



Setting Up a Community-based School:

Some Recommended Guidelines

by the Village Design Institute

These Guidelines for setting up a school are meant to apply equally well to all community-scale educational enterprises - whether the school is labeled as a "Community Education Campus," a "Sustainability Demonstration Site," an "Ecovillage Training Center," or whatever. As we enter further into this deeply transformative 21st Century, there will appear a growing need for neighborhood-based resource and training centers that can distribute and disseminate a wide range of life support and life enhancement skills among members of a given community. This set of Guidelines outlines a generic, replicable process for getting one of these schools off to a successful start.

- 1) The creative process always begins with the spark of a vision. Therefore, clarify, articulate, and materialize the vision with the aid of a Vision Statement. The Vision Statement will be from 3-5 sentences, and will be written in order to capture and express the full passion and flair of what wants to come into being. The Vision Statement is a device that will be presented to new potential participants, so it should be written in such a way that it can arouse a person's full moral and emotional commitment - if one is so aligned.
- 2) Convene a Core Group of between 3-5 persons - no more than 6. Members of the Core Group will be so impassioned by the vision of the project that they will be inclined to make long-term commitments to seeing its successful realization. Of course, most people have a vision of some kind - an image for

how the world may become a better place - so in most cases people attracted to the Core Group of any particular project will have *complementary* visions. In that case, after the Core Group has been indentified, the Vision Statement will need to be revised and refined so that it can accommodate and include the collective vision of all those who would make a commitment. "Founders" here often have a hard time compromising their original vision; yet setting up a school is a task far too complex for one person, so much help is needed. Unless the Core Group is getting paid to participate, then it is best that each member have a voice in shaping the desired outcome, that they in fact feel a sense of "ownership" in the Project.

- 3) Give birth to a name and incorporate as an educational non-profit corporation. The name ought to be given a numerology test to see if the associated quality is the one desired. When submitting the Articles of Incorporation for the non-profit, add a little note requesting that the time of day be recorded when the corporation becomes, in fact, a legal entity. With that information, an astrological birth chart can be created that will prove to be of immeasurable value over time. Of course, the reasons for establishing a not-for-profit vs. a for-profit are many, for example: a) it presents a friendly, unthreatening face to the public, b) it can become the recipient of grants and donations, including 'in kind' donations of time and expertise, c) it can enter the network or 'family' of other charitable organizations in the area, and d) it can frame its work in terms of 'community service,' endeavoring to provide a real need for the community. Of course, individuals in the original Core Group may choose to become Officers or Board Members of the nonprofit. The non-profit will need to translate the Vision Statement into a Mission Statement - a set of realizable goals that encapsulates the purpose of the organization.
- 4) Whether in the early stages of an initial Core Group, or later, as the proceedings of a formal non-profit corporation, it is essential that all those involved in organizing the Project get together for meetings on a regular basis. Members of the Core Group defining and giving shape to the initial outlines of the school may want to meet at least once a week. (A meeting schedule for the nonprofit will be written in the Bylaws, and usually reflects a quarterly cycle.) The Core Group needs to meet regularly so that the ongoing and ever shifting issues and opportunities of the Project can be discussed and prioritized, with solutions forwarded, and tasks delegated. The Core group will need to be trained in the techniques of Consensus Decision Making, Compassionate or Non-Violent Communication, and Group Facilitation Skills, so that the meetings can proceed in an organized and constructive, process-oriented manner. An Action Plan will need to be formulated, along with a projected timeline. A Business

Plan will need to be created and a budget forecasted. Considering the intense spiritual nature of the work - in terms of this kind of school fulfilling an evolutionary need for the planet - it is a good idea if the Core Group could begin their meetings with meditation time, so that they may come into resonance with a higher Power, and so become instruments or agents of that Power.

- 5) Once a site has been secured, steps should be taken to clear the site of unwanted, stagnant, or lingering energies from the previous tenants and activities. This clearing begins with walking the circumference of the site as a procession while drumming a rhythmic, deliberate, even sonorous beat, shaking rattles, ringing bells and chimes, and chanting mantras - all the while mentally insisting in a firm manner that the previous energies remove themselves, relocating to a new destination. Any buildings on the site will need to receive this same treatment, as well as individual rooms in the buildings. The burning of sage smudges is also very effective during a clearing, and should be used liberally. Participants can undergo a cleansing ritual themselves prior to the clearing, as psychic preparation. During the clearing, participants may wish to wear specially adorned attire. Clearing always entails moving in a *counter-clockwise* rotation. Immediately following the clearing of old energies comes the affirmation of new intentions, and this happens while moving in a *clockwise* rotation. The same procession proceeds, yet this time the drumming, shaking of rattles and ringing of bells, takes on a more joyous, free-flowing and celebratory tone. The participants now envision pure white light descending into the place, forming a protective barrier or ring around the site, and entering into the buildings and rooms, bringing in all the good things that Spirit has to offer. Clearing ceremonies may need to happen on a recurring basis, in varying levels of intensity, as needs arise. The Project surely will benefit if participants can keep it in their attention from time to time to re-vision and re-affirm the white light permeating the place, forming a protective and ascending-directed dome.
- 6) After the site has been cleared, and the intentions of establishing a community school (to benefit the evolutionary trajectory of humanity) have been implanted, organizers should begin at once holding potlucks, parties, celebrations, and other, more task-oriented gatherings, on site. The influx of so many new energies with a constructive purpose will help to establish a new threshold of positive potential. The site, and the buildings and rooms on site, will begin to vibrate with new expectancy - this expectancy, if managed properly, building to a crescendo of unified manifest purpose. (And it really is all about vibration!)

- 7) After legal arrangements with the appropriate jurisdictions have been established - which will include business licenses, permits, etc. - the new school will be ready to begin offering classes, workshops, and programs of all sorts. By this time, the preliminary work - which was largely *energy* work of varying proportions - will have been laid. The school is now ready to begin operating as a multi-purpose service to the community. At this point, a Program Director will need to be hired to oversee operations. The Program Director, in collaboration with the Board, will establish a regular curriculum reflecting the goals and purposes of the school. Members of the community, ideally from all walks of life, can then be solicited and encouraged to begin offering educational events of their own design, sharing their special gifts, for the benefit of the community-at-large. Of course, by this time a website will have been operational, and brochures and flyers created. The school ultimately begins to establish itself as a valuable resource center for the community, becoming the life-supporting and life-enhancing educational nexus for a surrounding village-scale population of 5000.

The community-scale, neighborhood-based school will become an integral component of the retrofit and restructuring of the North American settlement pattern during the 21st century. During the coming period of energy descent, with its necessarily accompanying down-sizing and re-localization, production, support, and maintenance capacities will need to be increasingly re-situated within a community context, at the scale of the neighborhood or urban village. Broad-based, multi-disciplinary, comprehensive education will be needed instructing community members in various life-supporting and life-enhancing skills. The community-based school - whether labeled as a "Community Education Campus," a "Sustainability Demonstration Site," or an "Ecovillage Training Center" - is destined to become the focal point for the re-enactment of sustainable society in the post-industrial, post-petroleum Age of ever-expanding human potential.