

How Can You Get Involved?

Community residents should expect the “lead entity”—the organization with the leadership role in implementing the community’s plan—to take the following actions to involve community members:

- Make sure community residents have a major voice in decisions about the plan by serving on governing boards
- Establish rules and procedures that encourage and assure community participation in decisions and in the work of carrying out the plan
- Making its actions public through frequent reports, press stories, and public notices
- Holding regular public meetings and seeking community input before all major decisions

If *you* want to participate, consider taking these steps:

- Contact the “lead entity” for your EZ or EC and ask how you can help
- Join the work of one of the partnership organizations
- Ask your organizations to get involved
- Attend public meetings

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Your Rights as a Community Citizen

If you live in a census tract designated as an Empowerment Zone or Enterprise Community, you have these rights:

- The right to know what is in the strategic plan
- The right to know and help assess the results
- The right to participate in implementing the plan
- The right to express your views about changes that should be made in the plan
- The right to assure that benefits from the plan come to citizens of the designated community

If You Believe Your Rights Have Been Denied

Contact: your state Rural Development office
or:

Deputy Administrator
Office of Community Development
Rural Development
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, DC 20250

Community Empowerment

Your Guide to Participation



May 11, 1999

The Bottom Line is Empowerment

In December 1994, President Clinton announced 3 rural Empowerment Zones (EZ) and 30 rural Enterprise Communities (EC). Again in January 1999 Vice President Gore announced an additional 5 rural EZs and 20 rural ECs. The designations released major Federal funding for these low-income communities, along with tax credits, technical assistance, and eased regulations.

These actions alone will produce visible improvements in the quality of life for residents of these communities. But the Community Empowerment Initiative is much more than dollars. Experience teaches that lasting improvements in community life are unlikely to occur unless other more fundamental advances take place as well.

Basic to the Empowerment Initiative is the belief that low-income citizens must take charge of their communities and their lives, develop their ability to bring about basic improvements in the way their communities work, and undertake economic development that is sustainable through their own efforts.

This is ***empowerment***.

Community Participation is Key

The Empowerment Initiative is about building healthy communities. It began when communities applied for designation as an EZ or EC. Community applications were much more than paperwork, however. They were strategic plans that were the first step in a process of long-term community improvement. The plans included strategic visions for change, built on solid community partnerships. They identified new resources and created new approaches to economic opportunity and community improvement.

Critical to creating effective community strategic plans is a process of planning that is open to participation by all community organizations and social groups, so that it becomes a “we” process, and not “they.” And it is critical that low-income residents—the intended beneficiaries of the Presidential Empowerment Initiative—be represented and actively involved in every stage of carrying out the plan.

To achieve the purpose of the Empowerment Initiative—to create development and investment strategies that will enhance the economic well being and improve the lives of low-income EZ or EC residents—the views and talents of low-income citizens are essential.

How Should Citizens Expect to Participate?

During the application process, community groups representing low-income residents and individual citizens took part in community meetings and planning sessions to create a strategic plan for their community.

Now that the designations have been made, the real work of bringing about lasting advancements is underway. Now more than ever, the need for community participation is essential.

Residents of designated EZ and EC areas can expect to participate by:

- Making decisions about the implementation of the strategic plan
- Doing the work needed to make the plan a success
- Assessing progress in meeting the plan's goals
- Approving changes to the plan based on experience in carrying it out