

REGIONAL STEWARDSHIP AT NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

A DECADE OF ENGAGING WITH OUR REGION

The VVV Process and Resulting Products

Engaging our region in setting university priorities has been an NKU tradition for nearly a decade. It began in the fall of 1997 with President James C. Votruba's *Vision, Voices and Values* (VVV) process, during which he and a team of NKU faculty, administrators, and staff met with more than 30 groups comprised of more than 500 campus and community leaders in order to seek their views on the future directions of NKU. About half of the groups were internal to NKU; the other half were external and included business, education, government, and community leaders in the Northern Kentucky region. What was learned in those meetings shaped the university's vision and core values. It also resulted in a set of strategic priorities that guided the university for 5 years.

NKU's vision, developed from the messages heard in the VVV process, acknowledges the university's integral role in the community. The vision states:

Northern Kentucky University will become a preeminent, learner-centered, metropolitan university recognized for its contributions to the intellectual, social, economic, cultural, and civic vitality of its region and that of the Commonwealth.

Similarly one of the university's eight core values, emerging from the VVV process, highlights the university's commitment to regional stewardship. The value, *Public Engagement*, states:

We are committed to treating the metropolitan region as an extension of our campus. We will build partnerships throughout the region that both serve the learning needs of the public and enhance the learning opportunities available to our faculty, staff, and students.

Two other core values also refer to the university's strong commitment to the region. The value *Multiculturalism* states:

We are committed to advancing multicultural understanding within both the University and the community as an educational and civic priority.

Collegiality and Collaboration states:

We are committed to building a University community characterized by open communication and shared responsibility for decisions. We will build a culture of collegiality and collaboration within and between the University and the public we serve.

In the fall of 2002, the university embarked on a second VVV process, this time involving more than 550 people from throughout the campus and the metropolitan region. The conversations focused on assessing the university's progress in the eyes of its various constituencies and

developing the strategic priorities for the next 5 years. From those conversations, the university learned that:

Community groups strongly supported the University's current commitment to public engagement and urged us to do more of it, including: enhancing our involvement with P-12 education, increasing collaborations concerning economic development, providing more support for local governments and nonprofit organizations, and providing a neutral platform for addressing the critical challenges that confront our region.

The two strategic agendas that grew out of the two VVV processes commit NKU to being a good regional steward. The current agenda includes a priority to *Strengthen Public Engagement* and commits specifically to work with four sectors:

P-12 education, regional economic development, local governments and local communities, and the local nonprofit community.

It also commits NKU to:

sponsor programs and encourage public dialogue to address the critical and sometimes controversial issues facing our community, our nation, and our world; expand access to the visual and performing arts, particularly in those communities that have limited access to the arts; and strengthen our communication with our various publics through an improved Web presence.

[See Appendix A for a copy of *Strengthening Our Capacity to Serve*, the university's 2003-2008 strategic agenda. It includes the university's vision, core values, and current strategic priorities.]

Making Place Matter

Based on a competitive proposal submitted to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), NKU was selected as one of four universities to participate in ***Making Place Matter*** (MPM) a collaborative project of AASCU, the Alliance for Regional Stewardship (ARS), and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS). MPM was partially funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

MPM was a 2-year project based on the belief that state colleges and universities should be regional stewards and provide leadership that contributes to the long-term well-being of their regions. Its purpose was to develop and test tools and models that universities could use to work collaboratively with their regional and statewide partners to evaluate and improve their stewardship efforts. The four national demonstration sites were chosen to conduct 18-month pilot tests using a stewardship audit and a series of guided discussions with their community and regional stakeholders. In these discussions, they were to identify their regions' stewardship opportunities and barriers and then develop plans to overcome the barriers and realize the opportunities. NKU's selection for the project recognized the university's past accomplishments and commitment to regional stewardship.

NKU's MPM process began in August 2004 with a half-day gathering of almost three dozen internal and external stakeholders meeting with consultants from AASCU, ARS, and NCHEMS. [See Appendix B for a listing of members of the stakeholders group.] A subsequent series of stakeholder meetings and other meetings of smaller Action Teams led to the identification of four priorities, or stewardship opportunities: education/human capital development, innovation/economic development, diversity/inclusion, and regional leadership/governance.

With approval from AASCU, ARS, and NCHEMS, NKU modified its MPM process to accommodate *Vision 2015*, a regional visioning process that significantly overlapped with the goals of MPM. Although MPM was already well on its way when Vision 2015 emerged, the university, with input from several people on the stakeholders' group, decided it was in everyone's best interests – the community's, the university's, and the members of the MPM stakeholder group – to combine the two projects and suspend meetings of the full MPM stakeholders' group. Thus all of the externally-focused portions of the MPM process, including the work of the Action Teams, were folded into Vision 2015's Action Teams where they continued to address the region's desired outcomes, measurable objectives, and appropriate action steps to achieve them.

Vision 2015

In 2005, a group of regional leaders agreed that much had changed since 1995 when Northern Kentucky's leaders created a 25-year vision for the region, and they concluded that the region needed an updated roadmap. They asked President James C. Votruba and A. J. Schaeffer, an attorney and member of Legacy – the region's organization for young professionals – to co-chair the new regional visioning process. About two dozen NKU faculty and staff participated in the process, along with hundreds of business, education, and government leaders and hundreds of "ordinary" citizens from high school age through senior citizens.

NKU provided at least one content expert – a faculty member or administrator – to serve as a resource and data analyst/interpreter for each of Vision 2015's five Action Teams. Because of the university's extensive participation, NKU had one or more representatives present at every meeting of the Steering Committee, the Leadership Team, and each of the five Action Teams. This endeavor, with President Votruba as co-chair, was clearly a collaborative effort between the university and the community.

Vision 2015 resulted in a final report containing six strategic directions, each encompassing a series of specific goals, many of which relate to activities and actions that can best be undertaken by NKU in collaboration with community partners. The Vision 2015 report will guide the university's role as a regional steward over the next decade. [See Appendix C for a copy of the Vision 2015 Summary Report.]