

The Community Activeness/Consciousness

MATRIX

A Tool for Community Development

Gene L. Theodori
 Extension Specialist for Community Development
 The Texas A&M University System

Extension agents, particularly those in non-metropolitan counties, are increasingly being called upon by community leaders and local citizens to provide leadership and programming efforts in the area of community development.

However, because of the wide range of issues, needs and problems in each community, agents must be able to determine which development initiatives are reasonable and achievable. One tool to help them make that decision is the Community Activeness/Consciousness Matrix (Fig. 1). Agents

community tries to address its issues and problems are often unique as well.

Therefore, before beginning a community development-related program, Extension personnel would benefit by assessing the levels of two key community attributes:

- **Community activeness**, which is the behaviors of local residents working together to address needs and solve problems in that locale. It is the degree of action that people living in the area take to improve their community or solve their problems. This level of action varies widely across communities and within the same community over time.
- **Community consciousness**, which refers to a community's level of awareness of its current social, economic and environmental situations. Like activeness, the level of consciousness varies across and within communities.

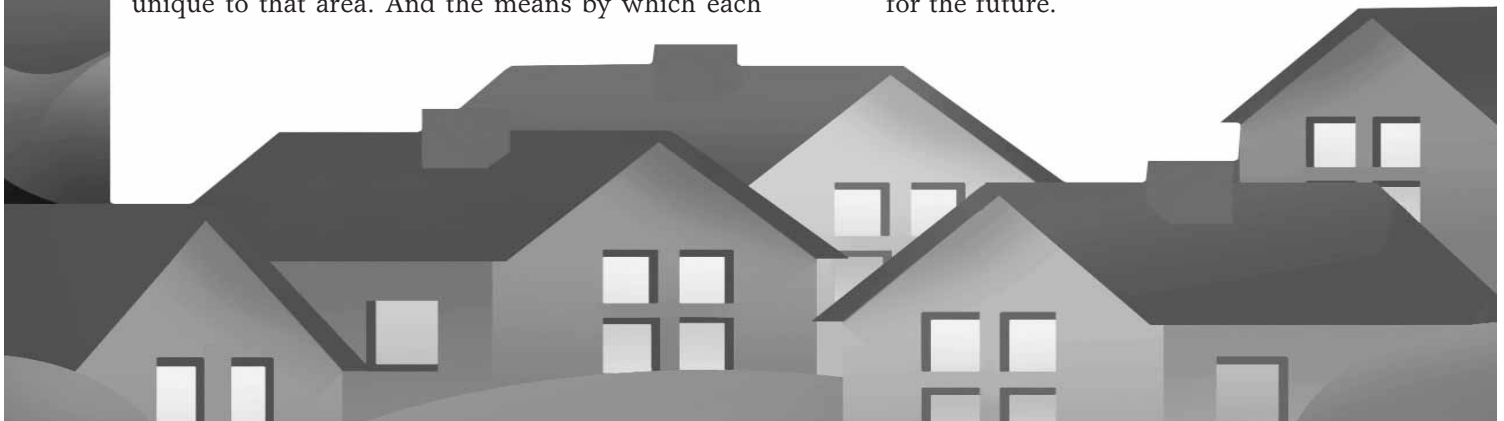
When a community is truly conscious, it is fully aware of and knowledgeable about its current social, economic and environmental conditions. Moreover, the community understands the history of its people, economy and environment, and it has a well-defined vision for the future.

	Active	Not Active
Conscious	1	2
Not Conscious	4	3

Figure 1: The Community Activeness/Consciousness Matrix.

can use the matrix to help local residents assess the levels of activeness and consciousness within their community.

Every community has certain social, economic and/or environmental issues and problems that are unique to that area. And the means by which each



Agents can quickly learn the local citizens' assessment of the community's levels of activeness and consciousness by using the Community Activeness/Consciousness Matrix. This tool can play a key role in the initial stages of a community development educational program. The matrix enables Extension personnel to quickly assess the levels of activeness and consciousness of a community *as viewed from the local residents' perspective*.

In the matrix, the activeness dimension has been divided into two groups — "active" and "not active." The consciousness concept has also been separated into two categories — "conscious" and "not conscious."

Using the matrix

Agents may follow three steps in using the matrix to help residents identify their area's levels of activeness and consciousness:

1. First, draw the Community Activeness/Consciousness Matrix on a posterboard, project it on an overhead projector or simply distribute handouts of the matrix.
2. Next, explain what each cell of the matrix represents:
 - **Cell 1** represents communities that are both conscious and active. In these communities, the citizens are fully aware of and knowledgeable about the area's current social, economic and environmental conditions. The residents understand their community's history, and they have a well-defined vision of how they want their community to look, feel and operate in the future. In addition, these citizens are actively working together to improve their community and achieve their vision.
 - **Cell 2** represents communities that are conscious but not active. In such communities, the citizens are fully aware of and knowledgeable about the area's current social, economic and environmental conditions. They understand their community's history, and they have a well-defined vision of how they want their community to look, feel and function in the future. However, these citizens are not working together to improve their community or to accomplish their vision.
 - **Cell 3** represents communities that are not conscious and not active. In these communities, the citizens are not fully knowledgeable about the area's current social, economic and environmental conditions. They do not understand their community's history, nor do they have a well-defined vision of how they want their community to look, feel and operate in the future. They also are not actively working together to improve or develop their community.

- **Cell 4** represents communities that are not conscious but active. Citizens in such communities are not fully knowledgeable about the current social, economic and environmental conditions of their community. They do not understand their community's history, and they do not have a well-defined vision of how they want their community to look, feel and function in the future.

These citizens are actively working together to improve or develop their community. But because they lack a common, well-defined vision, their efforts at community development are generally uncoordinated and piecemeal. The efforts produce, at best, transitory results in the community.

3. Last, ask the program participants to identify the cell in which their community fits best, and to explain why they chose to place their community in that particular cell.

Extension faculty who use the Community Activeness/Consciousness Matrix will find that residents of a community may vary widely in the choice of cells for their community and in the reasons behind such placement. Such disagreement actually makes the matrix more useful; in fact, the more varied the responses, the more useful the discussion.

As residents explain their justifications for why the community should be placed in one cell instead of the others, critical discussion develops about the views and actions of various sectors of the community. This communication among individuals and groups within a community is a crucial element in the overall process of community development.

An ideal time to use the Community Activeness/Consciousness Matrix is at the start of a community-

based planning process or other meetings dealing with community-wide issues. By listening to local residents as they assess the levels of activeness and consciousness within their community, Extension faculty can decide on development initiatives that will be reasonable and achievable.



For further reading

"The Community Activeness-Consciousness Matrix," by Gene L. Theodori. *Journal of Extension* 41(5). 2003.