Fourth Plain Corridor
Boulevard Renewal
A Great Place to Live, Shop, and Grow

Americans Building Community INC

Transforming neighborhoods,
one heart at a time

FVF
FRUIT VALLEY FOUNDATION

Memorandum of Understanding
Asset Based Community Development
A Framework for Holistic Community Engagement

I. Introduction

Americans Building Community (ABC) and the **Fruit Valley Foundation** (FVF) are nonprofit organizations whose missions are dedicated to empowering people in our neighborhoods to address their interests – together. We operate at the neighborhood scale where we facilitate community to be re-created by helping people connect and help one other.

The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is to establish a partnership based on a mutual understanding and cooperation between these parties and other interested community partners in the implementation of the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) framework within Vancouver WA along the 4th Plain Boulevard.

This is a voluntary partnership that encourages adherence to ABCD principles in promoting the revitalization of associated neighborhoods and businesses by serving community interests through the mutually realized assets of those who live, work and play within our community.

II. Guiding Principles for Community Engagement

The parties to this MOU agree to use these principles in designing their engagement and mobilizing their efforts at community revitalization. These principles confront the traditional mindset of community development predicated on bringing in outside resources and expertise to address problems. Rather, this framework acknowledges that exceptional resources exist within our struggling neighborhoods, and yet most of this inherent "community capacity" remains untapped and underutilized.

As a result of the predominant community development approach—most community social and economic challenges are addressed by less than fully available community capacity. This underutilized—and often marginalized—capacity is essential to the sustainability of revitalization efforts. The traditional practice is both the challenge to and opportunity for community engagement. These principles of practice are predicated on the belief that everyone in a community has something to offer—that there is no one that we don't need.

1.) EVERYONE HAS GIFTS.
With rare exception people can contribute and want to contribute. Gifts must be discovered. Gift giving opportunities must be *offered.* Strong communities know they need everyone. There is unrecognized capacity and assets in every community. Find it.

2.) RELATIONSHIPS BUILD A COMMUNITY.
See them, make them, and utilize them. An intentional effort to build and nourish relationships is the core of ABCD and of all community building.

3.) CITIZENS AT THE CENTER
They engage the wider community. People in leadership in everyday life (associations, congregations, neighborhoods, and local business) must be at the center of community initiatives rather than just helping agency leaders. It is essential to *engage* the wider community as actors (citizens) not just as recipients of services (clients).

4.) LEADERS INVOLVE OTHERS AS ACTIVE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY.
Leaders from the wider community of voluntary associations, congregations, neighborhoods, local business, can *engage* others from their sector. Community building leaders always need to have a constituency of people to involve. This "following" is based on trust, influence, and relationship. Strong community leaders invite a growing circle of people to act.

5.) PEOPLE CARE ABOUT SOMETHING.
Agencies and neighborhood groups often complain about apathy. Apathy is a sign of bad listening. People in communities are motivated to act. The challenge is to discover their motivation to act.

6.) MOTIVATION TO ACT
It must be identified. People who are not paid as staff will only act when it is very important. People will act on certain themes strongly felt; concerns to address, dreams to realize, and personal talents to contribute. Every community is filled with invisible "motivation for action." Listen for it.

7.) LISTENING CONVERSATION
Through 1-on-1 conversations or in small group dialogue is how to discover motivation and invite participation. Forms, surveys and asset maps can be useful to guide intentional listening and relationship building. Mapping is not a substitute for listening and talking face to face.

8.) ASK, ASK, ASK!
Once a person's possible '*gifts to give*' and '*motivations to act*' are recognized; an opportunity to act must be offered. Asking and inviting are key community building actions. "*Join us, we need you!*" This is the song of community.

9.) POSING QUESTIONS RATHER THAN GIVING ANSWERS INVITES STRONGER PARTICIPATION.
People in communities are usually asked to follow outside expert's answers for their community problems. Agencies usually ask community members to help with the agency's answer. A more powerful way to engage people is to invite communities to address 'questions' to elicit the finding of their own answers—with agencies following to help.

10.) A CITIZEN-CENTERED "inside-out" ORGANIZATION IS THE KEY TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.
A "Citizen centered" organization means one where local people control the organization and set the organization's agenda. Community engagement initiatives rarely succeed without residents as leaders organized to do intentional relationship building. It takes an organization of citizens to organize a community. It is also very valuable to have a staff person to assist relationship building as a 'community organizer' following the citizen leaders' agenda.

11.) INSTITUTIONS HAVE REACHED THEIR LIMITS IN PROBLEM-SOLVING.

All institutions such as government, non profits, and businesses are stretched thin in their ability to solve community problems. They can not be successful without engaging the rest of the community in solutions. We need to be more skillful in wider engagement. Everyone must do their part.

12.) INSTITUTIONS AS SERVANTS.

People better than programs *engage* the wider community. Institutions of government, non profits, and business can be of invaluable help supporting the work of citizens to *engage* their fellow community members. Ask people what they need and offer help. Leaders in institutions have an essential role in community building as they lead by "stepping back" creating opportunities for citizenship, care, and real democracy.

III. Roles and Contributions of the Partners

This MOU is a living document, designed to incorporate a broad, growing mix of partners who come to understand and commit to the application of its principles. Signing on as a partner does not obligate any organization/signatory to the MOU to commit resources to its implementation. Rather it serves to identify the willingness of the party to seek to work in alignment with other partners in search of being an effective community builder.

Shifting the orientation of an organization's approach to an ABCD model can be a long term effort. A cultural transformation within an organization is often essential to embracing this mode of operation—moving from an "expert" based to a "service" based frame of operation. It assumes that assets always trump needs.

The optimal contribution of each partner organization is their declaration to commit their efforts towards building deeper and broader connections within our community; and to explore how their contributions of resources can best align with mobilizing the natural resources that exist within each and every neighborhood which they engage.

IV. Signatories

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