

The Florida House Institute Sustainable Development Toolkit

Background

The Florida House Institute (FHI) has been developing a set of tools and processes to support sustainable community development as a comprehensive process of continuous improvement. How can each new project in our neighborhood or region incrementally improve the performance of our natural, built, economic, and social environments and deliver the future we want for our children and future generations?

We use this framework or community taxonomy to help build a comprehensive, whole systems orientation to the community development process. It is useful in identifying the unique assets of the community and the people that represent them.



New Tools for community design and decision support

For the last several years FHI has been engaged with a new community of practice evolving around comprehensive, vision -centered, place-based planning and community development. With support from the MacArthur Foundation, the U. S. Department of Energy and other partners, FHI has been developing a Sustainable Development Tool Kit based on our experience with facilitating collaborative processes to support sustainable community development.

What is the Toolkit?

The Sustainable Development Tool Kit is a set of collaborative processes to support vision based planning and community development that have resulted from our work in communities. They work in conjunction with GIS and place based planning and decision support tools to aid communities in developing and implementing consensus-driven sustainable development.

The FHI Tool Kit is based on the philosophy that the opportunity to get the future we want depends on understanding of whole systems and developing the capacity of the community to translate vision into concrete action plans.

The Florida House Toolkit:

- inclusive, comprehensive and proactive process;
- collaborative, interdisciplinary, design-based strategies;
- an on-going dialogue about a community's shared vision for the future;
- cultivates civic values;
- provides continuity to the public process;
- generates new capacity to deal with complex local and regional issues.

The tools fall into three basic categories:

Getting Started

- Creating a Comprehensive Stakeholder Group
- Doing an Inventory of the Present State – Natural, Built, Economic and Social
- Creating the Vision
- Developing Indicators

Building Capacity and Creating the Workplace

- Creating Centers for Civic Learning and Community Design
- Using GIS and Place-Based Planning and Decision Support Tools

Implementing Over the Long Term

- Discovery and Design Charrettes
- Sustainable Design Elements for Real Estate Development
- Sustainable Urban-Rural Enterprise

This work is not problem centered – it is mission-directed. It focuses on developing clarity about the future a community would like to have, how that would work, and implementing that future through the private sector. It provides a blueprint for linking civic, government and business interests around common objectives.

An important component of the FHI approach includes developing regional and local Centers for Civic Learning and Community Design.

Learning Centers are designed to accommodate citizen-based planning, group facilitation, conflict resolution and collaborative design activities . Centers are venues to convene the community over time and provide the community access to innovative decision support tools like GIS, indicators software and facilitation processes. Facilities can range from storefronts to hi-tech configurable space and immersive computer-aided visual environments

Learning Centers provide institutional memory and a place for community learning and design to emerge.