an additional 150,000 young professional, 20-34 year olds, to the area's work force, increasing by 50 percent the number of workers in that age range.

The third measurement is seeing that every household in the region has an income that is at least 250 percent of the federal poverty level, a goal that, if met, would essentially eliminate poverty.

"You need to set big goals," said Jeff Edmondson, executive director of education advocacy group Strive, one of the groups that will be involved in Agenda 360's next phase. Noting progress in phases will also keep the community focused on the long-term goals. "Benchmarks and objectives along the way are important," he said.

The group will use the United Way's State of the Community report as one way to gauge its progress.

Constantly communicating the goals with the stakeholders of the plan and with the public will be critical to moving ahead, said Robert Reifsnnyder, president of the United Way of Greater Cincinnati. "As long as we keep the big picture in front of us and ask the questions - what are we trying to achieve as a community - we'll make progress," he said.

Involving the public will be key to keeping Agenda 360 energized, organizers say.

An effort called My Cincinnati will be created as a way for the public to interact with the plan as it moves into the action phase. A Web site will be created where residents can share what they like about the region. "We're asking every resident to step up and tell us what this place means to them," van der Horst said. That will be built into a "master narrative" used to help share Cincinnati's story with others.

A series of public dialogues will be launched later this year, in which the public will be invited to explore topics that support the vision, such as how communities and families can become "greener."

The Agenda 360 leadership modeled their work after a communitywide plan in Northern Kentucky called Vision 2015 that was completed in 2005. The Northern Kentucky group has a three-year head start on implementing an ambitious community plan that relies on the work of many volunteers and community groups.

"You need a strong organization in place to guide it and support it," said Mike Hammons, the former chair of Vision 2015 who is now a senior adviser to the effort. Hammons likened the work to being chair of an annual church festival. "You've got to do whatever it takes to get the job done," he said.

The Vision 2015 staff tracks the progress, follows up with additional research, applies for grants, lobbies state and federal government and prepares regular reports to the community and to the group's board, the Regional Stewardship Council.

Vision 2015's staff has grown to four full-time people, two part-timers and a budget of about \$1 million a year to pay for salaries and programming, said A.J. Schaeffer, chairman.

Agenda 360's implementation will be led by Myrita Craig, a vice president at the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber who will take on the role of executive director of the newly formed Office of Agenda 360. That office will be housed at the chamber's downtown offices and will be supported by chamber administrative staff.

Craig said she hasn't proposed a budget yet for the new office, but said she wants to keep it minimized by using chamber resources and staff when possible. She does anticipate needing funding for community outreach, for lobbying state and federal governments for funding and for communications.

A "Council 360" will be formed, essentially a board of directors of 50 to 60 people representing the

stakeholder groups, who will oversee progress toward meeting the goals.

Co-chairs will be named for each of the six priority areas the plan identified. That team will be a sort of "kitchen cabinet" to the Office of Agenda 360, advising the leadership.

Two of the original co-chairs, Ellen van der Horst, chamber president, and Ghassomian, an attorney with Greenebaum Doll and McDonald, will stay involved. The third, Myrtis Powell, a vice president emeritus at Miami University, will no longer serve as co-chair, but will continue in a smaller role. Mary Stagaman, a University of Cincinnati associate vice president, will serve as a co-chair.

Several early efforts and successes of Agenda 360 offer a glimpse of the type of projects the group will explore and expand on:

A Leadership 360 program has been formed, modeled after the Leadership Cincinnati program that has connecting and training future leaders in Cincinnati for more than 20 years. Leadership 360 will emphasize regional collaboration.

The Greater Cincinnati Workforce Network is a partnership of work force development programs to improve worker training in three key industries and improve job opportunities for disadvantaged workers.

The University of Cincinnati has formed a partnership with Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center to create a program for diabetes and obesity treatment.

What each of those efforts has in common is the identification of existing programs that can be built on, connected with similar programs and expanded and aligned to achieve higher results than they could alone.

"We're trying to build on the best that already exists," Edmondson said. Regular reports on progress will be made to the Council 360 board and to the community.

Additional Facts

TOP GOALS

Six imperatives identified for transforming our community:

QUALITY PLACE

We must create strong, attractive and functional places in which to live, work, journey and play.

BUSINESS GROWTH

We must use our strengths as a region to retain, attract and create businesses and jobs.

QUALIFIED WORK FORCE

We must provide our young people and our workers with the skills necessary to get good jobs now and in the future.

TRANSPORTATION

We must expand our options for moving people and freight across the region.

INCLUSION

We must work to create a welcoming community in which all people are embraced and their

differences are the foundation for the community's successes.

GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION

We must help the region's many cities, counties and townships work together toward our common goals.
