Breakthrough Solutions Program and Model

How do you create communities that are vibrant, sustainable and resilient? At some point in their history, most communities were vibrant – pulsing with energy and activity; lively and vigorous. **How do 500-year-old communities survive and sustain their vibrancy over time in a rapidly changing environment? They keep reinventing themselves** by adapting to the current and emerging environment. Communities (and regions and businesses) that do not adapt, cease to exist.

**Breakthrough Solutions** is based on the premise that in this time of rapid change, incremental improvement is insufficient for communities and regions to move forward and prosper.

Communities and regions will be most successful if they seek to create **breakthroughs** on those strategic issues that can impact and transform an entire community.

Breakthrough Solutions offers a fresh approach to strategic leadership and innovation, drawing on research from multiple disciplines and widespread experience with community development in Arkansas and other states.

**Breakthroughs** are advances, innovations or leaps forward that can transform a community and change the dynamics in a region.

**Breakthrough solutions** carry the breakthroughs into action. They:

- act as catalysts to leverage other resources,
- inspire awe, and
- often change the rules.

When community leaders are asked about breakthroughs that have taken place in their community, they readily identify them, and describe the impacts those breakthroughs have fostered.

The Breakthrough Solutions Program uses a comprehensive, asset-based approach to develop communities and regions that are vibrant, sustainable, and resilient:

**Vibrant** – pulsing with energy and activity; lively and vigorous, bursting with health, opportunity and prosperity;

**Sustainable** – community and economic development that realizes the potentials of the present and lays the foundation for the next generation to prosper in multiple dimensions, including:

- Economic,
- Environment,
- Equity (social-political),
• Electronic (technology), and
• Energy.

(This is the five-fold bottom line.)

Resilient – the ability to survive and adapt to major changes, whatever they may be.

The ability of communities to create real breakthroughs that have extraordinary results is confirmed by the excellent research by Dr. Vaughn Grisham (Grisham, 2010). Dr. Grisham’s work helped community leaders and developers realize that communities can do extraordinary things that transcend incremental change. Grisham studied communities that were so successful in their community development efforts; they can rightly be described as extraordinary. When asked how his work relates to breakthrough solutions, he responded:

“When I tell these stories, there is no question that they are breakthroughs, because you can see the lights going on.” Dr. Vaughn Grisham, Author and Former Director, McLean Institute of Community Development, University of Mississippi

Breakthrough Solutions Core Principles

Communities and regions are most likely to be effective if they embrace these Breakthrough Solutions Core Principles:

1. Harness the key drivers of change to realize their desired future,
2. Be pro-active with bold actions and a long range vision and commitment (10-20 years),
3. Be inclusive, with broad-based participation and community ownership,
4. Foster a learning community – reflect on the past, assess the present, and, develop a shared vision of the future,
5. Create breakthroughs that will reinvent your community by leveraging, connecting and transforming assets,
6. Seek system change that lays the foundation for success in the 21st century economy,
7. Adopt a surplus mindset and collaborate across boundaries in your community and region,
8. Embrace IT and broadband to eliminate barriers of distance and connect to the world,
9. Seek solutions that are sustainable – economic, socially, environmentally, technologically and energy-wise over the long term, and
10. Measure progress and tell your story to the world.

These core principles are woven into the tools and development process in the Breakthrough Solutions Implementation Manual, which includes a Breakthrough Solutions Model. The manual is now being shared on the Breakthrough Solutions blog.

Our History

In 1996, this collaborative effort formed as VISION 2010, with the mission to build healthy sustainable communities for the 21st century. Several VISION 2010 partner organizations came together to develop a program in which key leaders from 21 communities participated in a series of educational seminars and site visits, learning about Arkansas community development from a digital economy perspective. They involved over 9,000 citizens who invested over 32,000
hours in various community development initiatives, generating over $70 million in local funds invested, grants, appropriations and taxes.

In 2004, the name was changed to VisionWorks, in anticipation of the rollout of the exciting new program, Breakthrough Solutions. In 2008, the name was changed to **Breakthrough Solutions**.

**Breakthrough Solutions Program**

Breakthrough Solutions is adapted to a community, county or region, and involves the leaders and citizens of a community in developing a community blueprint and action plan to realize its desired future. It begins with a community engagement process (Breakthrough Action Process) and leverages assets to create a Breakthrough Solutions Roadmap for the future of the community. Breakthrough Solutions will include some or all of these elements: a community engagement and planning process, an in-depth community economic analysis, a design charrette led by a team of architects and technical support for a 2-3 year period.

All program formats are designed with in-depth experiential learning for community leaders who then involve organizations and citizens in the community. The number of days of training varies with each format, and some cost recovery may be necessary.

**Outcomes We Have Seen From Breakthrough Solutions:**

- New projects, organizations and jobs created by local citizens.
- Community leaders that know how to engage their community and harness key drivers of change.
- A community blueprint and an action plan to guide the community toward its desired future.
- Increased use of information technology, the Internet and broadband connectivity.
- Greater array of resources tapped from within and outside of the community.
- Fresh opportunities for community and economic development that emerge from the development process and interaction with Breakthrough Solutions partners.

For more information **on the program**, contact **vworks@uaex.edu** or call 501-671-2253.

**References**

* Grisham, V. “Extraordinary Results in Ordinary Communities: Transforming Towns and Growing People”. A study for the Kettering Foundation, 2010.

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